

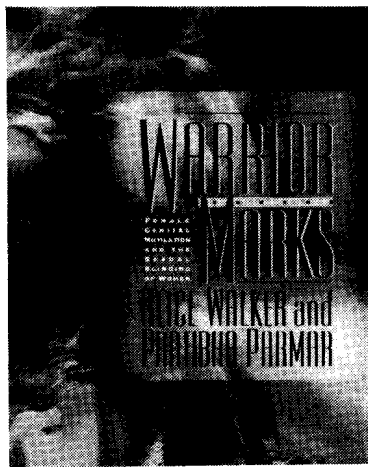
*Women.* Following Walker's moving novel on this subject (*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Harcourt Brace, 1992), *Warrior Marks* (a non-fictional work) marks the literary progression of an author who aims to liberate those who suffer from this particular form of patriarchal domination. Parmar adds to her own feminist work in film a documentary which gives voice to a subject area shrouded in "deafening silence."

*Warrior Marks*, a joint venture by Walker and Parmar, chronicles the making of a documentary film on female genital mutilation. To make the film, they travelled to Africa (specifically Senegal and The Gambia) and interviewed proponents of this "initiation" practice, advocates for change, and children upon who this painful and life-changing procedure had been performed. Their personal journals and logs are shared with readers in the book. We begin with Walker's vision in a letter to Parmar, and follow through with glances into the thoughts of these two brave women. The interviews held with women of varying social genres and points of view on the topic of genital mutilation are fully transcribed. The book expands on the topics and portions covered in the film, but instead of sound-bites and edited interviews, complete and detailed insights are provided.

Perhaps one of the best features of the book occurs through the introduction to the work that is done in Africa, by African women, to liberate themselves from the oppression of patriarchy. An extensive interview is provided with Awa Thiam (African feminist and political activist, editor of *Black Sisters, Speak Out*), in which a clear discussion is held about the roots of genital mutilation. This is only one example of how this book becomes a medium through which the voice of African women can be heard.

Issues of cultural imperialism and racism have surrounded the discussions of female genital mutilation in the past. *Warrior Marks* does not exist as simply another example of

this tendency in political and feminist works. Pratibha Parmar handles this issue more than adequately when she states, "...what [is] happening to women in Africa should concern *all* women across the world...." Through their journey, Parmar and Walker provide a classic example of the joining of women of colour in the diaspora to do their part to help and educate...and end the violence against



women and children, particularly as exemplified through the genital mutilation of young girls.

The book sets out not only to expand on the journey undertaken by Walker and Parmar, but to provide a glimpse into the issues facing African women and children in African societies. Definitions are provided along with addresses of activist organizations in America, England and Africa.

*Warrior Marks* significantly contributes to the work being done in Africa, the Middle East and Asia to liberate women from the chains of bondage and mutilation. If this book and film save only one African child from genital mutilation, liberate one woman from male domination, make one person remember and face her pain...it has done its job.

## POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY

Alice Walker, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

by Sandy Fraser

Alice Walker's book, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, was released in October 1992. Alice chooses Tashi, one of the characters from a previous book, *The Colour Purple*, to weave a pseudo-mythical tale about Female Genital Mutilation, and its immediate and long-term effects on Tashi and her family. This book represents a strong departure from the usual presentation of this subject matter. There are countless articles and books written about FGM. All of them tend to take a scientific approach, with facts and figures to explain the practice. There are many in the African community that view Walker's book as trivializing the subject; however, no other writer has had the ability to bring this taboo subject, affecting an estimated 100 million women worldwide, to the international scene.

Walker employs an unusual style. She becomes the orator, telling Tashi's story through the various characters who are a part of her life. This is an effective tool, which reflects the oral culture of African tribal life. Little by little, Tashi's life is revealed; however, quite often the story does not flow, and is sometimes made cumbersome by the constant changing back and forth in time and place.

Interestingly, Tashi has chosen to be "circumcised" at rather a late stage in her life, after escaping this fate as a child. She wants to assume the mark of an Olinka woman, so that she can fight along side the men, to free her country from Colonial repression. The reasoning here seems convoluted, but since this is a fictional account we can allow some licence. Tashi seems to have been left an invalid after her mutilation by M'Lissa, the excisor, so soldiering out of the question.

Then along comes Adam to the rescue, too late to prevent her or-

deal—but he will marry her and take her away to America where she will be safe and secure. Wrong again! With the other women of her African community she was prepared to accept her fate at the hands of the excisor. Why? To achieve status the only way possible, and in their own turn to “circumcise” their daughters and perpetuate the myth. This is the role which they must play in a patriarchal society, internally conditioned to endure for the sake of belonging to their society.

Tashi, as a bride, travels to America where it seems she adopts all of the western cultural norms, as well as a new name, Evelyn. She suffers great pain trying to consummate her marriage, to no avail. She finally conceives by accident. She suffers again at the birth of her son, at the hands of a “doctor” in a hospital. The delivery is botched, causing her only child to be born retarded. One wonders if she would have been better off in her homeland. One last gift from western society is visited upon her—psychiatry. She spends years trying to get in touch with her psychological pain, and repressed memories of her childhood, her lost sister, who bled to death after her excision, and the strange haunting vision of the excisor. She learns to express her anger and in fact to act on it, by returning home to kill M’Lissa. She comes to possess the secret of joy. Resistance! But this cannot be condoned. The “leader” of the homeland takes on some characteristics of a former president of Kenya, who denounced the missionaries for trying to eradicate “circumcision,” which he explained as an attack on the culture of his people. The “leader” condemns Tashi to death, so that she is made an example for all the community to see—a clear warning that the integrity of the male-oriented society must not be challenged.

Alice Walker, to her credit, has designated part of the proceeds from her book “to educate women and girls, men and boys, about the hazardous effects of genital mutilation.” There is no question that her novel will have an impact on those who

read it. Many who come from some of the 29 or so countries where FGM is practised may take offence at *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, but FGM is no longer a local issue. War, famine, and complete social anarchy have brought the affected to our shores.

## SELECTED POEMS

Lorna Goodison. The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

### by Deborah Jurdjevic

Reviews are supposed to be well-tempered things, setting the poem, the canvas, the symphony within their own traditions, evaluating how successfully they compete for a contemporary ear and eye. Now and then, however, there comes along a work so fine that one’s hands smart from the applause; one’s throat is hoarse from the bravos, one’s delight in the perfect combinations of sound and sense outstrips by light years the careful pace of analysis.

Lorna Goodison’s *Selected Poems* is such a work. Many of the poems from *Tamarind Season*, her first volume (1980) are included here; all but four are included from *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986) and all but four from *Heartease* (1988). New poems, a half dozen of them, from the forthcoming *Book of Amber* are, one by one, wonderful.

“To us, all flowers are roses” which opens *Selected Poems* gives Goodison, for those who don’t already know her work, a context at once Jamaican and universal. Like Frost’s poems, these simple, lucid, singing lines lend themselves to light reading; like Frost’s poems, they repay concentrated attention. A paean for Jamaica and rosary of significant names, “To us, all flowers...” turns on a double metaphor which sees the specific word as a natural bloom of language, and language as a life-giving stream. Its power

resides in the voice of the poet which is by turns pedantic, playful, authoritative, and confessional. We catch some of these turns in the first stanza:

Accompong is Ashanti, root,  
Nyamekopon  
appropriate name Accompong,  
meaning  
home to bushmasters, bushmasters being  
maroons, maroons dwell in dense  
places  
deep mountainous well sealed  
strangers unwelcome. Me No  
Send You No Come.

This is as synoptic a view of Caribbean slavery as one is likely to find, but the point it makes is a linguistic one. The Ashanti word survives; rebel warriors live on the Jamaican tongue. A lesser poet might have been content to point the history lesson. Goodison, who knows that poetry’s source is sound, speaks clearly to the most delicate ear of the mind. We hear in the alliteration and assonance of this stanza an older language, and in the last line we miss neither the threat nor the joke.

The sixth stanza, a mid-point in “To us, all flowers are roses,” begins by remembering what of Africa has been lost and develops the poem’s central metaphor of language as a nourishing stream.

Some of it is lost, though, swept  
away forever,  
maybe at Lethe in Hanover,  
Lethe springs  
from the Greek, a river which is  
the river  
of Oblivion. There is Mount  
Peace here  
and Tranquillity and Content.  
May Pen  
Dundee Pen, Bamboo Pen and  
for me,  
Faith’s Pen, therefore will I write.

The poet’s voice modulates in this stanza from that of teacher to that of acolyte, as African place-names give way to English and Greek ones, themselves of no certain permanence.