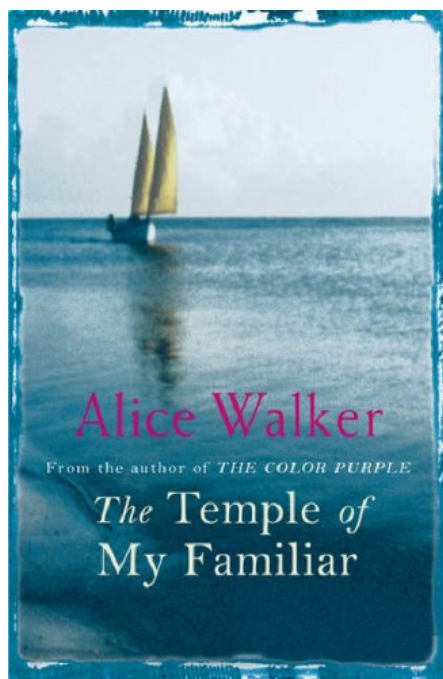




The Temple of My Familiar

Alice Walker

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The Temple of My Familiar

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The Temple of My Familiar Alice Walker

A visionary cast of characters weave together their past and present in a brilliantly intricate tapestry of tales.

It is the story of the dispossessed and displaced, of peoples whose history is ancient and whose future is yet to come. Here we meet Lissie, a woman of many pasts; Arveyda the great guitarist and his Latin American wife who has had to flee her homeland; Suwelo, the history teacher, and his former wife Fanny who has fallen in love with spirits. Hovering tantalisingly above their stories are Miss Celie and Shug, the beloved characters from THE COLOUR PURPLE.

The Temple of My Familiar Details

Date : Published September 16th 2004 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson (first published January 1st 1989)

ISBN : 9780753819487

Author : Alice Walker

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, African American, Feminism, Magical Realism

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From Reader Review The Temple of My Familiar for online ebook

Glen Stott says

I took notes, as I always do. It didn't help much. "Ulysses" by James Joyce was difficult to read but it had a character and a storyline that followed a sequence the reader could diagram. "Temple of My Familiar" is simply chaotic. There is no single character you can engage with, no single story you can follow, no time line you can track. Imagine a Scrabble game with a couple of dozen characters. Names and vignettes from their lives are put on about 50-100 pieces of the game. Someone throws the pieces in the air and they fall and scatter. You take the table that the pieces landed on and tip it so they all slide in a line against a wall, and that's how they line up in the book. It is difficult to make any rhyme or reason to this. All the characters are related directly or indirectly. However, it's kind of like playing the six degrees of separation. C may be married to L who is F's sister who is a friend of K who works with J. Though C and J will be tied to other characters, the chain above is the only connection between them, and it is not laid out as above. The ties will be found in several different vignettes; if you don't have notes to refer to, you may never get it. Sometimes the connections between people are important; often they aren't. Having said all that, a few of the stories and memories provide a historical, mythological evolution of man. There are a couple of loose ties to characters in "The Color Purple" which make it a sequel – sort of.

In "The Color Purple," Walker makes several assertions, which seem to be blatant and straightforward. However, compared to the wrecking ball approach in "The Temple of My Familiar," the presentation in "The Color Purple" seems subtle. The points in this work are: Men are bad, the white race is responsible for all the evil in the world, marriage is an evil invented by, who else, white men for the purpose of owning and subjugating women and children, marriage doesn't work out when sex is part of it because it comes from evil. For some reason, marriage is okay if sex is not a part of it. All of the characters and vignettes are used to prove one or more of these assertions; that is the basic thing holding the book together. The things Walker highlights are things that happen in the world every day, but it is improper to base the proof of her assertions solely on the distillation of life found in the stories being presented. Walker only writes stories that prove her point, while in real life, this whole tag-the-blame-on-a-gender-and-a-race quickly falls apart.

In order to load the book with historical "proofs" of her assertions, Walker has created a character, Lizzie, who can remember hundreds of former lives she has been reincarnated into from the beginning of the human race. For example; Lizzie was a pigmy in Africa so close to the emergence of human beings that her people still considered the apes their aunts and uncles and visited and interacted with them regularly.

Walker's evolution of mankind. In the beginning, women and men lived separately. Their villages were close, so social interaction was possible. Females often had sex with men, pretty much according to the female's desire to enjoy it. Females had children and raised them. When the male children began to mature, they would be sent to the male village to live their adult lives. Animals could talk to each other and to humans. The animals and men and women all lived in love together. Predators, such as the lion, humanely killed the old, injured, or sick animals and ate them. All the animals that were killed were desirous of being put out of their misery and welcomed the predators with open arms, or hooves as it may be. When not culling the weak from the herd, the lion socialized with the other animals. It was the perfect heaven where the lion and the lamb lay together in unending bliss. Then a white male was born – an albino, I suppose. This was one of Lizzie's former lives. The white man (Lizzie) felt different and therefore unloved, so he left the tribes of humans and lived alone. In his anger at being alone, he killed lions and upset the whole balance of nature. The lions struck back at everyone. The white race came into being. Then black males wanted to separate the land into small, manageable parcels and own them. This desire for ownership spread until the males eventually wanted to own the females and their children. The males began to pick females and take ownership through marriage. Conclusion: all men want to subjugate and own women. The white race wants

to subjugate and own every other race. The white race ruins the balance of nature, destroys the earth (farming, mining, pumping oil, etc), pollutes the air, and has developed a bomb that can destroy everything. Heaven is not something to look forward to; it was already here. The white race destroyed it and is therefore the devil. In order to regain heaven, something has to be done about the white race. I talk of heaven, evil, etc. in a secular sense because Walker does not believe in god. That is just another white race invention to subjugate black men to a white god.

While I totally disagree with Walker on the premise of this book, I found the stories and characters interesting. Though the presentation is one-sided, the problems Walker addresses are real, and I feel empathy for her characters. On the down side, this kind of lop-sided presentation provokes racism (against whites) and misandry (hatred of men). I don't like that anymore than I like racism against blacks or misogyny.

The quality of character development and general writing is 5-star. I would give the chaos of the book one star, except I suspect it was intentional to keep the focus on Walker's social agenda. I am rating it low, not because I disagree with Walker on her basic premise, but because a book promoting racism and misandry is divisive and a disservice to social justice. I would give it four stars, but for its divisive purpose, I give it two.

Becky says

3.99 star average? Really? That makes The Temple of My Familiar one of the most highly rated books I've come across on Goodreads. Way ahead of most of the 1001 books to read before you die. Well I don't get it. At all. Are we all being PC? Did we genuinely enjoy this overwrought wrangling with the ideas of feminism, "normal" relationships, colour and love? I sincerely believe that to be an honest and decent person today, you have to be connected with your past, and to understand the sacrifices made by past generations so that the world is shaped the way it is. Maybe this history was so foreign to me, that I couldn't connect? I don't see myself as a spiritual person, and the notion of spirituality, of past lives and magical ancestors was way, way too much for me. In fact, I was pretty offended by the suggestion throughout the book that unless you were black, female, and aware of these past incarnations, then connecting with your fellow human beings today would be somewhat difficult. Maybe I'm not really allowed to say that, or maybe I just totally missed the point. But this book was not inspiring, it did not change my life, it was laboured, over the top, and dull as dishwasher.

Jstg00d says

This book was a different experience than most books.

I initially was swept in by the writing. I felt like I could touch the scenes.

I am actually a big narrative person, i.e. I usually like a great story line. This did not disappoint, but it was more about the characters. It reminded me of Grapes of Wrath in that it wasn't until I read the final chapters of the book that the story line rushed over me and revealed its excellence.

Written by Alice Walker, the book explores African-American culture, but also tells a story (though not a specifically realistic story...perhaps a little more like magical realism) about the history of all mankind. It was interesting to read a small book try to sum up the history of man and bring it back to the depth of a character and the possibilities of life.

haha, I could keep going with these platitudes, but to sum it all up: It was a unique book that successfully spoke about the big picture of life and the individual struggles of the characters at the same time.

Molly Bosscher says

Wow. I read this book so many years ago. Reading it again was like discovering what I already knew again. This is a beautiful and complicated story, a layered and complex story of love.

Nea says

2.5 stars

There are some great topics of discussion in this book but it just didn't feel like a novel. There's no real plot, nothing flows, and the characters aren't well developed. The worst part is the excessive use of dialogue. With page after page of long quotes, it seems that Walker took the lazy-writer route on this one. Granted, she delivers powerful messages on gender, race, power, and the evolution of humanity; so this book is not a total fail. It's just poorly formatted. In fact, it's more accurate to say it altogether lacks a format. It is almost like a stream of consciousness with quotation marks thrown in to attribute the author's thoughts to the characters. Seriously, when was the last time you had a conversation that included one person speaking (uninterrupted) for hours; then you switched to the next person speaking for hours? That is totally unrealistic because it is not how people converse, but it's exactly what this book expects the reader to believe. What happened to the narrator?

As a psychic medium, I'm sure Alice Walker "downloads" a lot of information that she wishes to share with the world; but that's no reason for such a talented author to throw together a book like this. No matter how great the message, I can't give more than 3 stars to a novel that completely lacks the format of a novel.

Nicole says

is there a bookshelf called "to re-read?" this is definitely one of those. and i'm not even done with it. several metaphors come to life in this book, but one scene that I see as representative of the entire novel, is where Lissie is showing Suwelo several different pictures of herself taken in one day. Except the woman in each picture is distinctly different from the next. and from the clothing you can tell that they are also different time periods. but they are all of Lissie. Lissie explains that everyone has an infinite number of different "selves", and she remembers who she is in each picture. and each chapter of "Temple of My Familiar" is like a different picture of the same person, and this is the essence and truth about life- the interconnectedness of everything and everyone.

and so many, many stories! Some interlocking, some not, some stories are of people telling a story of someone else telling a story. one crazy story is about a trip to the natural history museum in DC and seeing an exhibit that is replicates an african village that no longer exists becaues it was destroyed by slavery and civil wars. The narrator thinks she sees a mannequin in the display but it turns out the mannequin is an actual human being, a young woman in traditional attire who LIVES in the exhibit! She learns that the museum "lets" this woman, the last of her people, live in her "natural environment". All day she weaves beautiful tapestries in front of an audience. Creeeeepy shit.

Tiffany says

This book shook me. It comforted me while at the same time making me extremely uncomfortable, and at first I was upset by that. Then I thought, "What's the use of a book if it doesn't make you challenge your own thoughts?"

It took me a good while to read all the way through because I kept stopping to chew over what it handed me, and in the end I'm not entirely sure I understood it in spite of all that ruminating. Its scope is truly phenomenal in terms of time alone, and then there are the people and their connections to one another to keep track of as part and parcel of the plot. Usually I dislike so many complicated strands, so much flipping back and forth of pages to see who was who and what and when and why. But this is different. It felt different.

Reading this book is like stepping back and seeing for the first time a vast rug you've been weaving in thousands of colors and shapes, and knowing it for what it is --beautiful and grotesque and complicated and simple and new and faded-- and liking and hating what's there in front of you, both at once.

Hope Erin Phillips says

OK SO this is the first book I picked up after having consciously decided to pick up the no (white, cis, straight) men authors for a year book challenge, with a particular focus on reading the works of women of colour, trans people, and queer folks. I picked this book because it was in my roommate's library and bc i know alice walker is a heavyweight author not to be fucked with wrt race and sexuality... I was initially not super engaged with the writing of this book but then all of a sudden BAM I was enthralled with the characters and their stories and their arcs of character development and personal learning... If I could liken this book to an experience it would be for me as a white person who is trying to decolonialize their mind and unlearn their racism, it would be like having a black woman who has been through so much sit down with me for three days and just tell me story after story after story of the nuanced experiences of generations of black folks in and being brought to thru slavery to america and ... I think this should be A+ mandatory reading for white people because no black person should have the burden of ACTUALLY sitting with our asses for three days telling us gutwrenching stories so that we can reevaluate our worldviews YET there is so much we can learn from these stories and reading this book is as close as we can get to that... so ... yeah... reading this was an amazing learning and delearning experience for me as a white person. Alice Walker obv. has so much more than just 'stories that can help white people unlearn their dickishness' going for her and this novel is a sensitive bulldozer of a thousand things regardless of the reader's race but yeah. I am not the best at writing reviews but I had lots of grateful feelings for this book that I wanted to put down in words! A+++

Lenega says

When I first finished this, I told my mom I never wanted to be more than 50 ft away from a copy of it, ever. She gave me ~8 paperback copies of it for my next birthday. It is one of my favorite gifts ever--I gave all but one of them away.

Linda Robinson says

A dream of a book. A vision. In my Top Ten. One of the best titles ever.

pg. 357 Miss Lissie's dream memory as told to Suwelo:

"Just as my mother was queen because of her wisdom, experience, ability to soothe and to heal, because of her innate delicacy of thought and circumspection of action, and most of all because of her gentleness..."

Zanna says

"Obenjomade, clean out your ears: THE WHITE MAN IS STILL HERE. Even when he leaves, he is not gone."

"Obenjomade, cup your endearingly large ears: EVERYONE ALL OVER THE WORLD KNOWS EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WHITE MAN. That's the essential meaning of television. BUT THEY KNOW NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT THEMSELVES."

"If you tear out the tongue of another, you have a tongue in your hand for the rest of your life. You are responsible, therefore, for all that person might have said."

Folk Memory, Matriarchy and Writing Back

Through the Black woman Lissie and the Latina/First Nation woman Zede, Walker speculates about pre-colonisation African and American societies, with anarchist and matriarchal or segregated organisations. She does this in a beautiful, poetic, magical realist style, freely imagining and reimagining myths and relationships between groups and even species. I think a number of reviewers have not understood or enjoyed this aspect of the book. I think it's about opening human possibilities into a space of folk-memory rather than a utopian future. Since kyriarchy has constructed human history we should not accept its interpretation. If myths and meta-narratives shape us, we urgently need to rewrite those that have deformed us. In particular, I love her rewriting of the Adam and Eve story to address the racism of Western Christianity and remove blame from Woman. This writing back is Walker's answer to the quote above. The White man is still here even after he has left, so we have to replace him with something. We need an antidote to his poison.

Beauty and Play

I love the way Alice Walker sees the beauty in everything and always chooses the beauty, without censoring the painful truth. I love the simple values she upholds: love & care & pleasure & health & spiritual wholeness. It's so un-elitist and sensible compared to (usually really privileged) authors and their characters who are sunk in malaise and can find nothing to satisfy them in a comfortable existence. Walker's mode of description and appreciation of bodies, especially Black women's bodies, is radical because it dismantles the Whiteness, thin-ness and general hegemony of beauty. The contrast becomes explicit when a male character Suwelo describes a woman who Walker earlier described in a totally different way: his conventional

description of her performance of femininity in terms of male sexuality is exactly what we expect. He reads Carlotta's high heels sexually, in contrast to Walker's earlier description of dressing up as play.

Black History

When I read about the life in which Lissie was an African child/woman sold into slavery I had to slow down, I was sitting on the tube and I found myself stopping to stare into space repeatedly. The story of the nursing mothers whose babies had been taken or killed offering their milk to feed children and salve wounds is so moving. On reading to the end of this chapter, to the part about women being raped and impregnated on the middle passage and the slavers being paid extra for pregnant women, I could not continue with the book and had to sit still on the train until I got to my stop. Although I have read about this before, Walker's folk-memory telling brought it inside me for the first time - it is inside all of us, in the sense that memory and memes inhabit us communally, and in the sense of history creating us and the circumstances of our lives: in my case, the wealth and comfort I enjoy rests on the backs of those women and men who were stolen and enslaved.

Health and Environment, Colonialism and Academia

I think this book, in many ways is about how to live, and Walker is obviously angry about the way Black people in particular have been cut off from health and harmony with the Earth by poverty, slavery and the theft of their lands.

“‘Like the Hopi in your country, most ancient Africans thought of the earth as a body that needs all its organs and bones and blood in order to function properly. The ore miners were forced out, the theory goes. They went north.’ ‘Yes,’ said Fanny, frowning, ‘and unfortunately in about 1492 they continued West’”

One of my favourite characters in the book is Fanny Nzingha, the granddaughter of Celie, protagonist of *The Colour Purple*. She is involved in many serious conversations about colonialism. In a way, she is the book's criticizer, while Lissie is its source of hope and restoration. She represents the awakened, angry consciousness of injustice for me. I was happy that she found her African sister Nzingha Anne.

“‘In the United States there is the maddening illusion of freedom without substance. It's never solid, unequivocal, irrevocable. So much depends on the horrid politicians the white majority elects. Black people have the oddest feeling, I think, of forever running in place’”

This is an incredible book that successfully synthesises a huge wealth of ideas. It's really beyond me to do it justice in a review.

Here is a post on the wonderful blog Gradient Lair which, I think, applies a Walkerian philosophy to criticise mainstream feminism.

Cherelle Shelton says

Lovely. I read this book when I was in my late teens and liked it. But it has a very different meaning now that I am a grown woman. I really enjoyed this novel the second time around.

Jennie says

OMG, did I ever hate this book. I loved *The Color Purple*, so I thought I'd like this.

It jumps around like crazy and includes new characters far more often than it refers back to ones we've already met. I got so sick of trying to keep track of characters that I finally threw it down in disgust. Irritating and a waste of time.

Cheryl says

Obviously I must be unpacking all my favorite books! I read this in college and it changed my life, opened my eyes to some beautiful ideas and meanings about life, feminism, love, and spirituality. There is magic, tribal wisdom, african myths, goddess worship, reincarnation, a little of everything! It was the first time I was able to see that there is wisdom in so many faiths and beliefs and you can respect them without having to declare allegiance to them. If I did have a familiar, I believe it is either an otter or a cat! The movie the Golden Compass touched on this subject and calls them "daimons" and they are the person's soul. I think a familiar is more of a companion, but it has been a while since I have read it...

Carrie says

Grateful to be in a book club that makes me read books like this one. Thanks Alison for choosing it.

It is a rare gift to find a book that challenges racism, sexism, colonialism, heterosexism, stifling monogamous culture, and similar while managing to NOT be pedantic and to weave a rich narrative tapestry around its characters. A book about how all things and people are connected, it reminds me of one of my favorite quotes from *The Gulag Archipelago*:

"Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains ... an unrooted small corner of evil."

L says

Alice Walker is reputedly one of the most well-known, yet most difficult post-modern authors to read, and *The Temple of My Familiar* makes both of these reputations known. Why is it difficult? In an effort to present life, and I mean life as in the history of man (and other creatures) in this world throughout time, there's no doubt that the result of this feat would be a difficult read. Walker's novel travels in a non-linear way through time, covering South America, North America, Africa, and England, among others. With such an all-encompassing focus on "human" history, Walker can focus neither on one time period or one character.

Walker achieves this by use of a different ordering principle than we normally use to recognize time, i.e.,

past lives. She takes fantastic liberties with the presentation of the past and human origins, telling a matriarchal creation story where the men attempt to emulate the perfect art form of female childbirth and pregnancy. Walker also presents an arboreal past that is possibly an evolutionary history, and the most utopic of all the worlds in the novel.

With these stories and multi-faceted characters, Walker communicates that in every other person, there is a piece of ourselves and our histories, that from within one person, our entire past exists. She communicates the Jungian philosophy of the collective unconscious being connected back through time and culture in significant ways. It is with this that one of the characters, Mary Jane, claims that "we all touch each other's lives in ways we can't begin to imagine."

Such off-the-wall stories and complicated concepts add to the difficulty of the read while at the same time encouraging the readers to swallow a world that is so unlike their "normal" ones. This world of magic realism, an art form perfected by Walker and fellow writer, Toni Morrison, is one that makes for a refreshing and engrossing read. The characters are unforgettable, the historical and visual backdrops breathtaking. Names like Carlotta, Fanny, Hal, Lulu, Suwelo, and Lissie will forever remain portraits of amazing people that live in my mind beyond Walker's intricate telling.

Suwelo himself speaks of the "rare people...[who are:] connected directly with life and not with its reflection." It is this ultimate person that I believe Walker wants to present, create and/or reach with the readers of this story. With this, Walker's confusing journey becomes almost a dramatization of how she feels the universe itself works.

Gaijinmama says

I'm ashamed to admit that this one sat on my shelves for perhaps 15 years. But clearly, there was a reason I held onto it: it is a beautiful, magical, devastating, lyrical treat! Even though the narrative drifts like a winding river among a cast of intertwined characters, plots, and settings, somehow they are all connected. I can't recommend this book highly enough, but I must warn you to be patient. I urge you to just pick it up and go with the flow. Not all questions are answered in the end, but...well, that's reality, isn't it? I'm sure the author would agree with me that, ultimately, all things are connected and the journey is its own goal.

Best treat of all: We get to spend more time hanging out with the delightful Misses Celie and Shug from *The Color Purple*.

Teri Drake-Floyd says

It was nice to see Celie and Shug again. The story about Celie and the dog was especially bittersweet.

Alice Walker gets flack for becoming less bitter and political and more spiritual and introspective as she ages, but I love her journey. Her words are full of wisdom and insight and act as a balm for the hurting soul. I was reading this book at just the right time - it was a comfort and settled over me like an old friend. I've seen other reviews that condemn it for being too "quote" or "soundbyte" heavy, but I didn't find it to be fake. I think this is what Walker has learned on her journeys, throughout her own life lessons.

Her thoughts on "dying whole", a discussion that Olivia has with her daughter Fanny, was especially helpful to me.

My only tiny gripe was that I didn't love the ending (spoiler: after all they'd been through collectively, for Fanny and Arvedya to end up together kind of bothered me) but on the whole I loved this book.

Juliana says

"In Uncle Rafe's house Suwelo always seemed to himself to be in a rather idle state of mind. His life had stopped, at least the life he thought he was building with Fanny, at he was suspended. He sometimes felt literally as if his feet did not touch upon the ground. It was a relief. And at times too, he simply thought, something that money, enough to keep you going for a while without worrying, permitted you to do. Another of the many advantages of the rich, but only if they were clever enough not to ruin this idle time by thinking about their money."

"But this little woman -- she was a white woman, and she had a black woman helping her -- she started to agitate on the mainland about the condition of the Island children, and pretty soon whole big boatloads of white people came to look us over. It was the first time I'd seen so many! They were in many different shapes and sizes and very healthy from having eaten our food all their lives. I didn't know this then, of course; how they had sound teeth because mine were rotted' how they could afford glasses to help them see, while my friend Eddie couldn't see beyond his nose and would never learn to heard; how they...well, you get the picture. They all had a distinct quality of being apart from real life. It was like they were on one side of a glass and were were on the other, and we could have no real impact on what happened on their side, the side of the unknown, but they could have a great deal of impact on us. And i felt that was because we were were life was. For even in our frailty, we laughed. So much was so funny to us! They could not laugh freely. Their faces were life fists. When they almost touched you, they grew confused and looked about to see what the others in the group did. We gathered in clumps, digging our bare toes into the sand, and looked at them as if they were a zoo. Only one man, short, fat, and disheveled, had come to be alive with or without us. He head for the beach out in the front of the school and took off most of his clothes, never looking at us. He took out a jar of liquid soap and started blowing bubbles. Pretty soon we were all out there with him chasing the bubbles and watching them float out into the bay."

"There was a period in the sixties when I passed myself off as a griot. I pretended I'd traveled to Africa and learned the stories of the diaspora straight from the old storytellers and record keepers there. I didn't have to go anywhere. I remembered quite enough of the story to tell, thank you. There was a little white woman professor who came to one of my lectures about the crossing of the Atlantic in a slave ship. She was one of those Afrophiles who was so protective of Africa that she claimed Idi Amin was framed. She got up and said "I wish you'd try not to say "I remember thus and so" about your African experiences. It is claiming more than you could possible know, and besides that, it is confusing.' Well, I apologized for that. It just slipped out. I did remember everything I was talking about, though, but I new the professional way to present my experience was as if it had merely been told to me. Some people don't understand that is the nature of the eye to have seen forever, and the nature of the mind to recall anything that was ever known. Or that was the nature, I should say, until man started to put things on paper."

On Elvis Presley: "That in him white Americans found a reason to express their longing and appreciation for the repressed Native America and black parts of themselves. Those non-European qualities they have within them and all around them, constantly, but which they've been trained from birth to deny."

"On we talked into the night, listening to the crickets and appreciating the warm brilliance of the stars.

People are called 'stars' not only because they shine -- with the glow of self-expression and the satisfaction this brings -- but because the qualities they exemplify are, as far as human lives are concerned, eternal."

"Ola says he is convinced that human beings want, above all else, to love each other freely, regardless of tribe, and that when they're finally able to do it openly - although the true essence of the person they've focused on is camouflaged by society's dictation - there is always the telltale quality of psychic recognition -- that is to say, hysteria; the weeping of the womb."

"But they were all three of them rare people, Suwelo thought, for they had connected directly with life and not with its reflection; the mysteries they found themselves involved in, simply being alive and knowing each other, carried them much deeper into reality than "society" often permits people to get. They had found themselves born into fabulous, mysterious universe, filled with fabulous, mysterious others; they had never been distracted from the wonder of this gift. They made the most of it."

"They believed that all that has ever happened is stored in the memories within the human mind, or in the head granary of those who alone on earth think of what is just. The life of my people is to remember forever; each head granary is full. The life of your people is to forget; your think granaries ('museums') and not yourselves, are full. I can tell you truthfully ('eyes steady, heart calm') that meeting your people was a terrible shock ('small children running away'). Your people are most afraid of what you have been; you have no faith that you were as good as or better than what you are now. This is not our way ('path'). Not only were we as good in the beginning as we are now, but we are the same ('two grains of sand, identical')."

Rowena says

"Long will we remember pain, but the pain itself, as it was at that point of intensity that made us feel as if we must die of it, eventually vanishes. Our memory of it becomes its only trace. Walls remain. They grow moss. They are difficult barriers to cross, to get to others, to get to closed-down parts of ourselves." - Alice Walker, The Temple of my Familiar

It's quite an intimidating feat to review this book. The Temple of my Familiar is such a rich, multi-layered story, the kind that you can ruminate on days after you've finished reading it, as I'm doing now. To me, this book is more than a story, it's an education and it's also a challenge. Walker educates by giving us facts and opinions on literature, race, gender, feminism among other topics. It challenges our preconceptions while offering alternative worldviews in areas such as race, religion, patriarchy and the like.

As it's Walker, it's only expected that political statements are made. In this case, one of the most profound ones was the "whitewashing" of history due to the impact of colonialism. African playwright Abajeralasezeola's critique of colonialism is emphatic: **"Clean out your ears: THE WHITE MAN IS STILL HERE. Even when he leaves, he is not gone."** I found that powerful as a reminder that Africa and other places are still under the scourge of colonialism, albeit modern day colonialism. If this weren't the case, we would know our history. Walker posits that we are barred from knowing our ancient selves, from being who we truly are, from being because of this blockage. We have lost the connection:

"You cannot curse a part without damning the whole. That is why Mother Africa, cursed by all her children, black, white, and in between, is dying today, and, after her, death will come to every other part of the globe."

The characters in the book were memorable. Miss Lissie was the most interesting to me, being a woman who had been reincarnated several times and had fascinating past lives. Following closely behind in the intrigue

category was Miss Fannie, who was constantly falling in love with spirits.

I think this book is for everyone but there are passages that I believe will speak more strongly to women. For example, this line by Miss Lissie said **“But what I refused to give up was my essence; nor could I. For it was simply this: I did not share their vision of reality, but have, and cherish my own.”**

At the very least, everyone should read The Gospel According to Shug:

<http://www.fantasymaps.com/stuff/shug...>
