'ASSIMILATED" WOMEN

And she had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself.

- Toni Morrison

While many of the fictional women characters discussed in the earlier chapter wage their struggle in spite of themselves, the women discussed in this chapter consciously challenge conventions. They show the extent to which black women have the freedom to pursue their selfhood within the confines of a racist and sexist society, and reveal how it affects the quality of black women's lives.

In her last essay, "Beauty; When the Other Dancer is the Self" in In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, Walker refers to the scar in her right eye and how the disfiguring scar had affected her psychologically. But that trauma left her when her daughter Rebecca commented on seeing her eye, "Mommy, there is a world in your eye" (MG: 393). She saw it not as a defect but as a 'world'. Walker then realized how much of life is a matter of perspective. In the dream that comes to
her that night, Walker is as happy as she has ever been, and she is joined in her joyous dancing by "another bright-faced dancer" who is "beautiful, whole and free." Walker adds "And she is also me" (MG: 393). Like Walker these women also discover or rediscover the "hidden, beautiful, whole and free" selves when they realize that definition of self must come from within.

The short stories and novels discussed here, according to Parker-Smith, "ameliorate the relationship between black women". She adds, "Each is suggestive of an advanced stage of development for women. A blueprint for women's bonding is apparent and the women begin to break out of that oppressive cocoon. But the stage of their metamorphosis is somewhere between winter and spring" (Parker-Smith 1984, 485).

Walker discusses many of the blatant issues of the last two decades like pornography, abortion, sadomasochism, interracial rape, incest, scarification and clitoridectomy, in the portrayal of these characters.

Many of the black women discussed in this chapter continue the progress towards spiritual health and self-definition begun by Ruth, Meridian, and Celie in the earlier chapter. Most of them are the "chosen ones" to have had their education in the colleges. Some of them have participated in
the Civil Rights Movement or the Black Power Movement. Walker portrays a few characters as trying to get assimilated and to join the 'mainstream'. Some characters have a paradoxical stance. Some try to come back to the South with their realization of their selves. These women are not subjected to extreme physical abuse. One learns that the self that survives is not a self dictated by others and that denial of one's spiritual essence signals failure and fragmentation.

Dee in Everyday Use is one character who denies her own spiritual essence and is enamoured of the fads of the American society. She, as the "chosen one" for whose education, Mrs Johnson, the mother has gone to the people of her church for money, returns as an "assimilated" woman. She has joined the radical, black nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s, changing her name from Dee to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo and cultivating a suddenly fashionable, or stylish interest in what she passionately describes as her "heritage". (ILT: 59) When she left for college, her mother had tried to give her a quilt whose making began with her grandmother Dee, but the bright daughter felt such patched coverings were "old fashioned and out of style" (ILT: 57).

Assured by the makers of American fashion that "black" is currently "beautiful", she has conformed her own "style" to that notion. She wears "a dress down to the
ground...bracketlets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up” (ILT: 52). She glibly delights in the artifacts of her heritage: the rough benches her father made, the handmade butter churn which she intends to use for a decorative centrepiece, the quilts made by her grandma Dee after whom she was named— the things that have passed on. Ironically, in keeping with the times, she has changed her name, denying the existence of her namesake, even as she covets the quilts she made. She has also taken a fashionable Muslim boy friend.

She believes in a world of pretended wholeness, a world of banal television shows, framed and institutionalized art, and polaroid cameras. In some ways, she is "a variation of the archetypal prodigal child" (Kane 1985, 7). The reaction of her sister Maggie when Dee wants the quilts is noteworthy. A scarred and dull Maggie who has been kept at home and confined to everyday work, emerges from the kitchen and says with a contemptuous gesture of dismissal: "She can have them, Mama.... I can 'member Grandma Dee without quilts" (ILT: 58). In an epiphanic moment of recognition, Mrs Johnson, who also has a longing for the "other" that characterizes inhabitants of oppressed, "minority" cultures, perceives the fire-scarred Maggie — the stay-at-home victim of the southern scarifications — in a revised light. She becomes aware of her
own mistaken value judgement and pays homage that is due to Maggie.

Walker portrays Dee in the light of black women who had the privilege to go to colleges for their higher education. But, unfortunately, these women are drawn more towards the American culture and they ignore the values of their own southern roots. It is her easy vulnerability to the fad of the moment, which gives a false and shallow picture of who she is, both as a black woman and the member of the Johnson family.

Dee's mother comes to see both the humbug in the returning daughter's new appreciation of the mother's realm and the everyday worth of her younger daughter. She is Walker's introduction to the type of androgynous figure, striking a successful balance between male and female. She represents the single-parent family. She is a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands like Gracie Mae Still in Nineteen Fifty-five and Sofia in The Color Purple. In choosing to give the quilt to the daughter who has remained home and doubts her beauty, the mother not only embraces the girl with love but also affirms the beauty and value of black woman's culture. She is clearly a part of the third cycle of Alice Walker.
Winchell places such type of women under the title "misplaced priorities" (Winchell 1992, 80). This story is a fitting precursor to The Color Purple, with its sewing protagonist and its scenes of sisterly quilting. Dee is, in a way, a slightly improved version of Roselily: Whereas Roselily marries a Muslim from Chicago whom she neither loves nor knows, Dee chooses a Muslim as her man as it is the fashion of the day.

The fall from beauty into horror is handled with great skill in The Flowers by Walker. Myop, aged ten, explores the woods in late autumn, picking ferns, strange blue flowers, and a sweetsuds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds. Suddenly, she steps "smack" into the skull of a murdered black man: "Her heel became lodged in the broken ridge between brow and nose, and she reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself" (ILT: 120).

Only when she sees the skeleton's naked grin does she give a cry of surprise. The horror and beauty of living in the South are symbolized by the wild pink rose growing near the head, and, around the roots of the rose, the rotted shreds of a noose. Above the child's head is a branch with more shreds of rope. The child's education is completed that day. Walker ends the story saying "the summer was over" (ILT: 120).
The details in this story record the essence of the experience portrayed. The situation is blackamerican, the character experiencing it is female and what one learns is the end of innocence. Walker uses the plants as a symbol of hope. They are often present in death scenes or at the end of some tragic moments. The passage describing the flow of the stream "the tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black soil" sounds ominous.

Harriet's tale in We Drink the Wine in France is about a black girl from South trying to fall in love with her French teacher, a White. She is young, with a brown skin and eyes like the lens of a camera, always dreaming. Like many of the Southern black young women, she feels she is ugly. She is not stupid but rather a really brilliant girl. She takes a lot of books to read as she is trying to feel the substance of what other people have learned: "She is the hungriest girl in the school" (ILT: 123).

Her French teacher, who escaped from the concentration camp in Poland, is old. In the class he bends close to her to teach French grammar. The force of his breath touches her and she draws in her own. On seeing this he springs upright. The girl feels "inferior" (ILT: 122) and thinks he does not want to mingle breaths with her. But, it is true, that he is drawn by her: "When she passes him at the door his heart
flutters like old newspapers in a gutter disturbed by a falling gust of wind" (ILT: 122).

Later, while she is with her lover in the car making love, she doesn't think of the act but rather about the completely correct account she has given the word boire. When she says loudly "Yes, it was good", she doesn't mean the movement knocking against her stomach. They rush back to the campus fearing her expulsion if she is late. She wonders about the injustices and her confinement in a school governed by the rules of the white.

Standing naked before the mirror in her room, she is proud of her shape. She imagines the professor climbing on her bed naked to make love - they lie talking for sometime. She learns about the stenciled numbers on his cuff and about his past. As he is old, "she takes him inside herself, not wanting to make him young again, for she is already where he at old age finds himself" (ILT: 126). The knock by the house mother dispels the dream.

The professor admonishes himself that he must stop thinking of her: "That his odor is of ashes while hers is of earth and sun" (ILT: 125). He remembers her sorrowful eyes and blurred speech. With that she also "brings the odor of Southern jails...hundreds of aching, marching feet, and the hurtful sound of the freedom songs he has heard from the
church, the wailing of souls destined for bloody eternities at the end of each completely maddened street" (ILT: 127). He realizes that her speech becomes of her. He dreams of taking her away with him to Mexico, but when he awakens from his dream, he finds himself sweating profusely. He plans the wording of his resignation and to buy the brochures for South America. In the class the next day, the lesson for the day has moved on. Instead of "Nous buvons le vin," it is Nos ne buvons pas le vin" (ILT: 128).

The girl in this story has crossed the early stages of her assimilation. She has joined the school but knows the racial disparities. There is always sadness in her eyes as she represents still the soul of her Southern ancestry. As discussed in Meridian the so-called institutions of learning only aimed at shaping these girls as "ladies" and never bothered about their Southern heritage. But Walker portrays her as a bright girl "trying to feel the substance of what other people have learned" (ILT: 123). Her suffering is not of physical violence, but of a kind of psychic violence. Her attempt to fall in love with a white man, probably, shows her inclination to join the mainstream.

Dee and Harriet stand for the type of women of the second cycle who are determined to escape their roots in order to make it in a white world.
The Diary of an African Nun deals with the protagonist who is in search of a faith that will not force her to deny her own perceptions of self and self-fulfillment. The protagonist, an African nun reflects on how alienated she is from her African culture. This young Ugandan enters a convent only to discover her otherness. The story is divided into six parts and is set in an African mission school in Uganda where an African woman has rejected her traditional tribal religion for Christianity.

The first part speaks about the mission which is a school by day and a resting place for travellers by night. The travellers from different countries react in their own way on seeing a nun. She herself feels uneasy about her rejection of African traditional religion and values. As she gazes at the Ruwenzori Mountains covered with snow, she develops a feeling that her present state inhibits natural growth.

Part two tells about her desire to become a nun when she was young and how she felt when she really became one. Part three develops her position towards her new found faith and culture. There is a tension between Christianity and African pagan worship. In Part four the dance of life by a young girl is described. It reflects the vitality of the African people. The psychological plight of the nun is
described in part five. Walker revives the metaphor of spring as the vitality of African culture as opposed to the harshness of European culture symbolized by winter snow. This imagery also speaks of the durable versus temporary nature of the two cultures. The last part speaks of the paradoxical stance taken by the nun towards what she is doing.

The entire story is an allegory. It speaks of the black middle class people who find themselves caught between the attractive materialistic Western culture and the deep-rooted, traditional African culture. This reveals the contrariness of the assimilated class. Walker asks in the 1974 essay, "Would they still be as dependent on material things - fine cars, furs, big houses, pots and jars of face cream - as they are today? Or would they, learning from Janie [a character in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God] that materialism is the drag rope of the soul, have become a nation of women immune (to the extent that is possible in a blatantly consumerist society like ours) to the accumulation of things, and aware to their core, that love, fulfillment as women, peace of mind, should logically come before, not after, selling one's soul for a golden stool on which to sit" (MG: 264).

In short, the story reveals the paradoxical state of the mind of many of the blacks. They are torn by their
"double consciousness". The message is that the blacks must not become a part of the European world or the African world for one stands for spiritual death and the other for material death. They have to strike a balance. The two worlds are both "complementary and contradictory" (Fontenot, 1977, 196). The nun is torn by her contrary instincts. One feels that she is trying to strike a compromise.

While the nun is able to take a paradoxical stance at the end in the story The Diary of an African Nun, the unnamed narrator in the story Advancing Luna - and Ida B. Wells fails to resolve the dilemma facing her. It examines the rape of a white civil rights worker by a black civil rights worker from the point of view of the black woman who is the victim's best friend.

A young Southern black woman's development is reflected through her growing understanding of the complexity of interracial rape. The story is set in Georgia, during the summer of 1965, where the unnamed black narrator and Luna, a Jewish woman, meet and become close friends while registering rural blacks to vote. The narrator assumes that black people are superior to every one. This generalization, however, is tested when Luna reveals that she was raped by a fellow activist, a black man, they both know. While the narrator sympathises with her friend's dilemma, she subconsciously
doubts Luna's accusation, recalling the innumerable deaths of black men unjustly accused of raping white women throughout American history. Her earlier sense of clarity is shattered. Doubts, questions, push her to unravel her own feelings: "Who knows what the black woman think of rape? Who has asked her? Who cares?" (GW: 93).

In her confusion, the narrator embarks on an imaginary discourse with Ida B.Wells, a black journalist and social reformer who led a national antilynching campaign during the 1890s. Ida B.Wells' advice was: "Write nothing. Nothing at all. It will be used against black men and therefore against all of us....Deny. Deny. Deny" (GW: 94).

Just when the narrator thinks she has resolved the problem and can terminate the imaginary dialogue, she sees Luna and Freddy Pye, the rapist together again under troublesome circumstances. Ultimately the narrator fails to resolve the dilemma satisfactorily and settles instead on the three opposing, ideologically aligned explanations for the rape and Freddy's return: (1) to have an 'unresolved' ending; (2) to doubt Luna's statement; (3) to conclude that Freddie is being hired by someone, which is not convincing. The problematic closure underscores the difficulty of relying on pat explanations to give meaning to human interactions.
The narrator, who calls herself "a Sarah Lawrence girl 'with talent' " (GW: 96), is more than an assimilated character. She has the maturity to understand the implications of interracial rape. Using her as a mouthpiece, Walker resists an easy solution. For although she speaks from the point of view of sisterhood with all women she also insists, as she did in "One Child of One's Own", that all women must understand that sexism and racism in America are critically related. This story is reminiscent of Meridian, Walker's second novel.

Whereas Advancing Luna - and Ida B. Wells probes the relationship of a young black woman and a white woman, Source examines the friendship between two young black women.

Anastasia Green comes from an upper middle class background. She is always painfully confused about her racial identity (she looks white but is culturally Southern and is considered black). Irene is also Southern but visibly black. She is afraid that achieving success will cause her to abandon a life of social commitment and subsequently transform her into an ordinary bourgeois woman whose ambition is subsumed in wearing designer clothing. During the years immediately following college, Anastasia has several identity crises and crosses the colour line in a variety of ways. She
has spent much of her life drifting, changing identities as she changes "personal fashion" (GW: 143).

After several changes - "Southern Innocent", "New York Super Vamp", "Kathleen Clearer type", - Anastasia meets Source, the title character, the only stationary figure in the text. He hastens her along to her next change to "Flower Child" and sometime mistress to him. During that same period Irene, fearful of becoming that ordinary, bourgeois black woman, dedicates herself to working in a Southern antipoverty programme. Years later the women meet again and discover that each has always embodied aspects of character that the other has sought. Anastasia appropriates the fervour with which Irene claims her identity as a black woman in order to embrace her own racially indefinite background, while Irene finally sees Anastasia's absolute refusal to let her middle-class background make her ordinary and socially uncommitted. Hence, each woman learns to rely on the convictions of the other in order to fortify her own.

The story is concerned with origins, beginnings and questions of male subjectivity and its relation to language and representation. In its parallel plot lines - one involving reading matters, the other family matters - the story deals with the question of self-identity of the black
women of the seventies and also reveals as to how the black
women try to overcome them.

The issue of self-definition and the black woman's love
of self are manifested strongly in The Abortion. Like Walker,
the main character, Imani, has an abortion while in college.
She recalls the experience of as a freeing one, "bearing as
it had all the marks of a supreme coming of age and a seizing
of the direction of her own life" (GW: 67). Seven years
later, Imani, is now married and the mother of a two-year-old
daughter, Clarice. When she finds herself pregnant once
again, abortion is legal, - also cheaper, safer, quicker, and
supposedly less painful - but she realizes that she is "still
not in control of her sensuality, and only through violence
and with money (for the flight, for the operation itself) in
control of her body" (GW: 69). She chooses to have an
abortion because "another child would kill me....Having a
child is a good experience to have had, like Graduate
school". So, she rids her body of the amorphous growth and
says to it: "Well, it was you or me, kiddo, and I chose me"
(GW: 65, 70).

She even advises her husband: "Have a vasectomy or stay
in the guest room. Nothing is going to touch me anymore that
isn't harmless" (GW: 71). Clarence, her husband, does as
Imani wishes. But their marriage ends for Imani the day after
the abortion when she attends the yearly memorial service for Holly Munroe, a young black woman shot down. Sitting in the stifling heat of the church, Imani realizes that in a sense Holly Munroe was every young black girl. "And an even deeper truth was that Holly Munroe was herself. Herself shot down, aborted on the eve of becoming herself" (GW: 73). She also realizes Clarence's interest lies in politics and not much in family matters. As her husband walks away from Holly Munroe's memorial service discussing politics with the Mayor, Imani "had uncoupled herself from him, in a separation that made him, except occasionally, little more than a stranger" (GW: 76).

Imani is a modern day woman who is spared of the chain-gang trauma of the black women of Walker's earlier fiction. Unlike, some of Walker's earlier fictional women, Imani does not cling to her loyalty to her black man to the point of total self-abnegation or self-destruction. She acknowledges her marriage for the fraud that it is and knows that she must be the one to walk away from it because ultimately Clarence is willing to settle for fraud and she is not. Certainly this woman who courted liberation of self had come a long way, but she is yet to become fully an 'emergent' woman as she is unable to be in "control of her sensuality" (GW: 69).
The unnamed main character in The Lover is a black poet who "after many tribulations in her life, few of which she ever discussed even with close friends, had reached the point of being generally pleased with herself" (GW: 34). The story features a fraudulent marriage but adds a newfound sexual freedom that provides escape from an unfulfilling marriage. The protagonist of the story enters into a passionless marriage and gives her husband a child as a gift because she likes and admires him. She views the child as a temporary distraction and stops thinking of her husband sexually. In the meantime, she enters into a brief affair with Ellis, a fellow writer during the two months of temporary freedom at a New England artists' colony, more in a spirit of adventure. She likes the illicit sound of the word "lover". She wants to be "truly a woman of her time" after having a lover (GW: 34). She is not sexually happy with her lover, rather disappointing at best, "but it hardly mattered, since what mattered was the fact of having a lover" (GW: 37).

This creation of Walker is a woman in love with the sensation of being in love. The very idea of being in love is physically exciting to her. It is quite clear by the end of the story that she will have others, one of whom could even be her own husband if she could have sex with him in the same spirit of adventure with which she looks forward to a whole
series of future lovers. She has discovered in herself a sensuality that has lain dormant in her since her college days. When Ellis first approaches her and saves her from a boring conversation with an aging poet with the question "Have you been waiting long?" it "suddenly occurred to her that indeed she had" (GW: 33).

Unlike that of the married couple in The Lover, the man and the woman in Porn have an almost perfect sexual relationship. Their relation is built on sexual passion. She is a free-lance journalist who is 'liberated', makes her own money, lives separately from her lover, and values her women friends. Her lover, a black man who prides himself on his sexual technique, attempts to increase intimacy by sharing his pornography collection with her. Contrary to his expectations, he loses her, for she is unable to clear her mind of the perversity of pornographic intent and the dehumanization contained in the images. When she holds him the last time they make love, she does so nostalgically, saying good-bye silently to what they once had, as "he feels himself sliding down the wall that is her body, and expelled from inside her" (GW: 84).

Walker focuses on the man's use of pornographic fantasies and the woman's reaction to them. She explores the way his fantasies underline his inability to make love to
this woman with whatever flaws might result, because of his need to prove his superiority through his sexuality. His fantasies, as perceived by the woman, degrade her, him, and other people they know, for his porn uses stereotypes of black and white men and women. Her awareness of the insidiousness of his collection destroys the sexual pleasure she had believed they were sharing. This story puts forward an argument for the integrity of the female body, and the treatment of woman as subject rather than object. Walker insists that women should be respected as authentic other rather than negated by a narcissistic patriarchal order.

Whereas all that remains of a satisfying relationship is mutual distraction and unspoken rejection in Porn, the husband and wife in Coming Apart do come apart momentarily and the potential for reconciliation is revealed.

The wife in Coming Apart discovers that her husband reads and desires sexual pleasure from pornographic material. When she confronts him with his Jiveboy magazine, he defensively claims that it is harmless and meaningless. But she thinks: "... they are not me, those women. She cannot say she is jealous of pictures on a page. That she feels invisible. Rejected. Overlooked. She says instead, to herself: He is right. I will grow up. Adjust. Swim with the tide" (GW: 43). Even more distressing than the mere existence
of his fantasy world, however, is its racist roots and his continuation of that racist past. It is no better when he brings home *Jivers*, "a black magazine, filled with bronze and honey-colored women", because in its pages black women are portrayed as less than human (GW: 43).

When she studies her own brown and black body in the mirror, in her imagination she sees it age into her mother's, yet is surprised to find that she considers her mother, even late in life, very sexy. Reminded thus of a wider range of human sexuality than pornography accommodates, she resolves not to "grow up", not to "adjust", but to fight to change her husband's demeaning and limiting perceptions of black women. She withdraws from their relationship and forces a debate on the issue, using as evidence essays included in *Take Back the Night*, the anti-pornography collection. Walker brings to bear on this domestic conflict analyses of pornography written by Audre Lorde, Lusiah Teish, and Tracey A.Gardner. Each essay, in its own way, demonstrates that women have been consistently denied their humanity, either by being objectified, as in the pornographic representations, or by being seen merely as an extension of the narcissistic male. The husband eventually sees the error of his ways and at the end desires her for herself. —
The persistence of the wife in exposing her husband to the voices of Lorde, Teish, and Gardner and to his own racial and sexual dishonesty moves the story to a point where their potential for mutual redemption is seen. She ceases to "fake" response; he begins to envision her body during love-making, not the bodies in the porn magazines.

Walker shows that pornography is used as part of a phallogocentric order which annihilates the selfhood of women. By fighting this order, the woman in this story becomes aware of her own self and the man achieves the wisdom of womanism. The two women characters in Porn and Coming Apart are healthier Walker women who refuse to have their sexual identity defined by a man's sexist or racist fantasies.

Another of Walker's fighters is the narrator of How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State? It was Easy. She is a poor black teenager with a mother who works as a maid and a father she never knew. Her mother entertains visitors at night and had a couple of abortions. She is a nervous kind of woman having occasional spells. This young narrator is raped at the age of twelve but shrugs it off with "I never told anybody. For, what could they do?" (GW: 23). When she is fourteen, the white lawyer Bubba, for whom her mother works, tricks her into his car,
drives her to his office, and rapes her. She again tells no one and the affair goes on for two years. Her mother, who finds out the affair, tells her how the white people view her. She tells her about "equal rights" and "integration" (GW: 24). But that never stops her affair.

The white lawyer persuades her to have her mother committed to an insane asylum, and three months later her mother is really insane. Waking up to reality, the young girl tries unsuccessfully to get her mother released. Even after that, she continues to visit the lawyer - "out of habit, I guess" (GW: 26) - until her mother dies. With no remorse, the young girl kills the lawyer with his own gun.

In the end, the reader finds the young girl sitting on Bubba's wife's bed, where she and Bubba have made love for years, babysitting for his children and eating fried chicken the widow made. The money she stole from Bubba's safe will guarantee her the college education he always promised her.

This story of Walker relates how a young black girl coming out of her innocence can act when she comes to terms with reality. Though not an emergent woman, this young girl has all the qualities in her. This story is an example for the existence of women who liberate themselves from victimization by murdering their victimizer.
Still another fighter is the title character of the story Eletbia, which Walker has called her creative solution to one problem that typified the racism that existed in her hometown of Eatonton, Georgia. There was "until a few years ago" an Uncle Remus Restaurant in Eatonton - for whites only, of course - which featured in its window a dummy of a black man, "an elderly, kindly, cottony-haired darkie, seated in a rocking chair" (LW: 31). Walker fantasized about liberating him, "using army tanks and guns" (LW: 31). Through the character Eletbia, she does free Uncle Albert, her fictional counterpart of the Uncle Remus dummy.

Eletbia, a young girl, masterminds the retrieval of "Uncle Albert", a mummified black man who is all teeth, smiles, and servitude as a decoration in the window of a "whites only" restaurant, despite the reality of his having been a rebellious slave whose teeth were knocked out for his efforts to remain human. Eletbia knows that Uncle Albert's denigration to a subservient happy waiter cannot be allowed. She and her cohorts break the plate glass, reclaim the mummy, burn it, and save the ashes. She aims to rid the world of all false, stereotypical images of blacks, especially men, and to recover the past, rectify its misrepresentations, and to preserve the truth for future generations. As she goes to the college, she finds "Uncle Alberts in her text books, in the newspapers and on t.v." (GW: 30). She realizes that the work
Thadious M. Davis observes: "Walker's individual Elethias understand that breaches may have occurred between succeeding generations, but that progress in the present and towards the future depends upon reconstruction of the bridges that, as Carolyn Rodgers says in her poem *It is Deep*, one generation has "crossed over on" (Davis 1983, 43). These fighting women of Walker act rather than acquiesce.

Another revolutionary character is the main character in Walker's brief story *Petunias*. She is killed in an explosion after her son comes home from Vietnam determined to teach her to make bombs. When she first begins agitating in support of the civil rights movement, she awakens one morning to find that whites have unearthed the grave of her mother, a slave, and scattered her ashes over the flower bed, a splintery leg bone falling among the petunias. Walker portrays a cyclical process in this story. She uses "petunias" as an image of survival. The tradition and heritage of the black people will continue inspite of annihilation by the whites.

Walker's first published short story, *To Hell with Dying* is about an old man saved from death countless times by the love of his neighbour's children. It is as much, if
not more, about what the old man's love does for the neighbour's female child, who narrates the story.

For as many years as the narrator has remembered, Mr. Sweet Little, a family friend, has made a ritual of dying. He is "a diabetic and an alcoholic and a guitar player and lived down the road...on a neglected cotton farm" ([ILT: 129]). He has been their childhood companion - a perfect companion, for he has the ability to be drunk and sober at the same time. At the beginning of the story, Mr. Sweet Little is about seventy; the unnamed female narrator is about four; at the end, he is ninety, and she is twenty four. In a span of twenty years, he has been saved by the ministrations of the narrator so many times. She used to climb on his bed and kiss and hug him tickling his body.

This ritual which she has been doing with her brothers and sisters, is always initiated by her father's call, "To hell with dying, man; these children want Mr. Sweet" ([ILT: 129]). In his 80s, the old man lived a peaceful life and the narrator had grown up and was away from home studying at the university. When he becomes ninety, she is summoned home as Mr. Sweet is again near his death. Her efforts to revive him fail and he leaves her with the gift of his spirit.

What he gives her, among other things, is a sense of her own self-worth. He also makes her feel that she is
physically attractive and has the power to control her own destiny. He shapes significantly the consciousness of the participant-narrator who is both teller and character in the celebration of the spirit. Her acceptance of Mr. Sweet's guitar signifies that she is willing to sing the blues. Her acceptance is also the external symbol of her bonding to the community. She turns out to be a story teller, historian and musician.

Compared to Dee in *Everyday Use*, the narrator of this story stands at another level among the assimilated women. Though she is a "chosen one" she doesn't forget the values of black culture and community living. Holister observes: "She grows up to be ambitious in the mainstream of American life, representing what Mary Helen Washington has called 'the' second cycle of Walker's personal construct of the history of black women" (Hollister 1989, 91).

While ancestors may give Walker what she calls "the joy of their presence" and reassure her that she is "not alone", her characters are very much alone in their searches, and their sorrows outweigh joy. John's mother, the revolutionary poet in *Entertaining God*, leaves miserably alone after her poetry readings in which she establishes her identity as a black woman and fosters a spirit of community among her listeners.
She is a radical poet known for her inflammatory rhetoric. She said pithy, pungent and unexpected things and never believed in non-violence or in Martin Luther King. She married a lower echelon post-office functionary and left him after the birth of a son. Though she was blasting the genteel southern college she had attended for stunting her revolutionary growth and encouraging her incipient whiteness and the preachers and teachers, it was actually the son of her unsuccessful marriage that lent fire to her poetic deliveries.

Before her son's death, she was an Assistant Librarian. Her son died at the age of fifteen under rather peculiar circumstances, after removing a large and ferocious gorilla from its cage in the Bronx Zoo. This had affected her so much that she was in a sanitarium for a couple of months.

When she came out of it, she was a changed woman. She changed her hair style, started wearing large hoop earrings and African dresses. She even had scarification. She tried going without bra but gave it up as it caused back ache. Whenever she gave her readings there was an overwhelming response. But she found herself alone in the halls. Sometimes she felt her son sitting in one of the back rows in front of her with enthusiasm for her teachings. Her struggle is an inner one.
Her husband married another plain black girl and went out with her to different places to teach the Word. They had two children but unfortunately they lost them in a twister. When he married his first wife he married her for her light skin. And she was particular to touch up the marriage photos as he was very black. Their son, in a strange way, as if appeasing the gorilla for forgiveness, let it out of the cage and was finally killed by the animal.

This woman moves closer to the third cycle of Walker's personal construct. As a young, lonely woman, she was conscious of the colour of her skin and position. Her married life proved to be a disaster and she became a total wreck when her son died. But, by going in search of her past culture and tradition, this woman tries to face life boldly. Some of the women belonging to this cycle of Walker's personal construct prefer the Black Power Movement and the Feminist movement and they move ahead in their journey towards wholeness.

Ruth in Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is one of the youngest women who falls under the category of the assimilated women. She is a product of her past, but she is also a child of the future. Ruth is brought up by her grandfather, Grange, who in his "third life" attempts to
salvage some of his own wasted life by protecting Ruth. He commits his life to the survival and wholeness of her. Symbolically, their relationship begins in 1960, when black people and white people, together, are struggling to change the face of the South. Together, Grange, now in his sixties, and his granddaughter Ruth suggest the possibility of change. Ruth reinforces Grange's new philosophy that the black people should not make white folks god: "Nobody's is as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls don't we?" (TLGC: 223). Grange nurtures Ruth's womanish attitude towards life.

Ruth asks questions and demands answers, and speaks with her own voice. Grange says of Ruth, "I never in my life seen a more womanish girl" (TLGC: 200). She emerges into a young woman at the same time as the civil rights movement, and there is just a glimpse at the end of the novel of how that movement will affect Ruth's life. She becomes aware, by watching the civil rights activists - both women and men - that it is possible to struggle against the abuses of oppression. Raised in the sixties, she is the natural inheritor of the changes in a new order, struggling to be, this marking the transition of the women in her family from death to life. According to Winchell, "She achieves a self-realization, a definition of self, that moves her beyond most of Walker's earlier women and that looks ahead to some of the
spiritual and psychological triumphs of her later ones" (Winchell 1992, 56).

Meridian is an extension of Ruth who symbolizes some ray of hope at the end. The move to Atlanta thrusts Meridian into the heart of the civil rights movement. As the name suggests, Saxon College, where Meridian has joined, is a metaphor for white Anglo-Saxon values that have seeped into the thinking of middle-class blacks. The school emphasizes self-aggrandizement in a capitalist economy and ladyhood in a sexist society. The real life that Meridian witnesses in the streets of Atlanta is ignored by the curriculum at Saxon, and new definitions of the role of women are anathema to Saxon's programme for "ladies". Meridian and other like-minded students decide that they have two enemies: "Saxon, which wanted them to become something - ladies - that was already obsolete, and the larger, more deadly enemy, white racist society" (M: 116). She stops living by others' standards, learns to bloom for herself, as she must in order to survive, since her rebellious acts will alienate her from the rest of society.

After concentrating on her studies for a year, she joins the movement in Atlanta and falls in love with a black would-be revolutionary, Truman Held, who loves to dress well and speak French. But their relationship and their sexual
encounters are soon baffling for Meridian, their conversations about them even more so, for Truman represents the traditional male in his hypocritical separation between "good" girls and "bad" girls. Truman "had wanted a virgin, had been raised to expect and demand a virgin; and never once had he questioned this. He had been as predatory as the other young men he ran with, as eager to seduce and de-virginize as they. Where had he expected his virgin to come from? Heaven?" (M: 183). Truman wants a virgin because he will accept nothing less than what the culture says he deserves. He wants this virgin to be "a woman to rest in, as a ship must have a port. As a train must have a shed" (M: 181). He is confused and spiritually broken by everything in white America that makes all black people suffer from the problem of "double consciousness" of which W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1898. Truman is black, but his psyche is white-directed. Meridian suggests as much when she observes that "from a distance both Truman and Lynne looked white" (M: 144).

The experience with Truman and Mr. Raymond, a black teacher at the Saxon College, leads Meridian to assimilate the fact that black men play racial games to exploit black women sexually. After only one sexual encounter with him, Meridian gets pregnant, has an abortion, and has her tubes tied. The abortion is a metaphor for the injury black women suffer because they are physically vulnerable and not
respected in a sexist culture. Further complicating her feelings is Truman's involvement with the white students, particularly Lynne Rabinowitz, whom he later marries.

Despite her disappointing affair with Truman, Meridian stays at Saxon but she defies its "zoo restrictions and keeper taboos" and distinguishes herself as a "willful, sinful girl" (M: 115). In the course of her stay there, Meridian learns to turn to folk traditions (stories, songs, Mey Dances around The Sojourner) for expression and inspiration. The story of Louvinie, (which is already discussed in the earlier chapter), the slave woman who planted "Sojourner", a giant magnolia tree, contains with it the quality ofpowerlessness as well as strength. Susan Willis writes:

Named The Sojourner, the magnolia conjures up the presence of another leader of black women, who, like Louvinie, used language in the struggle for liberation. In this way, Walker builds a network of women, some mythic like Louvinie, some real like Sojourner Truth, as the context for Meridian's affirmation and radicalization.

(Willis 1987, 114)

The Sojourner is a symbol of her struggle with identity, together with her thinking on the issue of violence, her conviction that she could never commit herself to use violence in order to attain social justice. The fact
that a drawing shows a branch growing out of the "dead" stump of the Sojourner tree convinces that for Meridian, at that time, death and violence are to be avoided and life affirmed. The Sojourner is also, in a way, a symbol for the ability of the black people to survive despite attempts to destroy them. But, unfortunately, against the protests of Meridian, the tree is destroyed by the agitators.

The death of Wild Child is an eye opener for Meridian to understand about the so-called superficial white culture and also the impact of racism and sexism on the lives of black people. The gory tale of Fast Mary leaves Meridian with a question: "Is there a "community of support?" These images of women provide Meridian significant strategies for creative living. Therefore, she intensifies her search for an opposing set of values which will provide relief from the strictures of the Anglo-Saxon value system.

But the Civil Rights Movement which Meridian turns to as an alternative to the stifling conformity of Saxon College has no place for deviance either. It is as hostile to "political incorrectness" as Saxon is to funkiness. For a brief time in the early days of the movement, Meridian experiences the feeling of solidarity and absolute commitment, untainted by contradictory claims: as she is being arrested and beaten, Meridian realizes that "they were
at a time and place in History that forced the trivial to fall away - and they were absolutely together" (M: 101). It is not long, however, before the drama and the glory and the unifying force of the movement are gone for all. Meridian, Truman and Lynne have all paid high prices for their roles in the movement. Not only have they endured the conflicts of the public and the private, but they have lost what many people consider the focus of private life: children, parents, personal love. In order to engage in the intense political struggles of the movement, Meridian has to forget the events in her personal past that once kept her from the larger historical context of her life. The historical context for Alice Walker, however, is not only that of traditional or political history but of what we might call cultural history. In an interview in which she discusses the structure and significance of Meridian Walker speaks of her fears about "how much of the past, especially of our past, gets forgotten" (Walker 1983b, 185). This past refers to the substance of folk life; its legends and myths, its arts and symbols, its morals, customs and habits.

After her brief affair with Truman, Meridian seeks to join a revolutionary student group. But the group holds a rigid theoretical position, and demands that she pledges herself to revolutionary murder. Because she rejects the mandate to kill, the group ostracizes her. The question of
killing for a revolution remains a haunting one for her, long after the leftist cadre has settled comfortably into suburbia.

A true revolutionary, Meridian is held by something that rejects violence as the approach to change. That something is the music of her people, the music of a culture that has been rooted in love. Walker's poetic evocation of black culture is worth quoting in full:

Meridian alone was holding on to something the others had let go. If not completely, then partially by their words today, their deeds tomorrow. But what none of them seemed to understand was that she felt herself to be, not holding on to something from the past, but held by something in the past: by the memory of old black men in the South who, caught by surprise in the eye of a camera, never shifted their position but looked directly back; by the sight of young girls singing in a country choir, their hair shining with brushings and grease, their voices the voices of angels. When she was transformed in the church it was always by the purity of the singer's souls, which she could actually hear, the purity that lifted their songs like a flight of doves above her music-drunken head. If they committed murder - and to her even revolutionary murder was murder - what would the music be like.

(M: 18-19)

The battle fatigue Meridian encounters as a result of working in the Civil Rights Movement turns into emotional fatigue brought on by the endless guilt she feels for putting her child for adoption. Even though she knows her child is
better off without his seventeen-year-old mother, Meridian cannot forgive herself for giving him away. She feels that she has abandoned both her son and her own heritage:

Meridian knew that enslaved women...had laid their lives, gladly, for their children, that the daughters of these enslaved women had thought their greatest blessing from "Freedom" was that it meant they could keep their own children. And what had Meridian Hill done with her precious child? She had given him away. She thought...of herself as belonging to an unworthy minority, for which there was no precedent and of which she was, as far as she knew, the only member.

(M: 91)

Meridian does not object to children, or mothers bearing children, but to the role a woman is expected to play once she becomes a mother. According to this role, a mother, particularly The Mythical Black Mother, should sacrifice her individual personality and concerns in order to live for her children. Unfortunately, the only way Meridian can escape this unwanted role is to leave her child and family, accepting her own mother's disapprobation. And to do so she must first learn to shed the guilt this action produces.

While at Saxon, Meridian begins to neglect her body: "she hated its obstruction" (M: 118). When she lies delirious, dying of her guilt of deserting her child, "Instinctively, as if Meridian were her own child, Miss Winter answered, close to her ear on the pillow, 'I forgive
you' " (M: 158). With the explicit forgiveness of this woman whom she mistakes for her mother, Meridian is just sufficiently healed to agree to live. This partial healing begins Meridian's struggle to establish her identity, provides her with a starting point. The incidents in Atlanta, further, make her sick. Walker first mentions the severe headaches when Meridian is confronted with the question, "Will you kill for the revolution?" (M: 18). She writes of Meridian's thinning hair when Meridian speaks of her deep love for Truman in conversation with Mrs Hill. Continually forgetting to eat, she begins to suffer fainting spells and blurred vision, which result in coma. She explains to Truman that she has volunteered to suffer until her people are delivered from oppression. She restricts herself to the "gross necessaries" of life:

Each time Truman visited Meridian he found her with less and less furniture, fewer and fewer pieces of clothing, less of a social position in the community - wherever it was - where she lived.

(M: 24)

All signs of Meridian's illness reflect the guilt created by the collective history of black women. Her cultivation of self has necessitated her weeding out many of the most cherished values and institutions of the Western tradition, and she is left, despite her deepened commitment
to the racial struggle, with the existential alienation that is the mark of the twentieth century individual. She is the archetypal "outsider". The last stage in her development, then, requires the formation of an alternate value system, a system outside the sterility and meaninglessness of the Western orbit. The continued progress of her search for identity requires that she goes backward in order to move forward, and backward is the South. Deborah E. McDowell observes: "It is significant that much of the novel is set in coastal Georgia, where the survival of Africanism - particularly of the oral, religious, and musical traditions - is said to be most salient. Echoing Jean Toomer, Walker sees the South, despite its history of racism and oppression, as regenerative, for it is the South that is the cradle of the black man's experience in the New World, and the South that has continued to shape his experience in this country" (McDowell 1981, 272).

Meridian leaves Atlanta and settles in a small Mississippi town distinct only for its backwardness and blatant racism. Here she does penance for stealing her mother's serenity. Here she struggles with the bitterness she feels as a woman used and discarded by a man. Here she searches for answers to the "dilemma of human beings' injustice to one another" (Christian 1980, 210). She returns
to recover from blinding headaches, seizures, thinning hair, and strange fainting spells.

Celie, in *The Color Purple*, moves from a relationship with a stepfather who is sexually abusive to a relationship with her husband who exploits her labour and sex, to finally, a relationship with Shug Avery, who loves her, teaches her the reverence and mystery of her body, and the means of earning a livelihood through her own industry and creativity. To reach this level, over and over again, she accepts abuse and victimization.

It is from Nettie that Celie first learns that resistance is necessary. When she complains to Nettie about how mean the children of Albert's are, Nettie advises her, "Don't let them run over you....You got to fight, you got to fight" (CP: 25). Celie can only respond: "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive" (CP: 26). There is a contradiction in a survival that permits these kinds of suppressions of the self as well as a contradiction in how this kind of survival represents a remotely healthy progression for the fictional black woman character.

Celie survives by being a victim, by recognizing that fighting back causes one, more problems than not. Even when one of Albert's sisters suggests that Celie fight him as well
as his children, Celie responds: "I don't say nothing....I don't fight. I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (CP: 29). She continues to believe that others are responsible for her destiny.

Celie does not encounter any extraordinary woman until well into her adulthood. Her first glimpse of a female existence beyond that of a battered wife or slave is through Sofia, the big and outspoken wife of her stepson Harpo.

When Albert's son Harpo asks her what to do to "make [Sofia] mind," Celie, having internalized the principle of male domination, answers, "Beat her". When Celie next sees Harpo, his "face [is] a mess of bruises" (CP: 43). Sofia, then, becomes Celie's first model of resistance to sexual, and later, racial subjugation. She explains to Celie: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (CP: 46). Harpo's marriage to Sofia introduces to Celie an alternative mode of coping. Sofia "modifies" the requirements of marriage and child rearing. She rebels against the authority of her own father, and she is unwilling to behave deferentially to any man. She scorns rigid gender definitions and prefers fixing the leaking roof to fixing the evening dinner. By interacting
with Sofia, Celie first has her eyes opened to the fact her lot in life isn't all a woman can hope for.

Unlike Sofia, Celie submits to male authority because she accepts a theology which requires female subjugation to father and husband. As they discuss mutually their problems, a friendship forms and Celie begins to abandon her numb allegiance to the father's law. She also understands the real nature and relevance of the man-woman relationship and the meaning of sexual equality. She eventually enters into a true sisterhood with Sofia, who loves her husband, Harpo, but does not allow him to perpetuate unjust excesses. But Celie's initiation into black womanhood comes at a later stage in her relationship with Shug Avery. They decide to make quilt pieces out of the messed up curtains at home.

Celie's talisman is Shug Avery who, in her boldness, humour, and talent, is the incarnation of such blues giants as Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday. Both women meet each other at perhaps the lowest points in their lives - Celie, trapped in an unrewarding marriage and Shug, returning from a not-very-successful singing tour and with a "nasty woman disease" (CP:48). In their exchange of sympathies, which is initially awkward and for Celie sometimes menacing, they give to one another a special kind of nurturing that restores health to the body and to the spirit. In the company of Shug
Avery Celie learns to love her black sisters and also herself. Shug gives back her real black womanhood, physical beauty, womanly ego and creativity. Moreover Shug Avery, for the first time in Celie's life, gives her recognition by naming a song: "Miss Celie's Song" (CP:75). Prior to this Celie was never recognized as an independent being.

Shug initiates Celie into an awareness of her own sexuality and an appreciation of her own body - for despite the fact that she bore two children through Alfonso and endured the selfish fumbling of Albert, Celie is sexually innocent and remains a "virgin" (CP:79). Walker emphasizes a relationship between the development of selfhood and the acceptance of female biology. Celie's rehumanization begins with her involuntary response to Shug's body: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery's long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man" (CP:53). Until Shug introduces her to the beauty of her own body, Celie remains devoid of any sense of self-esteem or self-value. She initiates Celie into the ancient and true properties of the "button" (CP:79) and imparts a knowledge to her that is greater than sex. The effects of this is seen in the course of her progress.

Sofia, who is jailed for "sassing" the mayor's wife and knocking the mayor down when he slaps her for impudence, is
saved from further violence by Harpo's new girl friend, Mary Agnes (Squeak). When she is elected to go ask help from the white warden for Sophia in prison, she returns from her mission battered and bruised. Only after some urging - "Yeah, say, Shug, if you can't tell us, who you gon tell, God?" (CP: 95) - is she able to tell the others that the warden has raped her. Telling her story, she becomes her own authority, symbolized in her self-naming: When Harpo says, "I love you, Squeak," she replies, "My name Mary Agnes" (CP: 95).

Mary Agnes's example is important for Celie, who until now, has buried her story in her letter. One night soon afterwards, when their husbands are away, Shug comes into bed with Celie for warmth and company, and Celie tells her everything:

I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug's arms....Nobody ever love me, I say. She say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth. Um, she say, like she surprise....Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. Way after while, I act like a little lost baby too.

(CP:108-109)

Celie's telling of her story is an act of knowing - with that breaks the father's law, his prohibition of conscience. Knowing her story with Shug begins to heal Celie's long-hidden wounds of body and voice. Celie's sexual experiences
with Shug give her a very real and very keen sense of herself as a complex and developing woman. As a consequence of Shug's patient and loving attention, Celie discovers not only the pleasures of intimacy, but that such intimacy must be based upon a respect for another's body, needs, and spirit. Over time, this discovery makes Celie more critical of Albert because she begins to see the deficiencies in their marriage. Over time, this discovery helps Celie to find her own voice, a voice that expresses the ache and anger of that secret true self held captive by years of abuse and violence.

Celite begins to revise her own notions of god and men and her place within the scheme of patriarchy when she discovers, through the agency of Shug, the cache of letters which Albert has concealed from her. She is amazed and appalled by Albert's pettiness. Her mind is an execution chamber riddled with just like blood and the memory of painful deaths: "All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble bout the house crazy for Mr.'s blood. In my mind, he falling dead every which a way. By time night come, I can't speak. Every time I open my mouth nothing come out but a little burp" (CP:115). Celie's comparison of herself to Sofia is significant because it is an evidence of her emerging, true, secret self - long oppressed by Albert's tyranny. Celie is beginning to reject
the passive stance of the victim and to assume the aggressive, defiant stance of the warrior.

From the cache of letters, Celie discovers not only that her sister Nettie and children are in Africa but that her real father had been lynched and her mother driven mad. These calamities and misfortunes shatter Celie's faith in the "big...old...tall...gray bearded" white man to whom she has been "praying and writing". She ceases to write to God as she learns from Nettie that "Pa is not our pa!" (CP: 162) and that "the god she has been writing is a man" who does not listen to "poor colored women" (CP:176). She gives up on Him as but another "trifling, forgetful and low-down man" (CP: 175). She begins to address her letter to sister Nettie. Writing thus becomes, for Celie, a means of structuring her identity - her sense of self in relationship to her sister, and by extension, a community of women. The discovery of Nettie's letters, disturbing as it is for Celie, has positive ramifications, according to Lindsey Tucker: "First, it removes the stigma of incest from Celie's children. Second, it symbolizes the diminution of patriarchal power. Third, it serves to mobilize Celie" (CP: 92).

Hopeless, she becomes at least potentially violent, actually threatening to kill Mr----. Her despair occasions Shug's discussion on religion, which, in addition to giving
the novel its title, brings many of its strands together. According to Shug, the only God to be found in church is the white man's God. But God is really within everyone and everything, and the proper response to God is admiration. Shug declares, "God ain't a he or she, but a It....My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all" (CP:178). She concludes her description of God by asserting that more than anything else God wants us to appreciate Him, which means to appreciate the world: "God just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (CP: 178).

At this point Celie remains somewhat bemused, feeling "like a fool", but her "eyes are opening" (CP: 179), and a stream of questions and concerns begins to run through her head. She comes to realize the quality of Shug's brand of piety and to appreciate how it inspired and determined her life and the lives of those she cares about, people who are models for love and sacrifice that are willingly made for others. Celie understands that she is "somebody" and that it was Shug's sense of God in time that inspired her eventually
to refuse to allow Celie to be violated, thereby giving Celie herself the strength to refuse.

In the pivotal dinner scene, when Celie and Squeak announce that they have decided to forge new identities by leaving their husbands it marks a further step towards wholeness. Celie announces to an amazed Albert that it is time for her to leave him and "enter into creation" and that his "dead body [is] just the welcome mat" (CP: 181) she needs. Patriarchal family rule and patriarchal metaphysics break down simultaneously as Celie and Shug leave Mr......'s house for Shug's Memphis estate. With Shug's help, Celie is able to translate her murderous rage towards Mr...... into a curse:

I curse you, I say.
...Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble.
...Anything you do to me, already done to you.
...I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here.

(CP: 187)

It is Shug Avery who channels Celie's anger into purposeful activity by suggesting that the two of them sew her a pair of pants.
As an assimilated woman, Nettie, in Africa, discovers among the Olinka the value of female bonding in a polygynous society. "It is in work that women get to know and care about each other" (CP: 153), she writes to Celie. Moreover, in the missionary household where she lives with Samuel, a black minister and his wife, Corrine, Nettie shares the responsibility of rearing the children and administers to the spiritual and medical needs of the Olinka. If Celie is degraded and devalued as a black woman in the American South, Nettie discovers that as an unmarried female, she is regarded with pity and contempt by the Olinka. She also learns about scarification and clitoridectomy, rituals of female mutilation in a patriarchal society. Much of what Nettie writes to Celie describes the situation in Africa - the breakdown of male/female relationships, the power of male domination, and the bonding between women - is replicated in Celie's experiences in the rural South. Her letters add substantially to the depth and variety of the entire novel, for in them Nettie reveals a world beyond the limited one that Celie knows.

A new reading of the Bible comes to Celie from Nettie. Nettie discovers for Celie that the Bible is a black text. She also relates the "story of the roofleaf", a kind of creation myth which unfolds a different version of God. Like
all creation myths, the telling of the original event - here a violation of ecological sacredness and its consequences - is a ritual act that has become the basis of the Olinka's worship of the roofleaf. Their reverence for this essential vegetation is understood by Nettie, who writes to Celie, "We know a roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but in its own humble way, is it not God?" (CP:131) Nettie's letter from Africa also speaks of the new god: "God is different to us now.... More spirit than ever before, and more internal" (CP: 227).

All the characters, with the exceptions of Nettie and Shug, live a very insular lives, unaware of what is occurring outside their own small neighbourhood and particularly unconscious of the larger social and political currents sweeping over the world. In their isolation, however, they work through problems of racism, sexism, violence and oppression to achieve a wholeness, both personal and communal.

From Dee to Celie, many of the women characters discussed in this chapter, are aware of their condition than those in the first cycle of Walker's personal construct. Many of these women are educated and they are not subjected to extreme physical abuse. Some of them have managed to become acceptable to the white world by the negation of their racial identity. Dee in Everyday Use is one such character.
The civil rights movement brought the black people and the white people together for the enumeration of the voters' list. Because of this, there was closeness between them and a new interracial relationship developed. Characters like Meridian and the young black girl in Advancing Luna-Ida B. Wells face new problems. Interracial rape is one among them. The women of this cycle are also influenced by Black Power movement and the Feminist movements.

These women are drawn from a wider social spectrum. Their conception of God and Christianity undergo a drastic change. They learn to realize that God is innate. The breakdown of male/female relationship brings these black women together and one can see the emergence of sisterhood among them. Sex is freely discussed with no inhibitions. Abortion is legalised.

Each woman character assimilates one thing or other. Each is suggestive of an advanced stage of development for black women. Dee represents the type of black woman who is very enamoured of the fads of the American society. She is an assimilated woman to the extent of appreciating her ancestor's creative works as artifacts. For the young girl in The Flowers and the mother in Petunias assimilation comes in different ways. For one, it is an "end of innocence" and for the other it is a realization of the "cyclical process" that
the tradition and heritage of the black people will continue in spite of the annihilation by the white. The young narrator in *How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State?* It was Easy realizes on the death of her mother that she is used as a sex object by the white man and she kills him. She is on her way to becoming an emergent woman. She and Elethia are the fighting warriors in this cycle of women.

The women characters in *Porn, Coming Apart, The Abortion,* and *The Lover* are women of the seventies boldly facing their men and trying to break the shackles that bind them. The nun in *The Diary of an African Nun* exhibits the dilemma of a black woman who wants to join the mainstream of American life and her paradoxical stance. Harriet in *We Don't Drink Wine in France* tries to fall in love with a white man which was a taboo those days. All these characters, including Meridian and Celie are affected by the twin afflictions of sexism and racism.

Some of these women characters try to liberate themselves through open movement. The central character in *The Lover* by her visit to New England artists' colony enjoys many new freedoms, including having a lover. She dreams of "all the far away countries, daring adventures, passionate lovers still to be found" (GW: 39). Imani, the narrator of
The Abortion, wants to "take in lovers" and "to ramble" (GW: 73). Source contrasts two women in terms of their capacities for open motion and personal development. Meridian leaves Atlanta to Mississippi and Celie leaves for Memphis.

The second cycle signals black female celebration rather than the predicament and marks a transition in Walker's broadening vision for the potential lives of her black heroines. Among these women only Meridian and Celie are portrayed by Walker as reaching the third cycle of women.