We are not White. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves....We and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere.

- Alice Walker

For the most part, the women of the third cycle belong to the late sixties and thereafter. But there are some older women who exhibit these qualities of the developing emergent model. Through their suffering and struggle, these women lay the groundwork for a new type of woman to emerge. They are fully conscious of the developments in the political and social fields. These women undergo a sort of initiation before they are ready to occupy and claim a new territory. Another fundamental activity these women engage in is the search for meaning in their roots and traditions. One also notes a reconciliation between themselves and black men as they try to reclaim their past and to reexamine their relationship to the black community.

Mrs Gracie Mae Still in Nineteen Fifty-five is linked to Mrs Johnson (Everyday Use) both in size and spirit. She is a black singer whose song is bought by the manager of a white
male singer Traynor, who also buys up all the copies of her record. The white male singer goes on to great riches but never understands the song.

Because he feels guilty about using her material, the white singer keeps giving her presents, while always trying to understand the song that has made him. He is trying to sing something that he lacks the experience to sing or to interpret. He is a commercial success as an artiste, the latest fad on the rock-and-roll scene, yet he is a spiritual failure because for him the link between art and life is never forged. Art requires full living and emotional commitment. Traynor lacks this. He has no more understanding of life than he has of the songs he is famous for. His marriage life is a wreck. He tells Gracie Mae, "I married but it never went like it was supposed to be. I never could squeeze any of my own life either into it or out of it. It was like singing somebody else's record" (GW: 13). He writes to Gracie Mae: "Everybody still loves that song of yours. They ask me all the time what do I think it means, really. I mean, they want to know just what I want to know. Where out of your life did it come from?" (GW: 11). He even attempts to share his success with her by taking her on the "Tonight Show" with him. But the audience wants the prettied up imitation, not vast and earthly and very black Gracie Mae.
Gracie Mae achieves her understanding of both art and life by way of suffering. Her audience may have been small compared to Traynor's, but as she explains to him, "It would have been worth my life to try to sing 'em somebody else's stuff that I didn't know nothing about" and "couldn't be nothing worse than being famous the world over for something you don't even understand" (GW: 17, 14).

The whole story is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between original black musicians and the white pop music that takes their work and exploits it commercially. Traynor is more a symbol of white exploitation of black music. Through her music, Gracie Mae found a type of freedom that all of Traynor's fame and money cannot buy. Part of her freedom is the freedom to be her content if overweight self. Though she is still "Mrs Gracie Mae Nobody from Notasulga" (GW: 14), she is spiritually healthy and whole.

While singing makes Gracie Mae healthy and whole, sculpture and drawing make Sarah Davis in A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring an emergent woman. One of the fundamental activities the women in the third cycle engage in is the search for meaning in their roots and traditions. By reclaiming her past and re-examining her relationship to the Black community, Sarah Davis strikes a reconciliation between herself and her cultural heritage and between herself and
black men. The story stresses the fact that one must go back to one's family in order to go forward and that the family background must be experienced as a resource rather than as a liability.

This, one of the most successful stories of Walker, is a fictional portrayal of a young black woman's response to the death of her father. She is one of the 'chosen ones' studying art in a prestigious girls' school at Cresselton in New York. She is beautiful, graceful and gentle with friends. She is also good in painting. She is "a poppy in a field of winter roses" (GW: 127). At Cresselton, she lives in a world where there are no faces like her own, save one, to serve as her models. She also finds herself incapable of drawing or painting black men because she cannot "bear to trace defeat onto blank pages" (GW: 126). Sarah's school friends "had no idea what made her," and "had no idea from where she came" (GW: 130), and Sarah herself is in danger of losing the sustenance which precise knowledge of her origins could provide.

Word of her father's death brings her home. Like Walker, Sarah Davis feels much alienated from her father. She blames him for her mother's death and for the other hardships they faced in life. On seeing him dead, she wonders, "Did it matter now that often he had threatened their lives with the
rage of his despair?" She answers, "No, ... I don't think it does" (GW: 132). The image of defeat is attached specifically to her father, but her grandfather and her brother provide models of victory. Her grandfather looks simply and solemnly heroic even at the time of grief. He stands like a rock, outwardly calm, the comfort and support of the Davis family. Suddenly, Sarah realizes that her grandfather's face has become a touchstone in the search of her own. She thinks, "It is strange ... that I never thought to paint him like this, simply as he stands; without anonymous meaningless people hovering beyond his profile; his face turned proud and brownly against the light" (GW: 135). When Sarah realizes she can indeed capture such strength on canvas, her grandfather tells her to capture him in stone instead. Sarah knows finally that in pursuing her art she will be saying "No with capital letters" (GW: 132) to the system that killed her mother and broke her father's spirit. The unpreacher-like gaiety of her brother's affection also moves her very much.

The physical contact with her grandfather and brother, and the perception of their faces are seen as the precondition for the development of Sarah's art. These family faces provide a necessary context and a direction to Sarah in continuing the search for her own face, her own identity.
The difficulty of reclaiming the father is introduced through the analogue of Richard Wright who had trouble with his father. In talking about Richard Wright to her friends in the college, Sarah is thinking about herself. The implication is that Sarah cannot deny the connection between herself and her father. She realizes that her father is her link to generations of her family and that he is "one faulty door in a house of many ancient rooms." She asks, "Was that one faulty door to shut [her] off forever from the rest of the house?" (GW: 129). To some extent, that "faulty door" does not matter since, Sarah finds an alternative in her brother. "'You are my door to all rooms,' she [says]; 'don't ever close'" (GW: 136). She finds the "doors" to the house of her heritage in her grandfather and in her brother. Sarah's brother reminds the readers of Fred, Walker's brother, who has encouraged her to get the education her parents wanted for her.

There are certain similarities, one can see, between this story and The Third Life of Grange Copeland. Both deal with the sense of a family on the move. Secondly, they show the image of a father who has been defeated by his life as a sharecropper and whose anger has turned inward against his own family. Thirdly, they show the significant relationship between the daughter and a grandfather who has transcended defeat. Sarah who learns that art requires full living and
emotional commitment is on her way to becoming a great artist.

Another artist, a writer this time, who has reached great heights and whose works are translated in so many languages is Andrea Clement White in Fame. She is aged, vain, crotchety and whimsical. She is very often haunted with the question: "...was she a success?". Though she feels that she is of course a success, "a small voice near the back faltered" (GW: 60). She has made money, travels in a silver Mercedes 350SL. Yet there remained an emptiness, an ache that she has not achieved what she has set out to achieve.

She is equally upset by the view that "black people write only about being black and not about being people" (GW: 57). She tells the T.V. interviewer, "It is more important that they are people, from the novelist's point of view. A botanist might say of a flower, it is a red flower. He is really studying flowers" (GW: 55). The white people never care to know the black history well enough to recognize an evolution or a variation. For them whatever the blacks write is new in the world.

Andrea Clement White is not only upset by this reaction of the white world. She is also equally annoyed by her husband's reaction: "It was clear they shared a life" (GW:
57). He cared little for literature and in his silence "there [is] tension, criticism of her, impatience" (GW: 57).

What gives this lady writer the sustenance to continue with her writing is the memory of her ancestors. She is very much moved and inspired when "a small girl the color of chocolate" sings "a slave song, authorless" (GW: 62, 63). This child's confident memory and the old anonymous song give her "the energy to stand up and endure with dignity (the audience surreptiously nibbling at dessert as she began to speak) the presentation of her one hundred and eleventh major award.

The black writer feels that she is not totally accepted as a part of the American literary tradition. She still feels the impact of sexism and racism. She also feels that she is more honoured for her "Fame, her use as a fund raiser, and age" (GW: 61). This woman who has crossed many hurdles in her life to join the third cycle of women of Walker's personal construct looks for "wholeness" in life. Materialistically, she is sound. But, she looks for something more. This urge in her, propels her to move ahead with the strength she receives from her ancestors. She knows that "resistance" is the secret of joy for black women.
Susan Marie is another character of Walker who gains strength from her ancestors and believes that God is innate in all human beings. In the story *A Letter of the Times, or Should this Sado-Masochism be Saved* Susan Marie writes a letter to her friend, another black girl Lucy. Her letter to Lucy is a sequel to her provocation on seeing Lucy dressed as Scarlett O' Hara. The main contention of this letter is about the efforts made by Susan Marie, a teacher, educating her students, both black and white, about slavery, racism and God. She realizes that God is "the inner spirit, the voice; the human compulsion when deeply distressed to seek healing counsel within ourselves, and the capacity within ourselves both to create this counsel and receive it" (GW: 119).

In reading several slave narratives, Susan Marie finds within them this inner spirit, "this inner capacity for self-comforting, this ability to locate God within that they expressed, demonstrated something marvelous about human beings" (GW: 119). She writes further to Lucy that "Nature has created us with the capacity to know God, to experience God, just as it has created us with the capacity to know speech. The experience of God, or in any case the possibility of experiencing god, is innate (GW: 119).

That God is innate comes to her as a revelation when she learns from the slave narratives about how the black
woman was "captured, enslaved, sexually abused, starved, whipped....found within her own heart the only solace and love she was ever to know" (GW: 119). She feels that the "twin self is in all of us, waiting only to be summoned" (GW: 119).

To prepare the class to comprehend God in this way, she requests the students to read the slave narratives and then to write narratives themselves imagining either an enslaved woman or a mistress/master. Most of them wrote about the sufferings of the black people but no one wrote of acquiescence or of happiness. All of them felt against slavery.

The efforts of Susan Marie in making the class realize about slavery and God come more or less to naught by the television show on Sado-masochism. One interracial couple, lesbians, are presented as mistress and slave - the white woman wearing a ring in the shape of a key and the black woman, as her slave wearing the lock on the chain around her neck. The reaction of a white woman student is that she sees nothing wrong with what is shown on T.V. But a black woman student feels abused. Susan Marie strongly feels that the T.V. has indoctrinated the black women to fear the whites and the white women to look down upon black women as slaves. She concludes her lesson stressing that they "must simply resist,
as [they] have always done, with ever more accurate weapons of defense" (GW: 123). She warns her friend not to be carried away by the heroines the white people portray in their works. This letter is a kind of eye-opener for the blacks who want to imitate the whites.

From the 1950s television became the most powerful new form of entertainment to the Americans. It had a major impact on the minds of the people. The negative portrayal of the blacks had, in a way, indoctrinated many Americans with the old images of the blacks. Susan Marie feels that "television is a lot more subtle than slave ships" (GW: 123).

For the black women to be whole, they must understand their selves. Self-definition is crucial for their inner growth. And the fact that God is within them will give them more courage and the power to resist. In this way, this short story written in letter form is invaluable in explaining how the epistolary form of The Color Purple aids Celie's process of self-definition.

Walker speaks about interracial marriage and love affairs in some of her stories and novels. Her own marriage to a white man, probably, has given her more insights about such marriages and their fate. In Laurel she speaks about a brief affair between Annie, a black civil rights worker and Laurel, a white civil rights worker. The story takes place
during the mid-sixties. She is attracted by his "smudged bifocals, nonchalant gait and slouchy posture" (GW: 106). His lilting voice mesmerizes her to such an extent she compares it to "two happy but languid children slowly jumping rope under apple trees in the sun" (GW: 106). He too is drawn by her beauty. But they cannot have sexual relationships because they are in the South. Interracial couples are under surveillance wherever the poor things raised their heads anywhere in the city.

The state of lust between them is such it has drawn her away from many of the most monumental issues of social and political significance. With the civil rights movement gaining momentum, South is rising again. People are murdered. Many of her colleagues and friends are imprisoned. Realizing the male authority in his voice and about his first wife, Annie feels that it is only sex between herself and Laurel and hence they part.

When Laurel tries to revive their affair, Annie is married and has a child. With the maturity of age and education she realizes that "a lot of the love was lust", but also admits that "lust can be a kind of love" (GW: 116). She admits to her husband that she would have run away with Laurel "because of the pity - and for the adventure" (GW: 116). For her "adventure" means marrying a white man whereas
"adventure" for Laurel meant to make love with a black woman. She realizes how tough life would have been for her, for her daughter or for her husband had she run away with Laurel.

Through a free discussion with her husband she unknots this problem. She also realizes that it is lust, love, pity and adventure which have drawn her towards the white man, Laurel. At one stage, to emulate the white and to join the mainstream of American life black women were ready to go away from South and their culture. Annie represents that stage and also her coming out of it. Later on, she realizes that it is just for sex, he is drawn towards her and she also realizes that she will be "the other woman" (GW: 109) - the already decided fate of many black women - when she learns about his first wife. This story represents the new awareness in black women.

It is in the South, Walker's protagonist of the novel Meridian rediscovers the power of the black past, accepts it and draws strength from its vital traditions. For years she continues to agonize over the question of killing for the revolution, despite Truman's impatient remonstrance that "revolution was the theme of the sixties" (M: 253) and is now an irrelevant issue. The others all forget the message of revolution that the civil rights movement carried. The once blood thirsty Anne-Marion, friend of Meridian in her movement
days, writes mature poetry in her lakeside home. Truman believes that the United States has come to accept racial minorities and that these groups "adore America just the way it is" (M: 253). He has capitulated to the status quo, paying lip service to his revolutionary ideals by "making a statue of Crispus Attucks for the Bicentennial" (M: 253). In turning revolution into a fashionable art object, Truman shows that he is more concerned with his product than with the process of social transformation. He has abandoned his ideals and betrayed his political concerns.

In her continuing dedication to revolutionary ideals, Meridian is isolated; others refuse the suffering which Meridian willingly takes upon herself. Although she refuses to kill for the revolution, she seems willing to let herself die for a less worthy cause. Alone, she performs spontaneous and symbolic acts of rebellion, such as carrying a drowned black child's corpse to the mayor's office to protest the town officials' neglect of drainage ditches in black neighbourhoods.

The scene in which she leads the black children of Chicokema silently lining them up to see the Marilene O'Shay exhibit on a day reserved for whites reveals her willingness to take up revolution in a quiet way. She places herself at the front of the line and marches across the square facing a
tank with which the officials of the town threaten to kill her. Her reason for defying the officials is to enable the community's black children to see for themselves that the woman billed as "One of the Twelve Human Wonders of the World..." is a fake. The children of Chicokema have been negatively socialized to believe that they are inferior to other children. Not prepared to open fire on this woman and her band of children, the defenders of the Old South simply stare at Meridian in disbelief. Without speaking a word, Meridian succeeds in desegregating the O'Shay exhibit. She accomplishes more than the would-be revolutionaries who move on to live Yuppie life styles. Stein writes, "Walker's novel affirms that it is not by taking life that true revolution will come about, but through each individual's slow, painful confrontation of self" (Stein 1986, 140). Only Meridian, who struggles with questions that other characters gloss over, completes this personal transformation. Her confrontations with personal history, family history, and racial history shape the way she chooses to live.

Meridian's struggle for personal transformation echoes June Jordan's definition of her duties as a feminist:

I must undertake to love myself and to respect myself as though my very life depends upon self-love and self-respect...and... I am entering my soul into a struggle that will most certainly transform the experience of all peoples of the earth, as no other movement can, ... because the
movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is ... now galvanizing ... the unarguable majority of human beings everywhere.

(qtd. in Hernton 1987, 58)

One of Meridian's most difficult struggles is to forgive herself for her perceived failings. If she can learn to love and respect herself, she can see her moments of silence as legitimate acts of rebellion against a system that would deny her individuality.

In the final section, titled "Ending", the journey of Meridian from contrariness towards wholeness begins. She accepts and draws strength from the symbolic and religious traditions of the blacks in the South. Wandering into a church shortly after Martin Luther King's assassination, Meridian notices a number of changes which trigger her reexamination of the function of the black church in the social and political struggle. The church memorial service reverses her self-destructive direction. She finds that the black church has been transformed from the churches of her childhood. It is neither her mother's church nor the church of the white Christian tradition with its futuristic eschatology. Nor is it the church which severed the black man's attention from the exigencies of the "here and now" and riveted it to the putative rewards of the hereafter. "It is rather the restored church of her slave ancestors that
Meridian ultimately embraces, the church of Nat Turner, of Denmark Vesey, the church rooted in the soil of protest against oppression, the church of communal spirit, togetherness, righteous convergence" (McDowell 1981, 272).

Instead of preaching resignation and salvation after death, the new message is resistance. The church's transformation inspires Meridian's; it permits her to find the answer to the questions of purpose which have been troubling her. What strikes her at first are the church's physical changes. It was not like the one's of her childhood; it was not shabby or small. It was large, of brick, with stained-glass windows ... an imposing structure; and yet it did not reach for the sky, as the cathedrals did, but settled firmly on the ground.

(M: 259)

Its outer transformations mirror its internal changes. A man is called on to pray, but his is a short prayer and, significantly he doesn't kneel. "He said he would not pray any longer because there was a lot of work for the community to do" (M: 261).

Similarly, Meridian observes a change in the music. It now has a tone which urges her to quote Margaret Walker's lines, "Let the martial songs be written .... let the dirges
appear" (M: 262). This feeling is perhaps best accounted for by literary critic Sherley Anne Williams:

That pain plays a large part in Black music is evident in the lyrics of the blues, the spirituals, the gospels, in the raw harshness which has been such an important aspect in the development of jazz. Yet, there is the beautiful lyricism of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane which also expresses triumph and transcendence, the sly humor and laughing confidence, the will to make it on through, to work it out which are also expressed in blues, gospels and spirituals.

(Williams 1972, 144).

Another telling transformation in the church is the picture in stained-glass window, not of the traditional pale Christ with stray lamb, but rather of "B.B. With a Sword" (M: 267), a picture of a tall, broad-shouldered black man with a guitar in one hand and a blood-dripping sword in the other. According to Deborah E. McDowell, the reference is to the blues singer B.B. King" (McDowell 1981, 274). Walker, probably, uses the black musician as a symbol of an enduring cultural tradition and as an exemplification of unity and community.

Listening to the congregation's hymn, Meridian finally achieves a spiritual release and transformation. She feels a "breaking in her chest," Walker writes, "as if a tight string binding her lungs had given way, allowing her to breath
freely." She finally understands that she must respect her life and "not ... give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own (M: 269). Meridian finds herself answering affirmatively the question that has been a refrain in the novel: "Will you kill for the Revolution?" (M: 18).

As she leaves the church, she promises herself that she will kill before she will allow others to be murdered. This is, however, a promise she is not sure she will be able to keep. She resolves her dilemma by finding a more congenial role in the revolution. She will be the artist rather than the killer: "... When they stop to wash off the blood and find their throats too choked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing, I will come forward and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear. For it is the song of the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost people suffer and are without soul" (M: 271). Karen F. Stein observes: "In defining herself as an artist, Meridian determines her salvation. Her art, hard-worn from personal struggle, will be life-giving, not death-dealing" (Stein 1986, 139). By turning to the songs and stories of her cultural heritage, Meridian finds a way to serve her people.
When Truman, devastated by confusion and guilt, comes to Meridian for love, she refuses to be a "port" or a "shed" in his life. He asks her for that kind of woman's love which flows into a man's life "like a special sun, like grace" (M: 293). She forgives him and pities him, but knows that the "sun" and the "grace" in his life must come from his own search for wholeness. She sets him free, and in so doing, she frees herself of the bitterness and pain she has felt as a woman used and discarded:

You are free to be whichever way you like, to be with whoever, of whatever color or sex you like - and what you risk in being truly yourself, the way you want to be, is not the loss of me.

(M: 293)

She adds, however, that he is "not free ... to think that she is a fool" (M: 293).

In the final chapter of the novel Walker shows Meridian emerging from her shack, free of headaches, seizures, guilt, bitterness, and confusion. Her hair is no longer thin; it is a soft wool that frames her "thin, resolute face." She is "strong enough to go" from the small town of Chicokema out for still other crusades. Anne-Marion's note to Meridian with the picture of a gigantic tree stump with a tiny branch growing from it is quite significant. Anne-Marion has written: "Who would be happier than you that the Sojourner
did not die?" (M: 294). Metaphorically, Meridian represents the tiny branch from the Sojourner Tree which is the symbol of the black oral and musical traditions. As she leaves the place, Truman climbs into her sleeping bag and dons her cap, in an effort to experience Meridian's vitality.

Meridian's search for wholeness and for answers to the problem of human injustice is an individual search and in Barbara Christian's words, it is "a continuing process rather than adventure that ends in a neat resolution": Truman's sickness clearly is a part of that "continuing process". Christian writes:

Walker's ending suggests that even Meridian's dearly won salvation is not sure unless we others sort out the tangled roots of our past and pursue our own health. In other words, until the pattern of this society is transformed, no part of it is free and it cannot be free unless each of us pursues our own wholeness. By making the end of the novel the beginning of another such quest, Walker invites us to use the novel as a contemplative and analytical tool in our own individual search. For the questions that she gives flesh to in the novel, questions that are rooted in this country's past, persist in the present.

(Christian 1980, 235)

Walker's novel affirms that it is not by taking life that true revolution will come about, but through respect for life and authentic living of life. This authenticity is gained only through each individual's slow, painful
confrontation of self. In *Meridian* one can see the process. In order to live, Meridian rejects the temptations of conventional middle-class life, the conventional women's roles of dutiful daughter, wife, mother and lover. But she must reject as well as the contemporary temptations of martyrdom and false revolutionary consciousness, for these roles are death masks. From her repeated encounters with death and deathliness, Meridian gains the knowledge and strength to achieve a new birth of self.

It is in Memphis, Celie moves further towards self-realization and wholeness. Her home-bound sojourn in Memphis as companion and lover to Shug gives her a new lease of life. At Shug's insistence, she begins sewing, an activity that Shug believes will absorb some of Celie's anger. Initially, she makes pants for herself and Shug only, but later makes them for others or merely for the sake of making them. Through making pants, Celie discovers her final declaration of independence. She turns pant-making into a full time occupation and rather quickly becomes a competent, highly patronized seamstress. Shug blesses her by declaring, "You making your living, Celie .... Girl, you on your way" (CP: 192). Celie establishes Folkspants, Unlimited, and hires a couple of helpers in the business. She even makes pants for the folks back down home, and they in turn spread the word of
her good work. The ultimate transformation is complete and she has effaced herself into free enterprise.

Within the context of a consideration of growth and liberation, Celie's pants making is an appropriate and effective symbol. When she wore the first pair of pants, it was a sign that she was breaking out of the role the men in her life had assigned to her. Not only does she shake off the power men have over her but also she turns it against them by getting them to like the pants she sews. Apart from this, as Lindsey Tucker says, "pants also suggest mobility". He adds: "It is no coincidence that Celie turns her art into an enterprise only after she herself has been mobilized - has moved out of Albert's house and up to Memphis to live with Shug. Thus Celie's pants are associated with freedom and movement - all kinds of movement" (Tucker 1988, 90).

Celie becomes one of those women Walker described so movingly in her essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", (MG: 231-243) earlier black women who have been artists, but whose gifts were so stifled and whose opportunities were so limited that they are never heard of by the outside world. Walker praises, for example, quilt makers and especially her mother, who made a garden wherever she went to live. They found an outlet for their creativity where they could, and similarly Celie, when freed from the oppressiveness of her
early environments, develops a way to express her personality in art.

Shug intervenes in urging Celie to take advantage of an inheritance. When Celie's stepfather Alfonso dies, she learns that the house in which he lived belongs, legally, to her and Nettie. But as she recalls her stepfather's abuse, she decides that she wants nothing that comes from him. Shug places the situation in perspective by assuring that the property was willed to her and that she has every right to assume the ownership. This event represents a pivotal point in Celie's life wherein she comes close to sacrificing a deserved inheritance because of her inability to recognize fully the possibilities within the range of her influence.

Celia also learns to be independent even without Shug. When Shug leaves to pursue her singing career and later marries, Celie, in a letter to Nettie, expresses her first affirmation of self-determination: "I be so calm. If she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content. And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn" (CP: 247-248). The text does not provide any enumeration of Celie's goals or evaluate the level of her aspirations, but at last she envisions contentment without assigning responsibility for that contentment to anyone other than herself.
Celie's transformation is beautifully summed up by Trudier Harris:

From a used and abused woman, Celie emerges as an independent, creative business woman. She moves from being ugly duckling to a figuratively beautiful swan. She moves from being Hurston's mule, the beast of burden, to physical and mental declarations of independence, to a reunion with her children and her sister. She moves from seeing God as the center of her universe to redefining the concept of the supernatural as an "It" that dwells in everyone. She moves from being beaten and used by others to establishing her own business. She moves from being a strait-laced church woman to being a reefer smoker. She moves from the back room of the house in which her stepfather has violated her to sharing a huge house in Memphis with her lover to returning to a house, property, and a store she has inherited. She moves from being Albert's footstool to demanding his respect and teaching him how to sew.

(Harris 1986, 14)

Even Albert has changed: "I know you won't believe this ... say Sofia, but Mr.------ act like he trying to git religion.... He out there in the field from sunup to sundown. And clean that house just like a woman." Harpo concurs: "Even cook.... And what more, wash the dishes when he finish" (CP: 199). Harpo's repressed love of domesticity begins to flower and the new Harpo stays home while Sofia works in Celie's store. Miss Eleanor Jane, the mayor's daughter, cooks up dishes for Henrietta to save her from her ailment. Shug comes home to Celie and decides to retire. Squeak gives up Grady and drugs to sing professionally again and comes home to
claim her daughter. Celie's long-lost sister and children arrive along with Samuel and Adam's wife, Tashi. Albert, Harpo, Sofia, Jack and Odessa complete Celie's circle and her story ends with Celie writing a letter of thanksgiving to "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (CP: 249). The novel ends with the celebration of a love feast.

In Celie, black women are visible at various stages in their history and in their representations in literature. Unlike Mem and Mrs Jerome Washington, III, she survives. She resembles to some extent, Myrna, Imani and the unnamed lawyer killer. Like Myrna, she survives exploitation and insanity. Like Imani, she proves faithful to her womanhood by rejecting a husband. And like the unnamed lawyer killer she finds a new self. Both Meridian and Celie come out as emergent characters. While Meridian has some overtones of Walker's personal life, Celie represents Walker's great-grandmother, a slave who was raped at the age of twelve by the man who owned her. One is reminded of Meridian forgiving Truman when Celie forgives Albert in the end. Like Truman joining Meridian in her quest, Albert joins Celie in her creative process.

Family, in this novel, is no longer based on blood but on mutual love and respect. The family itself becomes a positive force when Sofia changes it into an entity that
succours and helps its members. She extends the nuclear family when she welcomes Squeak's children into her home and heals the breach that had existed between the two women, both rivals for Harpo's affections. Shug and Celie form a new family unit which embraces all - both men and women.

Even religion is revitalized, when it extends to encompass the segregated, and God loses "Its" colour and gender: "God ain't a he or she, but a It .... It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself" (CP: 202). When religion loses the limitations imposed on it by a white, male hierarchy, faith opens in many directions, and Celie's perception of God becomes all inclusive and whole reminding us of Walker's "animism". Walker states: "a belief that makes it possible to view all creation as living, as being inhabited by spirit" (Walker 1973c, 193).

Society becomes more enlightened as its members are able to repudiate the dictates of societal norms. Indeed, there is an attempt on the part of the daughters to overcome the sins of their fathers when Eleanor Jane tries to make reparation for her parents' treatment of Sofia by working for her. The new society is not a closed order; it is open to all.
Walker uses with some ingenuity some of the decorative arts which she and many other feminist critics feel as devalued by patriarchal society to show the emergence of black women. One of them is the use of song. Walker asks: "What might have been the result if singing, too, had been forbidden by law. Listen to the voices of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Robert Flack, and Aretha Franklin, among others, and imagine those voices muzzled for life" (MG: 234). Walker often speaks of a song in connection with the making of an art, and it is not accidental that one of the dominant figures in the novel is a singer. Song also plays a role in the development of Celie's self-image. For Celie, the song is important because it indicates that she has been part of the creative process. Squeak is another character who is liberated through song.

Quilting, another decorative art, is a rich metaphor for Walker for it involves the making of a useful object from material which is customarily regarded as worthless: scraps and throwaways. Yet what can be created out of these worn bits and pieces of cloth is a truly beautiful yet functional work of art. In the novel, sewing creates genuine bond between Celie and Sofia. The quilt woven by them is appropriately called "Sister's Choice" (CP: 62). Needlework also is the means for the emergence of Celie. By stitching
pants for both men and women she gives vent to her creativity. Even Corrine and Nettie understand each better through quilting.

Another technique which Walker uses for Celie's self-realization is lesbianism. In the inscription of lesbianism, however, the work most radically departs from Walker's earlier novels. While it is arguable that The Color Purple is primarily and exclusively a celebration of lesbianism, in a broader sense it can be encoded as a potential source of empowerment for women. Bernard Bell rightly acknowledges that "rather than heterosexual love, lesbianism is the rite of passage to selfhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood for Celie" (Bell 1987, 263). Through the knowledge of her body, Celie realizes her potentialities.

Walker says, "Letters are so logical for women" (Walker 1985, 72). It is no wonder she uses this form as the apt technique for her novel in portraying the inner conflicts of her protagonist Celie. Some of the letters are addressed to God and some to Nettie, her sister in Africa. These are written in black English. There are also some letters from Nettie to Celie. Not only does the epistolary form tie this novel to those written by men about women; in addition, as Barbara Christian has pointed out, it recognizes that letters, along with diaries, are the one of the few written
forms allowed women in Western culture and are an important source of information about the facts of and attributes towards women's lives (Christian 1984b, 269). Walker also uses blanks in her novel whenever Celie has to refer to Albert. He is always referred to as Mr.----. In earlier epistolary novels the blanks would either hide the specifics of a supposedly real situation or allow the publisher to conceal the details from the readers. In Walker's case, however, while the blanks are an ironic reference to the epistolary tradition, they are used primarily to show the distance between Celie and her husband - he is such a stranger to her that she cannot even use his name. Nettie's letters are a way for Walker to expand the world of the novel beyond what Celie knows.

Since a (black women's) discourse is an enunciation that requires a speaker or narrator, and a listener or reader, the use of epistolary form is especially effective. Josephine Donovan describes it as a "semi-private" genre, used primarily by women because of their inferior education and because of the fact that such writings were not expected to be published (Donavan 1980, 212). Walker has effectively used the epistolary form to serve her purpose.

There is another narrative strategy that seems to influence this novel, albeit indirectly. That is the slave
narrative, an important component of black literary tradition because, as a mode of discourse in which the first-person narrator becomes central, it helps to re-possess subjectivity by means of the "I" or, as Susan Willis expresses it, "to wrest the individual black subjective out of anonymity, inferiority and brutal disdain". (Willis 1985, 213).

Thus Walker, through different strategies, succeeds in liberating Celie. She becomes an enterprising black woman and abandons her submissiveness, passivity and dumbness. Thus from a distorted, fragmented and dismantled self she wields a real black womanhood. She liberates herself from the patriarchal dictatorship and discovers herself. She, in the end, is able to celebrate her own genuine and real black woman self.

Lindsey Tucker observes:

Walker, like the quilter, has pieced together from the only materials available - materials of poverty, ignorance, brutalization - a work that, like the product of the quilter, may seem artless, but is instead a carefully crafted and brilliantly patterned piece of work.

(Tucker 1988, 93)

So far, Walker has shown that her female characters are capable of breaking the bonds of oppression and defining themselves as whole persons. She has also shown that they are able to discover divinity in all human and non-human
elements of the universe. This is seen in the observations of Shug Avery, Nettie and at a later stage by Celie. In her fourth novel, The Temple of My Familiar Walker tries to show that one can achieve through union of body and soul the psychological wholeness.

The Temple of My Familiar is essentially a story of the lives and loves of three couples: the popular musician Arveyda, with his exotic blend of African/ Scots/ Blackfoot/ Mexican/ Filipino/ Chinese blood, and his South American wife, Carlotta, a college teacher of Women's Studies; Suwelo, Carlotta's lover and a history professor, and his wife, Fanny, the grand daughter of Celie from The Color Purple and an academic who leaves teaching literature to become a masseuse; and the elderly black couple, Miss Lissie and Mr Hal, friends of Suwelo's uncle Rafe, who lived in a very compatible ménage à trois with them and whose death draws Suwelo into their lives. Arveyda, Carlotta, Suwelo, and Fanny seem to be of Walker's generation - middle aged, looking back on their youth in the sixties. The past emerges, as characters tell each other their stories or as they read diaries, letters, jottings in books or hear tape-recorded stories.

For Fanny and Suwelo, the civil rights movement continues to hover over the present. Fanny experiences
personal distress while confronting the way the world is
going and her own 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 the Freedom Riders,
black and white, beaten up in Mississippi .... I
saw a lot of black people and their white allies
humiliated, brutally beaten, or murdered.

(TMFF: 298)

Fanny is terrified of the future and is exhausted by
her life as an activist: "I've marched so much by now and
been arrested so many times, I am really quite weary"
(TMFF: 302). Most debilitating of all is her hatred of the
whites and the violent impulses she feels. Suwelo, her
husband, describes her as a victim who sees racism everywhere
she looks and whose characteristic response is thoughts of
violence. Freedom from the bondage of her feelings come when,
with the help of her therapist, Fanny confronts the origins
of her hatred and fear of whites.

"What do you think of white people?" asks her therapist
Robin Ramirez. In reply, Fanny recounts a terrible recurring
dream of a feast in which she is being devoured by the white
(TMFF: 314). She also refers to her white friend Tanya who was
affected by the movement. Tanya has married a black man - a political short cut that allowed her to feel that she was doing something about racism without changing society. Through Tanya's stories, Fanny reclaims long-repressed memories of growing up black in a racist world.

To Robin, she also speaks about the influence of "The Gospel According to Shug Avery" and her "band" (TMF: 299). Her hope is that she can stop racial oppression before it starts in her. "I won't be a racist," she tells the therapist, "I won't be a murderer. I won't do to them what they've done to black people. I'll die first" (TMF: 300). Suwelo advises her that her fantasies, nightmares, or dreams will not affect white people. He says: "Racist oppression and nuclear terrorism are two things your magic won't be enough to stop ... but fantasizing opening the doors of Pollsmore prison will not bring Mandela out" (TMF: 303).

In her fear of the murder within, Fanny starts withdrawing, to the extent that is possible, from human contact. She abandons her class rooms and moves to an administrative job. Her blood pressure reaches alarming heights. This conflict in her affects her conjugal relationship with Suwelo. She even wants to divorce him. She says, "It isn't about not loving you. I will always love you. Probably. But I don't want to be married" (TMF: 139). She
wants freedom. For her freedom means "never having (or being able) to embarrass anybody" (TMF: 140). "It's marriage I don't want," she insists, "not you" (TMF: 141).

Fanny is a woman who periodically falls in love with spirits. Her spirit lover of the moment may be an Indian chief dead for a century or a subject that doesn't even know who or what it is. About them, she says: "They open doors inside of me .... I begin to feel the stirring in myself, the humming of the room, and my heart starts to expand with the absolute feeling of bravery, or love, or audacity, or commitment. It becomes a light, and the light enters me, by osmosis, and a part of me that was not clear before is clarified. I radiate this expanded light. Happiness" (TMF: 186). Suwelo contemptuously refers this as Fanny "being in love" (TMF: 186). She loves the songs of Arveyda but can't see him in person as she has already visualized him as a spirit.

When Fanny begins to understand men's oppression of women which she herself feels in her own life, she ceases to be aroused by men. "Making love," Suwelo says, "is a disaster .... I'm certainly not, as far as she's concerned, though she claims otherwise" (TMF: 185). When asked what she experienced during orgasm, she claims that she has experienced a sunrise, or a mountain or a water fall.
Sometimes, she just whispers, "Adventure," or "Resistance," or "Escape!" (TMF: 183). Walker says: "In her feminine self-absorption and present indifference to other world views she made him think of Cleopatra" (TMF: 183).

She stops working in the administration, takes courses in massage and acupressure and opens a massage parlour. She cuts her hair very short and dresses in T-shirts, sandals and Chi pants. She joins the consciousness-raising group which teaches her to masturbate. Suddenly she feels herself free, sexually free. She also learns to meditate, throwing off the last clinging vestiges of organized religion. She stops reading books and listening to music. She says, "I find I like silence. It's music to me. I like the eternal nature of silence. It's music you can have either living or dead" (TMF: 246). Apprised of her condition by Suwelo, Fanny's mother Olivia takes her to Africa to Ola, Fanny's father who is a mysterious figure writing controversial plays in the independent nation of the Olinka.

Like the other emergent women who move out of their places--for personal growth and for wholeness, Fanny takes a major step towards psychic health when she leaves for Africa. Ola knows what it is to take white lives - he has done so in the name of revolution - so he knows first hand that killing the oppressors doesn't free one psychologically. His advice
to his daughter is to harmonize her heart and her surroundings. He adds: "Make peace with those you love and that love you or with those you wish to love .... Resist the temptation to think what afflicts you is peculiar to you" (TMF: 316-317). He also advises her to talk: "Talk is the key to liberation, one's tongue the very machete of freedom" (TMF: 315).

Fanny's mother Olivia too has her list of advice. Terming the white man as "the prodigal son of Africa" (TMF: 308) Olivia suggests "forgiveness" for what the whites have done to blacks. She says, "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; it only prolongs itself" (TMF: 308). Fanny learns to harmonize spirit and flesh in a mutually nourishing way. The debate between people who advocate violent revolution and those who adhere to nonviolence that divided the movement activists in the sixties is kept alive by Walker in this fiction also.

Fanny's absence and her distractedness help Suwelo to justify himself when he is unfaithful. He starts visiting prostitutes and as a result gets a terrible dose of 'claps'. From prostitutes he turns his eyes on pornography. He is
hooked to girlie magazines, naked women in quarter-to-peek glass cages, bondage films and 'live' sex acts on stage. The young people's marriage has temporarily broken down while each of them follows perilous and surprising paths of self-discovery.

The same fate is experienced by Arveyda and Carlotta, the other couple in the novel. Carlotta, a Women's Studies scholar, meets Arveyda, the dandy rock star during her last year in college when she delivers a cape of peacock feathers her mother Zadé created for him. Both, with their matching capes, parade on Halloween through the streets of San Francisco. Before long they are married and have two children. But Arveyda is also drawn towards Zadé, Carlotta's mother. He loves her for her creativity and artistry.

After Arveyda drops Carlotta for her mother, Carlotta puts on another type of costume as a "female impersonator" (TMF: 384), putting on the outward garb that would make her attractive to men. She starts wearing three-inch heels, sweaters revealing her luscious body and short skirts. Suwelo, in the absence of Fanny, is attracted by this ultra feminine facade. Carlotta reminds him of Latina Coretta King. He perceives her as "one without the kind of painful past that would threaten his sense of himself as a man or inhibit his enjoyment of her as simply a woman" (TMF: 130).
While Suwelo realizes that he is using Carlotta, she is equally convinced that she is using him. When Suwelo goes back to Fanny on her return from Africa, Carlotta tells her that "all along he was just a figment of my imagination. A distraction from my misery. He was just 'something' to hold on to; to be seen with; to wrestle with on the kitchen floor." On hearing this, Fanny thinks how Suwelo believes he took advantage of Carlotta and how this is what she herself had thought. She feels, "They were both wrong. There had not been a victim and an oppressor; there'd really been two victims, both of them carting around lonely, needy bodies that were essentially blind flesh" (TMF: 386).

Fanny tries to harmonize her relations with Suwelo, as her father had desired. She defines marriage as a bonding of souls so complete that marriage ceremony becomes a hypocrisy performed for the sake of the state. Divorce for Suwelo and Fanny thus means only "the first shedding of any nonintrinsic relatedness" (TMF: 282). But she stresses the need for divorce. She makes it clear to him that she doesn't feel betrayed as an individual by his affairs with women or with Carlotta in particular. Suwelo replies that Carlotta means very little to him and has no substance. This reply provokes Fanny and she retorts: "Men must have mercy on women, Suwelo."
They must feel women's bodies as a masseuse feels them; not just caress them superficially and use them as if they're calendar pinups, counterfolds, or paper dolls" (TMF: 321). Suwelo simply replies, "I'm flesh, I'm blood" (TMF: 322). Adding that "talking is the very Afro-disiac of love", Suwelo admits, "I'm mad. I'm mad about the waste that happens when people who love each other can't even bring themselves to talk" (TMF: 322). Holding her hands he assures his support in strugglehood.

As Fanny's visit to Africa is very crucial to the development of her character, so also is Suwelo's visit to Baltimore when his uncle Rafe dies. This death brings him into close contact with an elderly black couple who are his uncle's close friends. They are Miss Lissie and Mr Hal. These two are the impetus for the reform of many of the characters. The characters are unified in their interlinked struggles to liberate themselves from the stultifying effects of the traditional values underpinning Western civilization, values that can be summarized as the presumed manifest destiny of white males to exploit all women, nonwhite men, the land, animals, and natural resources.

Walker invents an African female version of the history of the world through Miss Lissie. Through her, she recalls centuries of exploitation by the white. From her stories
Suwelo gains understanding of the always difficult relationships between men and women, difficulties dating back 500,000 years, at the least. She refers to such events as living among apelike humans, the destruction of prehistoric matriarchal tribes, the displacement of female mythos by male legend, and the advent of Christianity. She also speaks of her recent personal memories - her transportation across the Atlantic in a slave ship, numerous experiences as an American slave, and the destruction of American Indian nations.

Her story-telling takes up the most room in the novel, occurring in sections as Suwelo listens to her in person, reads her letters, and hears a tape she makes for him before her death. Miss Lissie was loved both by Mr Hal and Suwelo's uncle Rafe. About them she says, "Hal loved me like a sister/mystic/warrior/woman/mother. Which was nice. But that was only part of who I was. Rafe, on the other hand, knowing me to contain everybody and everything, loved me wholeheartedly, as a goodness. Which I was" (TMF: 370-371).

Miss Lissie, with the wisdom of the ages, stresses the need in Suwelo to open the door to his past. She finds that his denial of the past prevents his becoming more than blind flesh. She also advises him to change his attitude to women when he contemptuously refers to Fanny and Carlotta.
Referring to Fanny as a "Space cadet", he tells Miss Lissie, "You are a spirit that has had many bodies, and you travel through time and space that way .... Fanny is a body with many spirits shooting off to different realms everyday" (TMF: 243). He refers to the long kisses of Fanny sucking his breath and stating, "I love you for your breath" (TMF: 283). For Fanny the breath represents not only life, but also the life force itself.

When Suwelo tells Miss Lissie that Carlotta is a being of no substance to him, she protests to this view and says, "it is a sin to behave as if a person whose body you use is a being without substance. 'Sin' being denial of another's reality of who and what she or he actually is" (TMF: 353). She also traces much of Suwelo's own pain to the fact that he is a fragmented being, in spite of the fact that his name is the same as the rune for wholeness. Like the other characters of Walker, Suwelo has tried to close the doors of his past, close them against memory and pain. Miss Lissie tells him that it is the memory of his mother's "abandoned and suffering face" that has made him fear knowing too much of women's pain. In one of her letters also she stresses this point:

For really, Suwelo, if our own parents are not present in us, consciously present, there is much, very much about ourselves that we can never know. It is as if our very flesh is blind and dumb and
cannot truly feel itself. Intuition is given little validation; instinct is feared. We do not know what to trust, seeing none of ourselves in action beyond our own bodies.

Filled with the wisdom of Miss Lissie, Suwelo returns to move towards self-identity.

Like Suwelo, Arveyda is also introduced to the past, but to the history of south American culture, by Zede, Carlotta's mother. Her south American culture shares with Miss Lissie's its matriarchal roots but also its history of pain produced by man's jealousy of woman and his resulting need to dethrone her.

Zede tells Arveyda of a time in the history of her South American country when women were priestesses of a mujer muy grande, a goddess who produced the earth. The birth process was a mystery to men and it was the men who made women into priestesses because "what the mind doesn't understand, it worships or fears" (TMF: 49). The men also lived apart from the women, visiting them only to be played with sexually. They also adorned the women with feathers, bones, animal teeth and claws. Soon this adoration came to an end. The men also learned the secret of birth.
By the time of Carlotta's grand mother, Zede the Elder, Zede tells that men and women have changed roles. The men became priests and felt that they should be somewhat feminine. With their roles changed, women started using their creative talents to adorn the male priests. Zede speaks of her mother's creativity as "holy work". Zede the Elder used to stay alone in a mud hut for days at a time when a new creative phase began. She listened to the sweet, light sound of the chimes and if the sound corresponded to the vibration of her soul at that time, she would begin to create.

Zede escapes a revolution in her country and a prison camp where she is sent for a time and makes her way to San Francisco with Carlotta. From Zede's past, Arvedya, as a creative artist himself, learns more about the process of creation and also learns about the status of women in the past. Winchell observes:

Winchell's observation of the world as traced through both the novel's African and South American characters records the "pattern of freedom", an alternating between times when men and women could and did live together more or less in harmony and times when harmony was best maintained by living apart. Man's need to dominate (read, dethrone) woman recurs periodically, however, and each time the two sexes enter a period of uneasy cohabitation.

(Winchell 1992, 117)
There is a visible change in Carlotta when she hears the story of her mother from Arvedya after his return from travels. When Suwelo goes in search of Carlotta to make amends, he finds that the female impersonator is most definitely gone. Her hair is now that of a concentration-camp survivor. Gone are her sexy clothes and even her voluptuous curves, "her slender, flat-breasted body [now] as vulnerable as a flower" (TMF:398). Carlotta feels that Suwelo is only an episode in her life. She introduces him to Arvedya and all of them become friends.

These two couples maintain separate identities. Though Arvedya and Carlotta are still married, they maintain separate residences. Fanny and Suwelo are divorced but live together an hour's drive away. They are building a house modelled on the prehistoric ceremonial house of the Ababa tribe:

A house designed by the ancient matriarchal mind and the first heterosexual household ever created. It has two wings, each complete with its own bedroom, bath, study, and kitchen; and in the centre there is a 'body' - the 'ceremonial' or common space .... After thousands and thousands of years of women and men living apart, the Ababa had, with great trepidation, experimented with the two tribes living, a couple to a household, together. Each person must remain free, they said. That is the main thing. And so they had designed a dwelling shaped like a bird.

(TMIF: 395)
Fanny and Arvedya develop intimacy as they feel they have many things in common. She likes him for falling in love with people dead long ago. Inspired by the new song he is composing, Fanny tells him about her creativity. She says that she is writing a play with her sister Nzingha Anne in Africa and speaks of her plans to go there to stage the play. The word Africa brings to Arvedya the memories of his dead mother Kathering Degos. She was like the strong African woman who "exposed herself to what she wanted", and made clear what she didn't want and "took risks" (TMF: 393).

Suwelo and Carlotta also join with an intimacy they never experienced when they approached each other merely as blind flesh. Theirs is now an intimacy of the spirit, and Suwelo even undergoes a symbolic spiritual rebirth when he plunges into the hot tub they have been sharing and holds himself beneath the warm water for several moments. He feels the door that has barred his own mother from his memory opening a crack, as Carlotta, her disguises gone, discusses her mother Zede. He recalls the car accident in which he has lost his parents. This recollection brings some of the fragments of his own reality and let the door to his past swing open.

When Suwelo reveals to her his family's past, Carlotta reveals to him her family's present in which she has
rediscovered her creative roots. Having known the story of her grandmother's pipe and chimes, she decides to become a bell chime player.

While Carlotta and Suwelo remain in the hot tub, Fanny and Arvedya go off to the sauna. After the sauna, Fanny starts massaging Arvedya. She does it so patiently and wonderfully, Arvedya finds the pain evaporating and the energy once again flowing freely in his body. He also sinks almost immediately to another level, a very sensual level of consciousness, thinking about Zede the Elder, Zede and Carlotta. He thinks of the suffering each of them has endured and the pain he himself has felt and caused. He suddenly finds himself composing a song.

For Fanny, it is another strange experience. She thinks, with something like disbelief, that one of the spirits she has loved so long is actually right beneath her, his very neck, at the moment, under her hand. She thinks: "Is this how people create gods,... She thinks she has always been walking just behind (oh, a hundred to a thousand years behind) the people she has found to love, and that she has been very careful that their backs were turned. What would she do if one of them turned around?" (TMF: 406). When Arvedya does turn around, aroused by the motion of her hands on his body, their union with one another is a perfect blend
of flesh and spirit: "After they make love, reaching climax almost immediately, they lie cuddled together in sheer astonishment." My ... spirit, says Fanny at last, her face against his chest. My ... flesh, says Arvedya, his lips against her hair" (TMF: 408).

Fanny has learned not to deny the flesh out of fear of what her anger might lead her to do, but rather to harmonize her own heart and thus to achieve through union of body and soul the psychological wholeness that killing her oppressors could never bring. Arvedya is a fitting partner for her in that he, like the born-again Suwelo, is one of those rare men capable of understanding women's pain.

In order to achieve spiritual freedom, Suwelo and Fanny, Carlotta and Arvedya have to return to the life style of their ancestors, a life style in which neither sex dominion over the other and thus one in which neither sex must surrender its spirituality to the other. Each couple chooses to live apart - and free - in order to live in harmony.

Walker suggests the importance of the personal effort to recapture the past as a significant element in present experience for a character's identity. In one of her interviews with Tate she says," "I think my whole program as a writer is to deal with history just so I know where I am.
I can't move through time in any other way, since I have strong feelings about history and the need to bring it along. One of the scary things is how much of the past, especially our past, gets forgotten" (Walker 1983b, 185).

Ikenna Dieke observes:

Behind the insistent particularity of each individual story is a serious quest, albeit unconscious, for the demonstrative values of oneness, wholeness, and unity as opposed to dialectical tension, exclusivity, and separateness ... Characters in the novel are in motion, even when it appears they are in conflict, towards an underlying kinship that binds them with one another and with forces beyond themselves.

(Dieke 1992, 508)

Ikenna feels that this novel can be read as a romance of the development of the human psyche, in which the human ego strives consciously and unconsciously for wholeness. C.G. Jung opines:

... since everything living strives for wholeness, the inevitable one-sidedness of our conscious life is continually corrected and compensated by the universal human being in us, whose goal is the ultimate integration of conscious and unconscious, or better, the assimilation of ego to a wider personality.

(qtd. in Dieke 1992, 512)

As a romance of the psyche, The Temple of My Familiar follows three kinds of wholes that Proclus posits: "the
first, anterior to the parts - the human world of men and women; the second, composed of the parts - the earth of living organisms, including humans and animals; the third, knitting into one stuff the parts and the whole - the universe, the magic circle of reunion and integration" (qtd. in Dieke 1992, 512).

Like The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar celebrates the possibility of happiness restored with the reconfiguration of the family as open, extended, and loving, and with the characterization of individuals who are not afraid to abandon social prescriptions for honest relationships.

Tashi in Possessing The Secret of Joy, like Fanny in Temple of My Familiar, goes back to Africa in search for meaning in their roots and traditions. Like the fighting women of Alice Walker, Tashi boldly faces her execution, refusing the blindfold to learn "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY" (PSJ: 279). She is one of "those few embattled souls who remain painfully committed to beauty and to love even while facing the firing squad" (RP: Preface).

This latest novel of Alice Walker which she dedicates "with Tenderness and Respect To the Blameless Vulva" (PSJ: V) has been on The New York Times best-sellers list for three months. Walker illustrates the truism that violence begets
violence in this strong-voiced but often strident and polemical novel. Her tale concerns Tashi, a character who made fleeting appearances in *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. Tashi grows up in a small African village but initially escapes the customary clitoridectomy. Eventually, she is coerced into having the operation as a means of offering fealty to the sinister politician called "Our Leader". When she moves to the U.S. with her husband Adam (Celie's son) and assumes a new identity as Evenly Johnson, her pain and anger, accumulating the suffering of the ages, bubble to the surface in a lingering madness that therapy does not assuage and that finally culminates in the murder of the *tsunga*. Each brief chapter is loaded with the sense of the historical importance which Walker wishes to convey. As in *Meridian*, *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, the narrative moves back and forth in time with a present that is hard to determine. Many other voices alternate with Tashi's including that of her best friend Olivia, her husband, Adam and his lover, Lisette. These perspectives provide a constant flow of fresh insights to the novel.

Like *The Temple of My Familiar*, this novel is a return to the original world of *The Color Purple* only to pick up those characters and events that refused to leave walker's mind or her spirit. In "TO THE READER" Walker says:
"Tashi ... stayed with me, uncommonly tenacious, through the writing of both books, and led me finally to conclude she needed, and deserved, a book of her own" (PSJ: 282).

Because her mother (Catherine/Nafa) was influenced by black American missionaries, Tashi herself was not circumcised at puberty. As a young child, however, she did hear the screams of her older sister, Dura, who died bloodily in the botched initiation in the tribal village. Tashi repressed this memory and "forget why the sight of her own blood terrified her" (PSJ: 9). Subsequently in a voluntary act of identification with pan-African aspirations, the teenage Tashi submits herself to the tsunga's knife.

Olivia, her childhood playmate and life long friend (daughter of Celie) tries to dissuade her, and in the argument between Tashi and Olivia, Walker is able to suggest some of the explosive issues that surround her subject, issues that pit the victims of gender imperialism against the victims of cultural imperialism.

"All I care about now is the struggle for our people," Tashi tells Olivia. "You are a foreigner. Any day you like, you and your family can ship yourselves back home. "She puts the case for cultural autonomy passionately: " We had been stripped of everything but our black skins. Here and there a defiant cheek bore the mark of our withered tribe. These
marks gave me courage. I wanted such a mark myself" (PSJ: 24).

At the Mbele camp, Tashi is indoctrinated further. Their chieftain whom they call "Our Leader" is like a "Jesus Christ to (them)" (PSJ: 114). He instructs them that "[they] must return to their purity of [their] own culture and traditions. That [they] must not neglect [their] ancient customs" (PSJ: 115). He also said: "We must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial - by cutting our unclean parts of our bodies" (PSJ: 119). She is also led to believe that if a woman is not circumcised her unclean parts will grow long and she will become masculine. She realizes initiation and scarification as "the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition" (PSJ: 63).

In a strange way, she also feels that this operation will join her with the other women whom she envisions as "strong invincible. Completely woman. Completely African. Completely Olinka." They appear to her as "terribly bold, terribly revolutionary and free" (PSJ: 63).

But the receiving of the mark almost destroys Tashi, physically and emotionally. Like millions of women in African and Eastern cultures, she has been genitaly mutilated, a tradition that predates the pyramids of Egypt and continues to this day. Mutilation controls women's
sexuality and thus makes them suitable for marriage in their cultures. Also known as clitoris - the source of female sexual pleasure - and sometimes the entire vulva, is often performed by the tsungaa with crude instruments and under unsanitary conditions, causing infections and chronic pain. After the organs are cut out, women are often 'sewn up' tightly, barely allowing the passing of urine or menstrual blood and, as walker explains, "making intercourse supremely painful and nearly impossible" (PSJ: 64). She notices "her own proud walk [has] become a shuffle. It now [takes] a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods [last] ten days" (PSJ: 64). Olivia observes that Tashi is "No longer cheerful, or impish. Her movements ... (become) merely graceful. Slow. Studied" (PSJ: 65). Adam rescues her, marries her, and brings her to the United States.

Because of Tashi's initiation, the repeated attempts of Adam to penetrate her fail him and somehow she becomes pregnant after three months. Adam bitterly refers to it as "an immaculate conception" (PSJ: 59). With the birth of Benny, Tashi's trauma increases. To their dismay the parents find him mentally retarded. Tashi also becomes aware of Adam's lover, Lissette, a white woman, in Paris and her son Pierre. This develops a "frigidity" in her, a "psychological circumcision" (PSJ: 165). From now on, the novel catalogues Tashi's descent into madness and the efforts of her loved
ibes to heal her, her long fight to salvage and reconstruct a self, her return to Africa, her final costly liberation and her discovery that RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY (PSJ: 279).

The relationship between Adam and Lisette recalls the early interracial relationships portrayed by Walker. Lisette is a modern day feminist who stresses the "women are no longer chattel" (PSJ: 31). She has read Simone de Beauvior's The Second Sex and has also witnessed the racial problems between the French and the Algerians. As her son Pierre prepares himself to go to America for higher studies, Lisette reveals something of her past life with Adam.

Narrating the story of Old Torabe, Lisette indirectly tells her son of the female subjugation by men and about the invitation. She tells him how she "recognized the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world" (PSJ: 137).

Olivia takes Tashi to a white witch doctor and Tashi is unable to say anything other than referring to her sister's scarification. Adam refers to the doctor about Tashi's constant dream of a "tower" which is tall, cool and dark and with so many people where she finds herself deep into, with her wings broken. He also tells the doctor how bold Tashi is by referring to their love making in the fields and
cunnilingus which are taboos in the Olinka society. The witch doctor tells Tashi finally that "Negro women" can never be analyzed effectively because they can't bring themselves to blame their mothers.

At the behest of Lisette, Adam takes Tashi to 'Mzee' (The Old Man), Lisette's uncle, a psycho-analyst in Switzerland. He observes that hers "is the pain of the careless carpenter who, with his hammer, bashes his own thumb" (PSJ: 49). He adds that "You yourselves are your last hope" (PSJ: 53). Her drawings, in his clinic, unravel the sufferings of her inner mind. As she continues to draw the entire scene opens before her mind in which Dura, her elder sister, was initiated and her subsequent death. It is no more a frightening episode for her. She recounts the death of Dura to The Old Man.

The letter of Mzee to his niece Lisette reveals the concern of The Old Man for Tashi and Adam. He writer: "A self that is horrified at what was done to Evelyn, but recognizes it as something that is also done to me. A truly universal self" (PSJ: 84). But he is yet to understand why she is afraid of the "tower". With the mystery still to be unravelled and with the death of the Old Man, Adam takes Tashi to another psychoanalyst, this time an African-American woman, Raye.
The sittings with Raye open up the Pandora's box and such unresolved moral problems as the idealization and deification of liberation leaders, the easy acceptance and corruption in a good political cause and the collusion that exists between oppressor and oppressed are being brought to the fore. Tashi speaks of "Our Leader" and tells Raye how the Olinka people consider her as "Jesus Christ" (PSJ: 114). His words are gospel. This discussion leads to Tashi referring to the initiation process and the different kinds of initiation. She is moved by Raye's "gum mutilation" which she has undergone willingly as an act of empathy. Walker portrays Tashi in her myriad moods. In spite of her madness, she still retains some sanity in her. Her remarks about Raye are an example of this. The next phase of her treatment begins with Pierre, Lisette's son.

When Lisette dies of cancer, Pierre moves out to America to continue his studies on Anthropology. He meets Tashi and tries to resolve her inner conflicts. Knowing that she is suffering from a fear for "tower", he starts reading some passages from Marcel Griaule's Conversations with Ogotemmeli. It refers to God Amma's creation of the earth with clay and her subsequent intercourse with earth. He tells her that "The creation itself began with mutilation and rape" (PSJ: 228). God Amma, being lonely and desirous of
intercourse with earth is prevented by a termite hill, the clitoris of the earth. Because of this she cuts down the termite hill and has intercourse with the excised earth. He also tells her that Cleopatra and Neferetti were also circumcised. Tashi realizes that God has deserted women. Pierre says that he knows which the "tower" is, though not perhaps, what it means.

From Amy Maxwell's story about her genital mutilation and the subsequent birth of a slightly mentally retarded son, Tashi is surprised that it is even practised in America on white people. Amy tells her that the American doctors have learned this procedure from the examination of the slave women and performed ...... other women in the name of Science. She adds that the doctors wrote that they found a cure for the white women's hysteria. Stating that she has the habit of playing with her genitals when young, Amy tells Tashi that her clitoris was removed when she was six years old. Amy briefs her how the white child cannot touch herself sexually as it is a taboo there. Tashi is confused further and she is unable to get rid of her mental agony.

Tashi accidentally comes across a year-old Newsweek in which she finds a news item about M'Lissa, the tsunga who has performed the initiation on Tashi and on Dura and on so many black girls in Africa. Resolving to salvage her own self and
to end her lingering madness which the therapy fails to assuage, she makes her journey to Africa to meet M'Lissa. She finds her there treated as a national monument by the Olinka government.

From Martha Mbati, the young black girl who looks after M'Lissa, Tashi understands that M'Lissa's visitors are "mostly women ... women with daughters. Frightened women, often". M'Lissa is considered as "a link with the past ... especially for women, ... an ..... (PSJ: 151). Somehow, Mbati appears for Tashi as her daughter she has earlier aborted and she develops a liking for her.

M'Lissa recognizes the murder in Tashi's eyes but receives her with a smiling face. Walker probes the various arguments between Tashi and M'Lissa about the unresolved moral problems and the collusion that exists between oppressor and oppressed. Like the story teller Scheherazade, M'Lissa tricks Tashi into sparing her life by telling her some version of reality and by asking a question "What does an American look like?" (PSJ: 206). She also tells her that her death as a tsunqa at the hands of one of the circumcised will elevate her to the position of saint.

M'Lissa narrates her story as a delaying trick to save her own life. She tells Tashi that from the time of memory, women were tsungas. It is not only an honour but also helped
them to fill their bellies. Walker's epigraph "When the axe came into the forest, the trees said the handles one of us" (PSJ: xi) highlights the position of the tsungas. Referring to her mother as a 'sad woman', M'Lissa speaks of about her secret visits to the forest to see a small object hidden there. It was a small smiling figure with one hand on her genitals. She relates to Tashi about her own initiation and says that women, even after child birth come to her to be resewn. About the uncircumcised woman, she says that she is "like a shoe that all, no matter what their size, might wear". She adds "A proper woman must be cut and sewn to fit only her husband, whose pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, even years, to enlarge. Men love and enjoy the struggle. "Tashi immediately questions her about the woman, the pleasure or the suffering the experiences.

Their discussion slowly gets heated up day by day and M'Lissa calls Tashi a fool for having come to Mbele camp. M'Lissa accuses "Our Leader" as a cheat. She asks: "Did Our Leader not keep his penis? Is there evidence that even one testicle was removed?" (PSJ: 238). She squarely blames the women for their suffering. When Tashi replies that they have reason to be afraid, M'Lissa retorts: "Their biggest fear is that they will have to kill their sons .... Even if they themselves almost died the first time a man breaks into their bodies, they want to be told it was a minor hurt, the same
that all women feel, that their daughters will barely notice, and cease, over time, to remember. If I tell them that, it makes it almost possible for them not to completely despise their sons .... Breaking into someone else's daughter. Just as another woman's son breaks into theirs" (PSJ: 239). She adds that both man and women receive pleasure out of this act: "... the men like it tight. Fighting.... The pleasure a woman receives comes from her own brain. The brain sends it to any spot a lover can touch" (PSJ: 240). Tashi traps her by asking as to why the "vulva" is destroyed and not her "shoulders" or her "neck" or her "breasts". But immediately, she admits that she did have pleasure after her "bath" but it shamed her as Adam gave it to her from behind. M'Lissa concludes the argument saying: "You had been made into a woman! It is only because a woman is made into a woman that a man becomes a man" (PSJ: 241). She says that she knows that the "tsungas are torturers of children", but she has done it in "service to tradition" and in "service to the country" (PSJ: 219).

In her letter to Lisette, before her death, Tashi speaks of her inner feeling. Blaming that her own mother was responsible for the death of Dura and for the plight of her other children, Tashi calls her mother as "She Who Prepares the Lambs for Slaughter" (PSJ: 273). Though she is very much pained to say this, she feels that "it is only the cruelty of
truth, speaking it, shouting it, that will save now" (PSJ: 273). She admits that her soul removed itself from Adam's reach, though she very much loved him, as he, as a preacher, only focused on the suffering of Jesus Christ alone excluding the suffering of others from one's view. She wanted Adam to focus her own suffering, the suffering of women and little girls to be the subject of a sermon. She asks Adam: "Was woman herself not the tree of life? And was she not crucified?" (PSJ: 274). But Adam felt ashamed to do so.

She proceeds to tell her how she killed M'Lissa smothering her and burning her body. She is reminded of M'Lissa's comments that "it was traditional for a well-appreciated tsungā to be murdered by some one she circumcised, then burned, while performing the act (PSJ: 204). It is also curious to note that the traditional tribal society dealt so cleverly with its appreciation of the tsungā and its hatred of her.

She writes to Lisette that she has learnt a lot form Pierre about the ancient black woman, with elongated genitals who were notoriously free. She feels confident that Pierre will rededicate himself to his life's work of destroying the terrors of the dark tower for men and women.

In the trial against her, it is proved, as she admits it, that Tashi is guilty, and is sentenced to death. Pierre
who is trying to find out what the "tower" means comes out with an answer. Screening her a film, he explains about the first human beings in Africa (first on the planet too, it is assumed) who imitated the termites as model for their living. They constructed houses like termite hills, as they are cool inside and made of clay. He continues explaining that the termite has kept a place for males in its society. The religious symbology of the African became completely reflective of termite behaviour, say Pierre. He finally compares the structural similarities between genitals and insect dwellings and tells that this is the "tower" that was haunting her. Raye bitterly comments: "Religion is an elaborate excuse for what man has done to woman and to the earth" (PSJ: 229).

Tashi slowly recognizes the meaning she recollects the discussion of the elderly men beside the baobal tree which she had overheard as a small child bringing food to them. The words "tsunga", "Queen", "clips her wings", "insert", "needle and thread" which came out from their discussion were the root cause for the deep-rooted fear she had for the word "tower". The old men knew very well that she could not, as a child, figure out the meaning of their "verbal diarrhea" (PSJ: 233). And yet, there in her unconscious mind had remained the termite hill, and herself trapped deep inside it, heavy, wingless, inherent, the Queen of the dark tower.
Knowing now the meaning for "tower", Tashi has one more small doubt to be cleared. The passage which Mbati has read from African Saga by the white colonialist author Mirella Ricciardi raises in her this question: "Black people are natural, they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them" (PSJ: 269). Tashi wonders what this "secret of joy" must mean which a white colonialist has understood about black people. Mbati promises to find it out for her. Tashi leaves her little sacred figure as a gift to Mabti saying, "Ache Mbele" (PSJ: 271). As she faces the firing squad with eyes opened, she notices Adam, Olivia, Benny, Pierre, Raye and Mbati holding a banner firmly and stretching it wide. It reads: RESISTENCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY. Her last haunting doubt is cleared.

Walker also highlights the plight of the AIDS victims by alleging that it is a "contaminated vaccine against polio" which has infected Africa with AIDS. This vaccine had been made from cultures taken from the kidney of the green monkey. It was experimented on the black men at Alabama by the white scientists. The dying confession of Hartford, an AIDS victim, who was earning his livelihood by catching green monkeys for the whites, confirms this. Olivia, Adam, Pierre,
Tashi and Mbati help the AIDS victims in the prison where Tashi is also kept.

Tashi comes out as an emergent woman by her various acts. Her reaction to the white men in America when they were rude to her is unique. She says, "If a white person was rude I simply turned and stared. I never acknowledged the system that sanctioned rude behaviour, but always responded directly to the person. How uncivilly you have been brought up! was the message of my stare" (PSJ: 38). She is equally outright in voicing her feelings. The billboard she writes says: "If you lie to yourself about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoyed it" (PSJ: 104). She is very kind and concerned about people. She likes The Old Man, Raye, the African-American therapist. Though she is jealous of Lisette, she finally understands and welcomes her son Pierre in her fold. Her letter to Lisette before her death stands as a testimony to her love for her. She looks at Martha Mbati with a motherly affection. She also stresses the need for education. Her views about every one is frank. About marrying Adam she says, "I married him because he was loyal, gentle and familiar. Because he came for me" (PSJ: 121). In her letter to Lisette she refers to Pierre as "a gift to me" (PSJ: 275). Tashi is surrounded by loving community that includes an African-American man, a European
man and woman and a young man who is both biracial and bisexual. By her death, she has awakened the dead feelings in the minds of so many people who were indifferent to the sufferings of the female children. Pierre and Mbati, as her legal heirs, resolve to dedicate themselves to continue her fight.

In an interview with Justice Toms and Michael Toms, Walker tells tht her "description of the circumcision of men and the circumcision of women is actually taken from a very old culture, the Duwong, in Mali" (Walker 1993, 10). Circumcision represents a repression of our sexual duality, she says, and reminds us of our need to enjoy and celebrate the full humanity within us, both male and female. She says that her book will "help people to understand that people are naturally bisexual, as they are naturally bispiritual, that they have a male and female spirit." She adds, "You have a male and a female sexuality because you have a male and a female parent" (Walker 1993, 10).

Stressing the importance of children, Walker says: "A society that ignores the crying child is a doomed society" (Walker 1993, 10). Samuel in this novel says, "There [can] be no happy community in which there [is] one unhappy child". He adds "One crying child is the rotten apple in the barrel of the tribe" (PSJ: 7). Walker is quite strong in her belief
that raising happy, healthy children is the key to a healthy future.

In her interview with Paula Giddings, Walker stresses that it is not necessary that all traditions are to be preserved. She says: "Ninety-nine and ninety-nine and one-hundredths percent of traditions should be done away with because women did not make them. Like marriage, for example" (Walker 1992b, 102). Paula Giddings asks her: "We've been made less than whole in so many ways, haven't we?" Walker replies. "Yes, there are so many people walking around who have forgotten to be whole persons. Just like they've have forgotten what it is to laugh. We have canned laughter. I hate it, because I know what real laughter sounds like. Do you know that many of our children have never heard real laughter? Many people have forgotten how to love. We've forgotten to have faith in our own beauty" (Walker 1992b, 102).

A news item entitled "Kenyans control women's sex" which appeared in the English daily Indian Express dated 19th March '93 speaks of the control of women's sexuality by men in Kenya through the practice of female genital mutilation. It is continued there because "men want it to continue". The news item says that it is done to reduce the sexual sensitivity of women in order to prevent them from being
promiscuous. It adds that, "because circumcision is elevated to signify womanhood and desirability, many women in communities where the operation is performed are psychologically conditioned to accept the practice and even desire it". Ms Mereso Aginah, national secretary for the grassroots women's development organization observes: "It is vital that we change this attitude because of the harmful repercussions on women and children." Hanny Lightfoot Klein's book *Prisoner of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* (1989) also speaks of the atrocities on young black women in Sudan.

About writing this book, Walker says: "I have one requirement: that, because of this book, one little girl, somewhere, won't be mutilated. And that is plenty. That'll keep me laughing. I'll go home. I'll kick up my heels, and I'll feel that on this issue I've saved one child. That's enough" (Walker 1992b, 102).

Combining fact and fiction, communing with the spirits of the living and the dead, Walker in this novel strikes with graceful power at the heart of one of the most controversial issues of our time.

The woman in this cycle resent any form of ownership, any form of claim. They feel themselves to be free persons and free spirits. They do not believe in marriage for they
feel the vestiges of slavery so clear on it. But they relate to people without being bound by anything other than their love. They know the importance of education, the love of beauty, the respect for hard work and the freedom to be whoever you are.

Some of these women, for a time, leave the confines of their communities and return to them. Each of these characters has paid a price for her acquisition of knowledge and each is on her way to seeking "wholeness". Instead of becoming resigned to their fate, they have always sought creative solutions to their problems. The ability to utilize their existing resources, and yet maintain a forthright determination to struggle against the racist society in whatever overt and subtle ways necessary is one of their major attributes.

One can find the relationship of these women not only in their personal sphere but also in the social spheres of life. These characters exemplify the Emersonian notion that true growth and change can occur only when the individual discovers the 'god' or divinity in himself or herself. They also honour their ancestors, and try to reconnect with the very first ancestors. This is seen in Walker's handling of this aspect in The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar, and Possessing the Secret of Joy.
These characters have a universalist attitude. Walker uses them as her mouthpiece in her fight against deforestation, pollution, AIDS and in the preservation of the beauty of the universe. These characters stress the fact that individual identity is a prerequisite to self-fulfillment. They survive by recreating themselves through an art form, such as blues singing, quilting, designing etc. From the invisible and passive women of the 'suspended' cycle, the women in this cycle, grow to be more creative, more visible, more realized, and increasingly more complex. They aim at achieving "wholeness" in personal, political, societal and spiritual spheres.