

Possessing the Secret of Joy: A Novel

By Alice Walker

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From the author the *New York Times Book Review* calls “a lavishly gifted writer,” this is the searing story of Tashi, a tribal African woman first glimpsed in *The Color Purple* whose fateful decision to submit to the *tsunga*’s knife and be genitally mutilated leads to a trauma that informs her life and fatefully alters her existence. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, out of print for a number of years, was the first novel to deal with this controversial topic and managed to do so in a manner that *Cosmopolitan* called “masterful, honorable, and unforgettable storytelling.” The New Press is proud to bring the book back into print with a new preface by the author addressing the book’s initial reception and the changed attitudes toward female genital mutilation that have come about in part because of this book.

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Possessing the Secret of Joy: A Novel By Alice Walker Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Pulitzer Prize winner Walker illustrates the truism that violence begets violence in this strong-voiced but often strident and obvious novel? and polemical novel. The focus of Walker's rage is the practice of female circumcision in African cultures. Her tale concerns Tashi, a character who made fleeting appearances in *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, and who here represents an archetypal figure, not so much a woman as a mouthpiece for feminist distress. Tashi grows up in a small African village but initially escapes the customary clitorodectomy. 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 and assumes a new identity as Evelyn 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 why not delete this next phrase (through 'finally') as point is made in previous sentence and 'accumulate' is repeated, and incorporate the point about "the ages" into the previous sentence finally culminates in murder. Walker tells the story in very brief chapters, each loaded with the sense of the historical importance she wishes to convey, but the fragile narrative cannot support the weight of her overwrought prose. Walker's protest against ok? author's "message" in the last review "what men . . . do to us" cannot be faulted; its guise as a novel, however, can. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

A peripheral character in *The Color Purple* (LJ 6/1/82) and *The Temple of My Familiar* (LJ 3/15/88), Tashi becomes the focus of this welcome new work. Tashi, who marries Celie's son Adam, submits to female circumcision partially out of loyalty to the threatened tribal customs of her people, the Olinka. As a result, she endures physical pain and long-lasting emotional trauma. Not a sympathetically drawn victim, the tortured Tashi stretches to bridge two continents and to understand why women must undergo this torture, even at the hands of their mothers, for the pleasure of men. Though she often succumbs to madness, Tashi eventually takes possession of the secret of joy. Her compelling story is every Eve's account of those "whose chastity belt was made of leather, or of silk and diamonds, or of fear and not of our own 'flesh.' " This is not a sequel to Walker's previous novels, but it easily equals, if not surpasses, their excellence.

-Faye A. Chadwell, *Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Here and there tantalizing remnants of the writing that made *The Color Purple* such a critical success, but for the most part Walker's latest is held hostage to an agenda--the eradication of female circumcision in Africa and the Middle East--a cause to which she will be contributing a portion of the royalties. A range of voices, including husband Adam, son Benny, and the character Tashi herself, tell the story of the Olinka girl who made a brief appearance in *The Color Purple*. Married to Adam, the young African-American missionary who took her back to the US, Tashi has suffered intermittent periods of madness since she was brutally circumcised as an adolescent in a remote guerrilla camp in Africa. It's a madness that has required hospitalization and treatment by a range of analysts, including the great Jung, who puts in a cameo appearance here. Though her older sister had bled to death from the effects of the operation, Tashi chose to have it done because she felt it would make her ``...completely woman. Completely Africa. Completely Olinka." The operation also was responsible for a difficult delivery in which her son Benny was brain-damaged. Helped by therapy, her grief turns to anger: she returns to Africa and murders the old woman who performed the operation. Sentenced to death, Tashi, who feels neither guilt nor fear of death, is finally at peace because an anthropologist tells her about the mythic causes of the practice: the early African woman,

“the mother of womankind,” was “notoriously free” of both sexual guilt and circumcision; invading tribes and Arabs were responsible for its imposition. Dying, Tashi finally possesses the “secret of joy”: the resistance to what is evil. A pastiche of New Age mysticism, dubious history, and feminist ideology tied to a storyline that points a moral, heavily underlined, rather than one that grows out of a tale. Female circumcision is a terrible travesty, but neither it nor Walker's talent is well served by this overwrought novel.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Perry Payne:

Exactly why? Because this Possessing the Secret of Joy: A Novel is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will surprise you with the secret it inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who also write the book in such amazing way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have got such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to postpone having that book? If I had been you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

Jewel Tarr:

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Gary Copeland:

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