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"I will learn you something if you listen to this song": southern women writers' representations of music in fiction

Courtney George

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, cgeorg2@lsu.edu

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“I WILL LEARN YOU SOMETHING IF YOU LISTEN TO THIS SONG”: SOUTHERN
WOMEN WRITERS’ REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSIC IN FICTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to
the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

By
Courtney George
A.B., University of Georgia, 1999
May, 2008

For my mother (the writer),
my father (the drummer),
and my three dogs (the listeners)...

“I love old songs and what they know/
Just turn ‘em up and let ‘em go.”
-Yonder Mountain String Band

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a rhetorical analysis of the formation of women's memory, history, and communities in intersections of musical and literary expression in the American South, a region graced with a vital but underexamined tradition of female musicianship. Recent scholars have deconstructed the imagined narrative of southern culture as static, patriarchal, and white to uncover alternative stories and cultures that exist outside of canonical literature. This project significantly expands current understandings of these conflicting narratives by investigating how women writers recall, reclaim, and re-envision women's roles in southern music to challenge, comply, and/or identify with women's prescribed place in the South. I examine novels by Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Dorothy Allison, and Lee Smith to explore the many ways these women employ blues, gospel, and country music through tropes of female musician characters, song lyrics, or musical structures in order to re-imagine a South less constrained by paternalist ideas about sexuality, race, class, and religion. In its unique combination of music history, literary analysis, and cultural theory, "I Will Learn You Something" models a productive interdisciplinary approach to understanding diverse women writers' rhetorical strategies for "learning" readers about female voices often neglected in American literary and musical history.

INTRODUCTION: SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS' MUSICAL FORMULATIONS OF IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, MEMORY, AND HISTORY

Let me tell you, girls, if your man ain't treatin' you right/
Let me tell you, I don't mean no wrong/
I will learn you something if you listen to this song/
I ain't here to try to save your soul/
Just want to teach you how to save your good jelly roll/
Goin' on down the line a little further now, there's many a poor woman down/
Read on down to chapter nine, women must learn how to take their time/
Read on down to chapter ten, takin' other women men you are doin' a sin/
Sing 'em, sing 'em, sing them blues, let me convert your soul...

-Bessie Smith, "Preachin' the Blues" (Davis 328)

In her song, "Preachin' the Blues," Tennessee-native Bessie Smith assures her female audience that her blues can "convert your soul" and teach women how to "save" their "good jelly roll" from mistreating men. Smith's words offer one example of what Alice Walker, writing about race and class oppression in "Coming in from the Cold," invokes as "the conflict between us and our oppressors and the centuries it has not at all silently raged" (63). While Walker calls for remembering the "vibration of souls" that can be found in the "idiosyncracies" of suppressed, vernacular speech, Smith's song invokes specifically gendered vibrations of memory in a far more public realm: the performed and published song. When Smith tells other women—and any men that might be in the audience—that she "will learn [them] something if [they] listen to this song," she summons the power of expression that music as both a private and public performance has held for southern women, as well as how sharing this expression builds a southern community that challenges patriarchal control. Calling attention to "the line" and chapters of an already existing, or "written," collective memory, Smith uses literary and religious metaphors to proclaim her blues as an instructional book of "not at all silent" women's resistance, communal cooperation, self-determination, and empowerment.

This dissertation continues Smith's project from the opposite angle, by analyzing southern women writers' invocations of women's popular music to "learn" their readers about

southern formulations of women's identity, community, memory, and history. In their novels, these southern women writers "teach" (if not "preach") about the diverse ways women's musical culture can be used to illuminate, resist, and revise gender, race, and class discriminations in a patriarchally imagined, yet contested, southern social system. My choice of authors and texts seeks to challenge critical and literary barriers by revealing the interdisciplinary cross-cultural influences of four black and white women writers from different regional and sexual backgrounds, writing about a diverse southern popular musical culture that includes blues, gospel, and country.¹ Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), and Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream* (1992) exemplify the varied use of musical tropes (lyrics, structures, and characters) in fiction to depict white and black, male and female, secular and religious, gay and straight, privileged and underprivileged southerners inhabiting different southern spaces and time periods. I argue that these writers recall the complex and underexamined history of southern women's musical expression to reclaim the power of those voices in a literary frame—to show how lower-class black and white women have been "speaking back" unsilently all along, even if it was unrecognized in dominant histories at the time—and to reveal when and *how* that power can be exploited, manipulated, and in some cases used to reinforce the very gender, race, and class lines it threatens.

What brings these authors' diverse works together is the foregrounding of the interrelationships among music, gender, religion, and the South. As Bessie Smith's song

¹ In its project of deconstructing boundaries, this work participates in what has been termed the "new" southern studies, especially following in the traditions of Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire*, Tara McPherson's *Reconstructing Dixie*, and Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson's collection *Haunted Bodies*—works that foreground gender construction and women's writing as a way to break down barriers between diverse southern peoples and varied discursive forms. Other collections that view the South through an interdisciplinary lens—for example *Dixie Debates*, *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the South*, and *South to a New Place*—have also inspired this work.

illustrates, music—like other discursive forms—can work as an instrument of protest for underprivileged female artists, whether through an assertion of sexual identity in the blues music of women like Smith or through a lamentation of motherhood in the country music of Appalachian female voices. Because popular music (and particularly women’s roles therein) is often dismissed and stereotyped as low culture, women’s participation in country and blues lacked critical attention until recent years. As Mary Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann argue, country and the blues tell the neglected story of lower-class women’s lives:

Our written histories exclude these ordinary women, the backbone and lifeblood of America, but these women have documented their own saga in song...Along with the blues, country music stands nearly alone as a record of the thoughts and feelings, the fantasies and experiences of this invisible and often silent group of women. It stands as one of the only documents of working-class women’s thoughts created by working-class women for working-class women. (ix-x)

Angela Davis argues something similar about the classic 1920s blues women, citing female blues as “a site for the independent elaboration and affirmation of subjectivity and community for women of the black working class. Through the blues, black women were able to autonomously work out—as audiences and performers—a working class model of womanhood”—a model that resisted and challenged dominant (upper-class, white) representations of womanhood in that era (13, 46). Along the same lines as Bufwack and Oermann, who argue that music is the only documentation of ordinary women’s lives, Hazel V. Carby suggests that the songs of blues women offer a more sustained critique of patriarchal narratives of sexuality than the written works of black women (notably Harlem Renaissance writers Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset) which are limited to “middle-class response[s] to black women’s sexuality” (231).² Overall,

² Carby suggests that a literary line of women challenging sexual expectations can be drawn from Hurston to Walker, but believes that the rural focus of these women’s writings leaves much unsaid about the “urban crisis” of black women’s sexuality (229-230); while I believe Carby makes a valid point about safe rural depictions of “folk” women, I also believe that she unjustifiably dismisses issues of sexuality in a southern context—notably as many

these scholars argue for more serious recognition of women's musical contributions, if not for a privileging of music as lower class women's chosen discourse. My study of how southern women writers employ these historical musical contributions in fiction both builds from this previous scholarship and redresses its limitations to show how southern women writers not only focus on the raced, classed, gendered dynamics of music but also the ways that regional community affiliation with the South engendered and sustained such dynamics.

Although the studies of Carby, Davis, and Bufwack and Oermann reclaim working-class women's musical voices, their projects de-emphasize the specific regional dynamics in which blues and country were born. Other music scholarship—like that of Charles Joyner and Bill C. Malone, which attests to the interracial southern community that birthed these genres—de-emphasizes the gendered dynamics in the music. While studies of female roles in popular music do not fully address the complexity of its southern origins, studies of southern music do not fully address the centrality of gender to the genres.³ Similarly, studies that look at musical tropes in literature stress the musical race or class heritages which lead to a multi-cultural American literary use of blues and country, again de-emphasizing the regional gendered dynamics of the genres' origins.⁴ This dissertation seeks to fill that gap by showing how southern women writers

scholars have dismissed resistance in southern women's writing and musical performances—a dismissal this dissertation seeks to correct.

³ Davis, by far, contributes the most to gendered regional studies of blues music with her attention to the blues as rooted in slavery. However, while Davis considers southerners Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith in detail, her attention to blues women's sexual resistances neglects the interracial southern context from which the blues was born. Bufwack and Oermann also view female country musicians as speaking for the "American" woman, downplaying that same southern interracial context, and so the histories of women in country and blues remain partially segregated. Music and folklore scholars Charles Joyner and Bill Malone undeniably bring the two genres together in a southern context in their work, but (whether intentionally or not) focus on the intertwining southern male tradition of blues and country—ignoring (again perhaps unintentionally) the way that women's issues allow for a gendered crossing of race and class boundaries. In studies of the interracial influences in southern music by John White and Paul Harvey, the result is inevitably the same—a greater attention to male musicians.

⁴ For instance, see Houston A. Baker Jr.'s *Blues, Ideologies, and Afro-American Literature*, Gayl Jones' *Liberating Voices*, Albert Murray's *The Hero and the Blues*, Craig Werner's *Playing the Changes*. These scholars—with Jones giving the most attention to women's musical and literary traditions—foreground the racial elements of blues, gospel, and jazz and neglect the gender dynamics also presented. Their focus on the African American musical

use musical tropes to bring gender issues in the South to the forefront. In recalling a southern history of women's music, these writers unveil the complex connections between gender identity and southern community (and its intertwined race, class, and religious constructions), showing how underprivileged females used musical performance to challenge gender roles and to resist a hierarchal community. Building on recent scholarship that has deconstructed the imagined narrative of southern culture as static, patriarchal, and white to uncover alternative stories and cultures that exist outside of canonical literature, this dissertation significantly expands current understandings of these conflicting narratives by investigating how women writers recall, reclaim, and re-envision women's roles in southern music to challenge, comply, and/or identify with women's prescribed place in the South.

Jill Terry's recent work comes closest to bringing together issues of gender (and race and class) and region through southern women writers' literary depictions of what she terms "literary oralities." Terry rightly suggests that southern women writers employ oral traditions for social progress: "the function of oral forms is the same whether in the original or the copy as a strategy of resistance to master narratives. The claiming of the oral voice is always a controllable literary trope and a political act" (534). While Terry focuses her work on multiple oral forms in two southern women's fictions, I both expand on and refocus her ideas in a study of four southern

contributions to a broader tradition of African American and American literature should not be downplayed, but this project seeks to refocus those efforts by also illuminating issues of gender and region as they connect to race and class. Similarly Cecelia Tichi's work *High Lonesome* considers country music themes in American literature on a broad scale—much like Murray's and Werner's work on the blues, examining the confluences between country music and literary themes—but fails to fully address the particular regional importance of the music as resisting gender, race, class, and sexual boundaries. Contrastingly, the work that most greatly influences my project is Adam Gussow's *Seems Like Murder Here*, especially in my discussions of gendered blues violence in Hurston and Walker. Like Gussow, who traces the history of lynching and the related violence in blues music—the ways the music speaks back to Jim Crow violence—my dissertation works to understand how southern women use music to interrogate gender discrimination (often informed by further race and class discrimination) and to resist the prevailing stereotypes of southern women.

women writers who employ the oral form of popular music.⁵ Terry suggests that the use of the oral serves a “common purpose [as] a response to negative stereotypes and to assert identity positively—as Southern, as black, as female” (534). I argue for a more complex use of music specifically, showing that writers of different racial, class, regional, and sexual backgrounds use music to varying ends—not only to “assert identity positively” and to sustain community resistance but also to reveal the limitations of musical aid in identity and community formation. In some cases, women’s musical performances as represented in fiction reinforce (rather than contest) predominant southern stereotypes and hierarchies—exposing the powerlessness of minority southerners in an oppressive paternalist South. Overall this project suggests that southern women writers use female musical histories, cultures, and rhetorical tropes to expose, to challenge, and sometimes to reaffirm identity and community constructions based on dominant imagined patriarchal southern narratives as perpetuated by white male heterosexuality.

Recent scholarship attests to the centrality of gender constructions and performances in affecting constructions of the South as whole. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson argue that “gender construction—even at the relatively simple level of overt prescription—cannot historically be disentangled from constructions of race, class, and sexuality” (2). Jones’s earlier work and Tara McPherson’s more recent criticism both focus on the upper-class white southern belle and woman as underpinning further communal race and class discriminations throughout southern history.⁶ Both works reveal the belle/woman as a role clearly constructed for performative purposes. In performing such a role—as Jones shows in the contradictory ways

⁵ See Jill Terry’s dissertation (case studies of Gayl Jones and Lee Smith) *Black and White Conjunctions in Southern Literary Oralities* and the condensed version of her argument in “Oral Culture and Southern Fiction.” While I appreciate Terry’s broad attention to oral forms like story-telling, preaching, and music, I specifically refocus this project on representations of women’s musical traditions as an undervalued, understudied field that deserves more critical attention—particularly when compared to a tradition like story-telling or vernacular speech.

⁶ See Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day* and McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*.

women viewed slavery, female voting, and lynching—upper class white women could conform to and/or resist southern patriarchal restrictions. While McPherson and Jones study the dominant trope of the white woman, Patricia Yaeger suggests innovative ways of reading southern women writers' representations of another dominant trope, the southern grotesque, as a way to examine a conflicting interracial literary heritage. As Jones and Donaldson suggest, viewed through the lens of gender (and its associations with race), "...the South, despite its fabled reputation for resisting change in all forms, reveals itself, oddly enough, as a radically unstable region, perhaps all too vulnerable to shifts in gender definitions originating within and without the region" (16-17).

This regional instability—as determined by gender instability—recalls Judith Butler, who argues that variations on performance act as resistance to social norms. Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, seeks to understand the construction of gender outside of any biological, naturalized, or essentialized perceptions of women in previous feminist, structuralist, and psychoanalytic theory. Butler argues that constructions of femininity, masculinity, and hetero- and homosexuality actually shield us from understanding that gender is "neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived" (180). Gender can be defined instead as a series of performances that contest and/or uphold essential conceptions of what a man or woman should be. In Butler's formulation, the performance of gender is not denied agency or identity because it is "performed" and not "authentic," but through these performances, agency and identity can be produced—resistance to prescribed identities (like that of the feminized belle, the desexed mammy, or the excluded grotesque woman) can be found in variations of the "*stylized repetition of acts*" (180, 185). Butler argues that feminist critics should look more closely at constructions rather than outside of them: "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally

intelligible” (187). To exemplify gender as performance Butler focuses on theatre and drag shows, and Jones, McPherson, and Yaeger focus on revising dominant literary tropes used by southern women; I add to the mix southern women’s representations of popular musical performances as another space for challenging prescribed roles and/or repeating those established roles in styles that allow for resistance.⁷ Through their allusions to female musicians, the writers I treat question how musical performances of gender specifically allow for identity formation and individual agency (which in turn influences visions of community).

With respect to music—itself an already established performative art—the idea of gender performance resonates, especially in popular female performers like blues singers Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith or country singer Patsy Cline.⁸ Ma Rainey has been memorialized for not only her unique sense of style and flashy dress, but also for her songs (like “Prove it On Me Blues”) that test the bounds of normative heterosexual relationships. Bessie Smith, who took her own glittering style in music and image from her tutelage under Rainey, transformed Rainey’s country blues into a vaudeville style that not only crossed regional boundaries but also tested women’s sexual norms. Patsy Cline, who prided herself on her lower-class Virginia roots, easily moved from the image of the honky tonk angel in spurs and fringe to the image of good country girl in gingham, transforming her yodeling talents into the smooth “Nashville sound.” In their ability to resist and pose variances to southern gender norms, these white and black women manipulated gender performances for profit and success, also creating a sense of agency and

⁷ For beginning discussions on the connections between music, feminism, cultural studies, and gender performance, see Susan McClary’s “Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism” and Ingrid Monson’s “Music and the Anthropology of Gender and Cultural Identity.”

⁸ For important discussions of the female performers discussed here, see Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; Harrison, *Black Pearls*; Carby, “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometimes;” Jensen, “Patsy Cline’s Crossovers: Celebrity, Reputation, and Feminine Identity;” Farmer, “Perverse Inclination: Queers and the Subversive Dynamics of Patsy Cline;” Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music, 1800-2000* and Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone? The Carter Family and their Legacy in American Music*.

identity for themselves during times when women were expected to conform to more submissive roles. With other popular music stars—for instance country queen Kitty Wells or Carter family member Sarah Carter—resistance was grounded in conforming to stereotypes of southern women (which Rainey, Smith, and Cline challenged). Both Carter and Wells relied upon their standings as good gospel mothers to appeal to their audiences and establish relationships with the public that allowed for the production of songs that defied the roles they played. Like Rainey, Smith, or Cline, Wells and Carter also performed gender to gain agency; instead of outwardly rebelling, these women projected conformity to the southern mother role, while questioning such a role through their songs. Either way, these female musicians tested the bounds of and performed the existing constructions for southern black and white women. When Alice Walker models Shug Avery and her audience on the real-life blues worlds of Rainey and Smith, or when Dorothy Allison shows Bone singing along to Kitty Wells, these authors ask readers to recall how working-class southern female singers used music to enact resistant performances that exposed not only gender constructions but also the communal web of race and class hierarchies connected to such constructions.

The authors I analyze contest a larger imagined southern community founded on such hierarchies; the characters these writers (re)create gain agency through their music and break down, if only temporarily, these imagined divides. Like Butler and southern feminist scholars who have argued that the destabilization of gender is evident in its constructions and performances, recent scholars argue that overarching ideas about community can also be destabilized by recognizing community's constructed status. Where studies of imagined national or regional communities often de-emphasize the role of gender constructions in shaping such imaginings, southern theorists that do address gender's role in community formation sometimes

reduce or essentialize southern community to an idealized feminine sisterhood. These studies often focus on print culture (newspapers and literature) or vernacular language, but they neglect to consider how popular cultural artifacts like music also aid in community building.⁹ Following the scholarship of Benedict Anderson, Scott Romine defines imagined narratives of southern community: “Hence, a new definition of community: a social group that, lacking a commonly held view of reality, coheres by means of norms, codes, and manners that produce a simulated, or at least symbolically constituted, social reality” (3). Unlike Romine, who views narratives of community precisely as compensation for the lack of “a commonly held view of reality,” Jean-Luc Nancy theorizes that community arises from the human reality of birth and death, what he terms “being-in-common”: “Community means, consequently, that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological ‘sociality’ that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being” (28). Nancy’s community cannot be produced like imagined conceptions of community; like Foucault’s power, it is always already there, and in this way, Nancy argues, “Community is, in a sense, resistance itself, namely resistance to [individual] immanence” (35). I build on and diverge from these studies in suggesting that the writers I examine consider *gendered musical* performances as the key to revealing the imagined patriarchal hierarchies of the South—sometimes exposing how diverse southerners exist as a resistant “being-in-common” despite such hierarchies.

⁹ See for example Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which gives little to no attention to gender and focuses on print sources and language; in a southern context, see Scott Romine’s *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, which focuses more on race and class constructions in white men’s literature. On the opposite end of the spectrum, see Michael Kreyling’s *Inventing Southern Literature* which argues that women writers offer the possibility of transcending race and class barriers or Linda Wagner-Martin’s “Just the Doing of It” which argues that women writers draw from a matriarchal sense of community for hope and strength. Contrastingly, the collection *Haunted Bodies* foregrounds both gender and interdisciplinary approaches to cultural studies of the South.

While Romine argues that southern manners and codes rely mainly on race and class distinction, I argue that my authors show how performances of southern gender constructions underpin these norms. Romine traces what he terms “reflexive moments” in literature which expose these norms as purely arbitrary; in my study such reflexivity always occurs in musical moments where gender performance allows for a temporary dismantling of other arbitrary social norms. For instance, in Hurston’s novel, Arvey’s thwarted piano talent helps readers understand her connection to exploited bluesman Joe Kelsey, while in Allison’s text Bone’s travel on the gospel circuit allows her (and her readers) to connect southern class discrimination with racial discrimination. While these reflexive musical moments temporarily allow for bonding between diverse southerners—what Romine calls “cohesive” communities (or what Nancy views as resistant being-in-common)—these authors portray an imagined patriarchal South as “coercive” when the gender, race, and class barriers ultimately cannot be transcended.

In this way, in their depictions of southern musical communities, the writers I treat offer something in between purely imagined communities that revolve around constructed hierarchies (of either discrimination or sisterhood) or a purely resistant being-in-common—perhaps what Richard Gray has referred to as “fictive but not fake” narratives (500). Southern women writers’ varied visions of community show how female musical performances temporarily bring together people of different genders, races, classes, and sexualities, and they simultaneously reveal how minority cultures learn to abuse their expressive musical powers and each other in their service to a paternalist system. This dissertation points to not only the ways women writers use music to establish transcendent southern female communities (like Shug and Celie’s blues womanist triumph over blues violence in *The Color Purple*, or Bone and Raylene’s re-recording of country music’s gender divisions in *Bastard Out of Carolina*) but also to show how women’s minority

cultures are kept divided by a larger paternalist myth, despite the supposed social and industrial growth of the South. When she sacrifices her musical talent to serve her enterprising husband, Arvay forms no real connections with any women in *Seraph*, just as many female characters in *The Devil's Dream* (like Virgie, Rose Annie, and even Katie) exploit each other for profit. Southern women writers employ gendered musical performances in reflexive moments to complicate previous understandings of community as either imagined or originary (perhaps alternately coercive and cohesive) by suggesting that southern community exists as both at once—often at the expense of lower-class women's expressive freedoms.

These four novels use musical tropes to trace the way gender constructions are imagined and affect southern communities throughout southern history—calling into question not only dominant narratives of southern gender and community but also narratives of history and memory. The many “Souths” that these writers depict in their novel reflect a conflicting, non-static vision of community; they call on music history to trace regional developments that span decades—from the Reconstruction era to the present post-South as depicted in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and West Virginia from the point of view of southern women marginalized not only by their gender and sexual status, but also by their race and class position. These four writers together offer a depiction of the popular evolution of the earliest southern music from a specifically female perspective—from a mass mixing of musical cultures in Hurston, which predicts the blues-inspired revision of the South by Walker, to a South which Allison also revises as a secularized gospel world, to Smith's country music post-South in which resistant musical worlds diminish due to capitalist exploitation. These writers show that while female musicians used southern song to protest their roles in a paternalist system, their songs were often manipulated, appropriated, and then relegated to popular culture—an easily dismissed and

undervalued discursive realm. As Hurston repeatedly expressed in her study of the folk, popular art forms like the blues, when posed against high art, often receive critical abuse from academics. Because of their secular subject matters, the blues and country were denigrated and stereotyped as the “devil’s” music, and women performing blues and country were especially marginalized. Blues women like Rainey and Smith were often labeled as “bad” women who abused alcohol and acted sexually irresponsible, and when country women (like Cline) refused to mold to images of the country mother, they were excluded from their southern communities.¹⁰ This marginalization of popular music (and particularly of women performing such music) often silenced women’s lyrical protests until recent reclamations by the previously mentioned cultural scholars; the authors analyzed in this dissertation use a literary frame to restore and revise the lost voices of women in popular music in order to interrogate not only dominant gender constructions and imagined southern communities but also to explore how memory and history intertwine to shape southern women’s musical roles and communities.

The questioning and revising of paternalist forms of memory and history can be linked with the industrialization and commodification of southern culture, particularly in the works of these authors who use the development of the music industry to correlate to other industrial and social changes in the South. In each of their novels, when the music becomes an industry guided by the prevailing class’s need for profit, patriarchal values are sometimes reinforced instead of resisted. These women writers show how blues, gospel, and country are misinterpreted, exploited, and used for monetary gain; often any resistant sense of gender identity or agency or any sense of a cohesive community is traded for profit. Citing “the huge commercial growth of country music” as just one example, Richard Gray argues that in the capitalist post-South

¹⁰ For discussions of blues as the devil’s music, see Giles Oakley, *The Devil’s Music*, and for country, see Bill C. Malone’s *Country Music USA*. See again Davis and Daphne Duvall Harrison’s *Black Pearls* for discussions of blues women and Margaret Jones’ *Patsy: The Life and Times of Patsy Cline*

especially, the mythological past of belles, mammies, and gentlemen is still relevant: “The legends of the South are not necessarily dying, in other words, or being fiercely protected or resurrected; in some cases, they are merely being turned into cash” (357). While George Lipsitz similarly reads the forms of popular culture (like music) as “perform[ing] the dirty work of the economy and the state,” he also suggests that “at their best, they retain memories of the past and contain hopes for the future that rebuke the injustices and inequities of the present” (20).

Building from Gray and Lipsitz, I argue that the authors I treat create fictional memories that invoke gendered musical performances and the effects on community construction to recall and critique dominant narratives of the southern past; as Jill Terry argues, employing underprivileged women’s music is a political move—a need to clearly address what Lipsitz calls the “on-going injustices and inequities of the present” and to call for change. These writers use women’s music performances to channel (and sometimes challenge) a collective southern memory that both commodifies and resists earlier narratives of southern history as sustained by the power locus of upper-class white male heterosexuality.

In invoking a southern musical past through the stories of Arvay, Celie, Bone, and Katie Cocker, the authors I treat create not only fictionalized individual memories but also the collective memory of underprivileged women’s musical contributions—the communities which both restricted and offered freedoms to blues and country singers. The concept of collective memory is theorized as in dialogue with history; both individual and collective (or cultural) memories inevitably influence how a nation’s or region’s past is perceived.¹¹ According to Pierre

¹¹ See Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, for a study of memory and history dealing with French nationalism. In an American context, I appreciate Marita Sturken’s study on Vietnam and AIDS memorials, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Sturken also sees memory as inevitably tied up with history, unable to be disentangled; the two are not mutually exclusive concepts. In a southern context, see Brundage’s introduction to *Where these Memories Grow* for a discussion of collective memory and history of the South. Notably, none of these studies views music as a site of memory.

Nora, scholars should look beyond the facts of history or the sites of memory to understand who shapes history, what and why people remember, and more importantly, to what ends these memories and histories are used—what power can be achieved by remembering or historicizing the past in a certain way (10). Nora argues for new studies of history that can be located in what he terms *lieux de mémoire* or symbolic sites of collective memory (for example archives, statues, books, portraits, memorial celebrations) that attest to a shared communal experience eroded by individual accounts of history. Nora suggests that these symbolic sites survive because of “their ability to resurrect old meanings and generate new ones along with new and unforeseeable connections” and that these sites can be determined by the ways they “reshape memory in some fundamental way or...epitomize a revision of memory for pedagogical purposes” (15, 17). Using Nora’s theories as a guide, I argue that southern women writers employ musical performances as symbolic sites of memory that revise older southern narratives and teach readers to forge new connections and view these narratives in varying ways. Like the women’s performances they draw from (for example Smith’s “Preachin’ the Blues”), these writers ask us to foreground and rethink the relationship between gender construction and southern community through fictional memorials that allude to and revise underprivileged women’s roles in music; in this way the novels themselves become a certain kind of *lieu de mémoire* as well.

Memory and history have long been central issues in southern and African American literary imaginings of identity and community, and *lieux de mémoire* become particularly important for the African American community, whose history has literally been erased in some cases.¹² As the contributors to *History and Memory in African American Culture* agree, music in

¹² Melvin Dixon uses Nora’s theories to uncover the way that African Americans depend on memory for their very history, arguing that “the presence of our culture of significant *lieux de mémoire* establishes the value of cultural memory and the very kind of history or historiography that is not dependent on written analysis or criticism but

the form of the blues (“sounding through a hundred years of the music in a variety of forms and fashions”) represent a symbolic site of memory for the black community (8). While the collection focuses particularly on sites of collective memory for African American culture, Alice Walker has suggested that the love of memories is what binds all minority social groups:

Actually I am wrong to think, as I sometimes do, that this love of memories is peculiar to any race or clan. I believe it is a human trait...and that what the black, the Native American, and the poor white share in America is common humanity’s love of remembering who we are. It is because the language of our memories is suppressed that we tend to see our struggle to retain and respect our memories as unique. And of course our language is suppressed because it reveals our cultures, cultures at variance with what the dominant, well-to-do culture perceives itself to be. (“Coming in from the Cold” 63)

Using Walker’s comments to expand on how African American literary depictions of music act as lieux de mémoire, I argue that fictional representations of blues, gospel, and country sustain a form of collective memory that in some ways unites (and in some ways divides) underprivileged southern peoples, especially when used as an expressive space for southern women’s gender performances.

In her recent book, *Resisting History*, Barbara Ladd links memory’s dependence on place (specifically the South) with the way History has excluded women, positing that southern writers use collective memory to resist such historical exclusions.¹³ Citing Judith’s passing on of Charles Bon’s letter in Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!*, Ladd describes how living memory (or Nora’s symbolic sites) sustains southern women’s collective experiences to offer “ultimately memory in

rather achieves an alternative record of critical discussion through the exercise of memory. Memory becomes a tool to regain and reconstruct not just the past but history itself” (19).

¹³ See also Marianne Hirsh and Valerie Smith’s essay on “Feminism and Cultural Memory” for a joining of the two theoretical fields: the authors argue “Feminist studies and memory studies both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested. Both fields assume that we do not study the past merely for its own sake; rather we do so to meet the needs of the present. Both fields emphasize the situatedness of the individual in his or her social and historical context and are thus suspicious of universal categories of experience. Beyond these broad points of convergence, developments in feminism and work on cultural memory demonstrate that the content, sources, and experiences that are recalled, forgotten, or suppressed are of profound political significance. What we know about the past, and thus our understanding of the present, is shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history; relative degrees of power and powerlessness, privilege and disenfranchisement, determine the spaces where witnesses and testimony may be heard or ignored”(12)

resistance to History” (90). I expand on the ways that scholars study southern women writers’ reinventions of these concepts with a specific focus on gendered musical tropes acting as symbolic sites of memory; I shift the focus away from written discursive tropes (like the privileged Judith and her letter) to show how the writers I study create underprivileged characters who pass along living memories through their music. In *Seraph*, when Kenny ultimately exploits the music passed down to him from Arvay and Joe, Hurston shows how music—as living memory—can expose the paternalist need to exclude on the basis of race and gender. A very different kind of living memory is passed on in Smith’s novel when Lizzie teaches her sister-in-law Lucie the songs that her mother once sang; through these songs, Smith uses country music to evince a resistance through the living memory of female community (perhaps a matriarchal or feminine community as Kreyling or Wagner-Martin might suggest). As shown by these brief examples, these authors use the female performative aspects of popular southern music as living memory (or symbolic sites) not only to confront the ways that lower class women have been excluded from southern History, but also to reconstruct visions of southern community and history as exclusive and/or inclusive.

Many scholars—like Lipsitz—argue for music as a discursive outlet for repositories of collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs (from whom Nora draws his ideas) argues that musical meaning can only be achieved through collective memory; the social relationship between musician and audience—the collective memory of performances—cements successive performances as well as the on-going connection between musicians and listeners.¹⁴ Ralph

¹⁴ See Halbwachs *The Collective Memory*, particularly his essay on “The Collective Memory of Musicians.” The question of what music means to the individual, Halbwachs argues, is not merely subjective; musical meaning—the written musical language, the emotions it evokes, the style in which a musician plays—are all founded on social conventions as part of a larger community which sets up such conventions. Halbwachs attempts to explain the universality of music and musical meaning as a “human” phenomenon, ultimately acknowledging that, whether consciously written or performed to do so, music describes and expresses elements of human experience; his theories contest any notion of music as an unexplainable entity divorced from society.

Ellison also views music as “giv[ing] resonance to memory,” particularly in his descriptions of jazz music in mid-century New York (203).¹⁵ Ellison describes how historical accounts of music cannot fully reflect the “true memory” (and inherent protests in jazz) but instead these accounts piece together fragments to create a “glamorized” legend (202). While these scholars acknowledge the use of music to sustain collective memory, my project suggests how fictional representations of music sustain collective memory and illuminate the gendered dynamics (and the related race, class, and religious dynamics) in southern history. In the novels I examine, the authors allude to music history—the glamorized historical writings and stories of which Ellison speaks—but each author carefully transforms history beyond the images and legends, using such revision as a tool to teach readers about false southern myths and histories of gender (and by association race and class)—questioning, like Ellison, what power locus benefits from certain constructions of collective memory and history and the further impact those constructions have on identity and community formation.

As Halbwachs suggests, when performing, a musician does not rely on written musical notes alone but also calls to memory the audience’s experience to sustain and recreate successful performances—allowing for a powerful interchange between musician and audience where the listeners contribute as much as the performer. In their texts, the authors I’ve chosen not only focus on the creative abilities of fictional musicians to challenge dominant narratives but also the interpretative abilities of their listeners to sustain these challenges. Hurston depicts how Arvey

¹⁵ Ellison suggests that the jazz community at Minton’s do not remember those jam sessions as indicative of the bop “movement,” but were rather lost in the present, in creating and improvising with the new form. Ellison views bop as not simply art, but as a cultural artifact indicative of the struggles of African Americans in the World War II years—a cultural artifact long ignored as possible political expression. He argues that cultural critics and sociologists concerned themselves with other perhaps more clearly “historical” events—riots, industrial movements, economic failures—neglecting the importance of bop as an expression of such struggles. While Ellison’s attention to music history as a neglected cultural element is important, his overall interrogation of memory and history (as reflected in music) emerges as a precursor to contemporary theories about memory and history—both as constructions that skew and fragment one’s experiences and identity.

joins in as a liberated listener when the African American community serenades her as a wedding gift, much in the same way Bone feels loved when she hears gospel and country music in Allison's text. When Smith's Katie Cocker remembers her first performance during a high school talent show, she speaks as much about the audience's experience as her own—the ways that music binds her with that community. However, when Shug tells Celie that she feels bored performing for white audiences, Walker evinces the disconnect between performer and audience, suggesting that the racial divide won't allow the white audience to truly hear her music. These authors, like Ellison in his depictions of jazz, reveal how "music gives resonance to memory"—a collective memory that speaks to the (dis)connections in southern communities along gender, race, and class lines. I argue that these authors insert reflexive musical memorial moments—like those of Arvey, Bone, and Katie relating to the larger community (audience) or Shug feeling divorced from it—as symbolic sites of memory that attest to a larger collective memory of (thwarted) gender performances. Like their created musical characters who call to the fictional listeners in the novels, southern women writers also call to their readers to re-examine southern musical history and its relation to gender, race, and class constructs—to expose and possibly change any residual dynamics in today's culture—just like the blues and country women from whom they draw their characterizations.

In this project, which ties together musical histories and southern women writers' fictional depictions of music, conceptions of gender, history, memory, and music intertwine. To return again to *The Inoperative Community*, like Nora, Jean-Luc Nancy understands the complex relationship between history and community: "history has been thought on the basis of a lost community—one to be regained or reconstituted" (9). For Nancy, community's resistant power results in an interruption of this history, which he concedes to be the imagined myth of the

origins of community—a community Anderson suggests was continually reimagined on the basis of religion, empiricism, fraternity, or nationhood—a mythical community that in a southern context, I would alternately suggest, is built on racialized gender constructions and performances. Using a musical metaphor (likening myth to music that ends), Nancy suggests that during the interruption of myth, resistant community speaks: “When myth stops playing, the community that resists completion and fusion, the community that propagates and exposes itself, makes itself heard in a certain way” (62). Offering the concentration camp as an example of an attempted annihilation of cohesive community, Nancy shows that a community united in resistance was exposed in the camps. While the interruption of myth (where myth is viewed as—however falsely—connecting peoples in a community) should destroy that sense of community, instead community arises in its exposure of myth as fictional; “being-in-common” becomes apparent in the disillusion of an integrated sense of Community—the mythical community we think we’ve lost and to which we long to return—the imagined community that Nora suggests humans seek in symbolic sites. Defining literature as not only writing or voice, but also music, dance, painting, or simple thought, Nancy suggests that “‘literature’ (or ‘writing’) is what, in literature—in the sharing or communication of works—interrupts myth by giving voice to being-in-common, which has no myth and cannot have one” (64). As I have previously suggested, when southern female and minority characters “share” or pass on music as living memory, they expose this being-in-common—and simultaneously expose dominant literary and historical depictions of a South divided on the basis of gender, race, and class hierarchies as imagined.

Nora argues that because memory has supplanted history, literature has become overly historical, and so we must “mourn the loss of literature” (20). But to Nancy, literature becomes the agent of community—the work that exposes community, not only the work which produces

it; literature does not service or imitate dominant historical narratives (as Nora implies) but instead challenges them—just as the writers I treat do not fully disclose women’s musical histories but instead revise them to promote change. Nancy argues, “Thus, once myth is interrupted, writing recounts our history to us again. But it is no longer a narrative—neither grand nor small—but rather an offering: a history offered to us. Which is to say that an event—and an advent—is proposed to us, without its unfolding being imposed upon us” (69). While myth imposes an imagined (coercive) Community, literature (whether music, writing, or some combination) exposes a (cohesive) being-in-common that Nancy understands as fluid and unimposing. Pairing Nora and Nancy, literature in my study becomes a certain kind of *lieu de mémoire*—a constructed repository of memory that exposes cohesive and coercive communities, and with these communities, dominant narratives of history. From this exposure, readers can accept or reject the history proposed. The writers I treat offer a revised version of southern history through fictionalized collective memories of gender performances in music; they do not ask readers to accept their visions of southern identities and communities as absolute but instead to continue to question and progress in the recovery of multiple visions—whether musical or literary, female or male, black or white, gay or straight, secular or religious. As Gray suggests, “The South is an imagined community made up of a multiplicity of communities, similarly imagined...Still, what all these communities have in common is the act of imagination” (511). Just as blues and country women musicians re-imagined and resisted southern gender constructs through their sung performances and asked their listeners to do the same, southern women writers follow their example in re-imagining and resisting larger imposing concepts of southern memory and history and ask their readers to do the same. While Bessie Smith teaches her

listeners these values through literary tropes, southern women writers teach their readers through musical tropes.

In the chapters that follow, I trace these gendered regional musical tropes as southern women writers expose and question how southern community, memory, and history is often founded on dominant white male heterosexual narratives designed to keep minority protests down and out of the mainstream, relegated to underappreciated popular culture discourses. Chapter one interrogates Zora Neale Hurston's use of the interrelated genres of minstrelsy, blues, and women's parlor piano talents in *Seraph on the Suwanee* to tell Arvey Henson's story of resistance and oppression in a modern paternalist South. Chapter two shows how Alice Walker revises a predominantly male tradition of blues violence to a womanist blues ideology, allowing for a triumphant, resistant southern community in *The Color Purple*. Chapter three argues that Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* extends this vision of an inclusive southern community through Bone's narrative of gospel and country music memories. Chapter four concludes with Lee Smith's vision of an early resistant country music community that dwindles in the capitalist post-South in *The Devil's Dream*. In its unique combination of music history, literary analysis, and cultural theory, it is my hope that "I Will Learn You Something" models a productive interdisciplinary approach to understanding diverse women writers' rhetorical strategies for "learning" readers about female voices so often neglected in southern literary and musical history.

CHAPTER ONE: “EXPLAINING THE BLUES”: WHITE WOMEN, THE BLACK COMMUNITY, AND SOUTHERN MUSICAL CULTURE IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON’S *SERAPH ON THE SUWANEE*

“I am not one of those sentimentalists who wants to take sides whether my stand is valid or not. In truth, the South represents a very confusing picture. Virginius Dabney and Bilbo side by side. High-mindedness and savagery side by side. In my native state, look at the ignorant Governor Cone followed by the brilliant and advanced Spessard Holland (now Senator). I want the book to look like the people it is written about.”-Zora Neale Hurston, in a letter to *Seraph* editor Burroughs Mitchell¹

Zora Neale Hurston’s thinly veiled refutation of Agrarian portraits of the South reveals her desire to challenge long-standing myths of an imagined cohesive pastoral community that is in fact sustained by coercive values of southern gender, race, and class hierarchies—in order to take a non-sentimentalist stand in explaining this complex and confusing vision of the South through gendered musical performances that highlight how other unjust discriminations and exploitations sometimes divide and/or unite southern minority communities. *Seraph on the Suwanee* tells the story of white Florida “cracker” church organist Arvay Henson and her rise to the throne of southern womanhood through her marriage to the enterprising Jim Meserve. As readers watch Arvay abandon her previous lower-class status and struggle to perform her newly-established role as Jim’s wife and servant, Hurston introduces a host of other minority characters like the Kelseys and the Corregios who similarly struggle to serve and aid Jim in his taming and industrializing of the Florida landscape. As in previous works, music figures prominently in Hurston’s narrative; Hurston creates a musical background to highlight Arvay’s progress in her

¹ After a lengthy diatribe on southern history in which Hurston argues that certain liberal white men were opposed to both slavery and war, Hurston suggests that these men’s conservative political positions were more complex and possibly fueled by their “backward” or reactionary supporters, suggesting that communities play an important part in forming the individual consciousness (560-1). In other words, these white politicians did what they had to in order to gain votes—even if it meant playing up racial and class divides or supporting a war they didn’t believe in. Likewise, Hurston defends her portrait of Jim Meserve as a white man who exploits his constituents (Arvay and Joe) in order to sustain progress in a modern South; if the South is to progress overall, there must be some sacrifices (the sacrifices of women and minorities). In contrast, this chapter argues that Hurston highlights the minority sacrifices of Arvay and Joe in *Seraph*—instead of sentimentalizing Jim’s exploitations as the only way to build a new South.

search for identity—her triumphs and failures, resistances and conformities—as related to the overall social and economic progress of the modern South. Hurston’s allusions to blackface minstrelsy, the blues, women’s parlor piano talents, and American ragtime ask readers to uncover a southern musical history that reflects the (dis)connections present in southern communities divided by gender, race, and class. In reflexive musical moments between Arvey and bluesman Joe Kelsey, Hurston arranges a temporary collapse of these imagined boundaries and simultaneously reveals how a patriarchal southern community binds and cripples white women and African Americans in their service to white men. Hurston’s musical allusions ask readers to consider how gendered musical performances further underscore issues of southern womanhood and marriage, imagined southern women’s communities, the patriarchal nature of southern religion, and cross-class and -racial oppressions and resistances between communities. Hurston’s created musical memories lead to later re-recordings in southern women’s fiction—to further tracks that signify on these same themes in the blues, gospel, and country music of novels by Alice Walker, Dorothy Allison, and Lee Smith.

Hurston’s attention to the instabilities in southern history and politics in the opening epigraph suggests her stake in rewriting and rethinking dominant upper-class white male southern history. Tiffany Ruby Patterson suggests that Hurston’s autobiographical, ethnographical, and fictional works participate in the “historical documentation” of the South and counteract many other Harlem Renaissance writers’ focus on racial oppression by the white world (14). However, in blatantly ignoring Hurston’s last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, due to her focus on southern black communities, Patterson privileges Hurston’s challenges to Harlem Renaissance narratives of southern racial oppression and neglects Hurston’s challenges to romantic pastoral histories of the interracial South. While I appreciate Patterson’s attention to

Hurston's earlier novels as participants in African American history-making, I argue that *Seraph* expands Hurston's formulations of southern history by channeling musical tropes as *lieux de mémoire* that uncover collective memories of a multicultural South that upholds and challenges gender and racial discriminations. Because this project views literature as the "interruption" (and not server) of History (as Jean-Luc Nancy argues), I suggest that Hurston sustains collective memories through literary musical sites rather than simply re-writing history. Hurston creates these memorial sites in her allusions to Stephen Foster's minstrel song, her creation of Joe Kelsey as a bluesman, her rendering of Arvay as a parlor piano player, and her descriptions of Kenny as a white swing musician; in these sites Hurston asks readers to recover how southern music history reflects and deflects a larger pastoral vision of the South—a romantic South where white southern women enthusiastically entertained their paternalist husbands on the piano and where minstrels and bluesmen happily served their white patriarchs. In her call to readers to uncover the imagined narratives that sustain southern musical history, Hurston teaches readers to question such pastoral narratives and the history-makers who create them by simultaneously illuminating the resistances and exposing the oppressive tactics inherent in southern women and minority cultures' musical expression.

While critics have more fully explored the musical elements in Hurston's other writings and novels, fewer scholars comment on music's influence in *Seraph on the Suwanee*'s overall portrayal of southern culture.² As Christopher Reiger has summarized, most critics view the novel as "a vacuous capitulation to white culture or ... a veiled critique that has been

² Certainly, scholars have previously described Hurston as a blues figure. Alice Walker's famed comments about Hurston belonging in an "unholy trinity" with blues women Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday come to mind immediately, and John Lowe has also compared Hurston to a "great blues singer" (13). Most blues scholarship on Hurston's work has focused on her popular novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; see specifically Barbara A. Baker, Steven A. Tracy's "The Blues Novel," Adam Gussow's reading in *Seems Like Murder Here*, Maria V. Johnson's "The World in a Jug and the Stopper in [Her] Hand," and Carol Batker's "Love me like I like to be."

misinterpreted as selling out” (106). Scholars debate Hurston’s critical and political stance in *Seraph* through a number of avenues, concentrating on the pastoral, humor, or feminist elements of the text.³ Barbara A. Baker incorporates *Seraph* in her tracing of Hurston’s shifting personal feelings about black music as they develop from an appreciation for the blues as an exclusively African-American genre to an inclusive unveiling of the blues as American music. While I appreciate Baker’s argument on Hurston’s perspective of an interracial American blues aesthetic, I shift her focus from characterizing Hurston’s life as blues woman to examining the ways she *uses* music in *Seraph* to explore the connections between gender and racial oppression and inter-racial and -gender resistances to such oppression under southern patriarchy. Hurston exposes how southern blues culture is based on the sacrifices and exploitations of white women and African Americans’ musical cultures; at novel’s end, the power of the music (and its metaphorical connections to gender and race resistance) is clearly located in the white man’s hands—and perhaps in a less positive manner than Baker suggests. Before readers reach that conclusion, Hurston leads us on a musical journey that begins with blackface minstrelsy.

Hurston begins *Seraph* with a reference to minstrel portrayals of southern culture, asking the reader to consider how uncovering minstrel history can better illuminate Arvay’s story—a poor white woman’s search for identity within the gendered paternalist residuals of plantation culture in the modern South. As Baker argues, “Hurston uses Arvay’s story to express her own

³ Reiger’s “The Working-Class Pastoral of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwanee*” traces the pastoral elements to argue for an ambiguous portrait of southern culture; in *Jump at the Sun* John Lowe argues that a shared humor allows white and black southerners to co-exist in a divided South; Chuck Jackson’s “Waste and Whiteness” uses the lens of eugenics studies to interrogate Arvay’s white trash identity; Brannon Costello’s “Paternalism, Progress, and ‘Pet Negros’” argues that paternalism sustains southern race and gender performances; Laura Dubek’s “The Social Geography of Race,” Susan Edwards Meisenhelder’s “The Ways of the White Folk,” Janet St. Clair’s “The Courageous Undertow,” and Cynthia Ward’s “From the Suwanee to Egypt” all use feminist approaches to argue for the various ways Arvay can be read as oppressed by or independent from Jim’s paternalist rule. Other critics like Mary Helen Washington and Cheryl A. Wall attack the book as a “vacuous soap opera” (Washington 134) or as proof of Hurston’s “artistic decline” (Wall 391); both women concur that Hurston was at her best when drawing from black folk culture and not the white South.

resolution of the American identity crisis as it is embodied in the blues idiom, as well as in the musical devices that both precede and extend forward from the blues: minstrelsy and jazz. The reader is directed to Hurston's intention from the very title" (104). Indeed, in the title and the first lines of the book, Hurston invokes one of America's most beloved minstrel songs and its writer: "Sawley, the town, is in west Florida, on the famous Suwanee River. It is flanked on the south by the curving course of the river which Stephen Foster made famous without ever having looked upon its waters" (*Seraph on the Suwanee* 1). Hurston references Foster's 1851 famous minstrel tune, "Old Folks at Home," asking readers to uncover the historical significance of how the minstrel tradition's most famous song portrayed the South from an outside northern perspective. Bill C. Malone argues that, as widespread industrialization progressed, people across the country identified with the community present in Foster's songs: "The image of a stable and placid Old South was therefore emotionally satisfying, for different reasons, both to northerners and southerners. Whatever the bases for its appeal, the image of an unchanging, exotic land with gentle manners and contented, nostalgic slaves has been a perennially enduring myth of American life" (*Southern Music* 21). The very image of Agrarian life, Foster's composition (written to be performed from a black male perspective on the minstrel touring circuit) summons up mythical characteristics of the Old South: a love for the plantation landscape, a frolicking happiness in singing songs and strumming banjos, a strong sense of family even within the fragmented slave community, an extreme sadness at being displaced from such a paradise. While Hurston wants to present an un-sentimental South, Malone argues that Foster's songs were steeped in the sentimental tradition: "People responded to his music not so much because it presented a realistic picture of southern blacks (which it did not), but because it reinforced the values of the family fireside and featured the stereotypical characters of nineteenth

century sentimental literature...” (*Southern Music* 21). In opening with a reference to minstrelsy, Hurston shows Arvay and the Sawley community’s (dis)connections from this sentimental portrayal; while the Sawley landscape is unsentimentally plagued with hard labor, disease, and ignorance, its residents still hold true to the Old South, suspecting local Yankees of “gloating over the downfall of The Cause” (SS 3). Hurston describes the Sawley community as remaining contentedly unconcerned with a violent southern past that exposes Spanish domination over the Native Americans in Florida, because the community is still invested in abusive discriminations against outsider Yankees—and as will be seen, women and other minorities. The (white) Sawley community—including Arvay—blindly upholds and internalizes Old South values, unable to see how those same values keep them unprogressively stuck in and divided by poverty and ignorance. Hurston’s reference to Foster’s song seems just such a marker of this behavior—the enabling of a romantic past that keeps southerners in a segregated state.

John Lowe writes that Hurston “points out that Stephen Foster made the Suwanee famous without having seen it, perhaps signaling to the reader that the fabled stereotype of this region will be exploded” (266). Susan Edwards Meisenhelder also argues that Hurston’s overall achievement in *Seraph* directly confronts Foster’s depictions: “Hurston thus paints a picture of racial and sexual domination in ironic contrast to the idealized relationships Stephen Foster immortalized and she alluded to in her title” (115). Hurston not only overturns the stereotypes of minstrelsy (like these critics suggest) but also she offers a revision of minstrel discourse where women and minorities can unite in resistance to patriarchal oppression in her explanation of the complex relationships that musical exchanges allow between black and white southerners—relationships which expose the contradictory blues ideals of tragedy and comedy in southern racial interactions. While she overturns Foster’s romantic depiction in some ways, Hurston also

reveals that a healthy interaction and connection—as in the song—exists in reflexive musical moments when Arvey comes together with Joe Kelsey; Foster’s myth becomes both true and untrue as Hurston depicts both a cohesive and coercive southern community.⁴ While Arvey and Joe might remain servants to Jim’s constructed paternalist system, through their music, Hurston implies the possibility of white women and minority cultures in forming a community resistant to southern patriarchy—a hidden resistance that also can be found in the history of minstrelsy. Hurston asks readers to unearth the critical and cultural history of minstrel music to specifically unmask and tie together performances of gender and race in a paternalist South, to show how music allowed for both resistance by and oppression of women and other underprivileged southerners.

While to contemporary eyes the minstrel tradition as exemplified by Foster’s lyrics reinforces stereotypes, Sarah Meer argues that like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (in which “Old Folks at Home” was employed in many stage productions), “Foster’s music also harbored ambiguities about slavery that allowed its users to make it mean a variety of things” (56). As uncovering the cultural history of minstrelsy will show, Hurston’s *Seraph* implies that minstrel shows were not only reproductions of a romantic South but also could be interpreted as hidden objections to the ways that a southern patriarchal system exploited women and African Americans—a connection Hurston asks readers to make in reflexive musical moments between Arvey and Joe. Meer’s documentation of abolitionist and antislavery uses of Foster’s work relates to Eric Lott’s study on minstrelsy, *Love and Theft*. Lott deconstructs the binary of criticism that surrounds minstrelsy—that it is either an attempted tribute to black culture or an

⁴ I am indebted to Christopher Reiger’s attention to the ambiguities present in *Seraph* as a “working class pastoral.” Reiger pointedly denounces any “either/or” critiques of Hurston’s attitudes towards race, class, and gender, as does my own reading of the text. While I appreciate his attention to the ambiguity in the novel, I question his straightforward reading of Arvey’s class ascendance and materialistic views as simply a positive experience.

idealistic racist stereotyping of black culture; like Meer, he stresses the ambiguity of responses to minstrelsy from both black and white audiences during the pre-Civil War era, suggesting that white working-class populaces were attracted to blackface theatre because it at once allowed them to admire African American humor and music, while at the same time controlling black culture, arguing for both a fascination with and renunciation of African American culture. A song like “Old Folks at Home,” as both Lott and Meer argue, not only could be valued for its sentimental, stereotypical rendering of the plantation, but also could serve as a coded protest to the loss and division of families during slavery—just as Arvay and the black community’s shared music evokes resistance to southern social discriminations. Lott’s overall thesis forges connections between the plight of working-class northern whites—usually males—and southern slaves. With respect to “Old Folks at Home,” Lott understands “minstrel-show nostalgia, usually for home and family life on the plantation...as a condensed, fortuitous mapping of white desire in dark skin” (190). Lott’s speculation is reflected in Hurston’s depictions of Jim as one who imitates and surrounds himself with black folk culture, but still exploits and controls the minorities for his business needs.⁵ However, Hurston also asks readers to consider a more genuine connection between white and black southerners in Arvay’s later musical connections with Joe Kelsey and the black community; Arvay’s thwarted desire to express musically her plight and frustrations ties her to the blues community in *Seraph*—just like the working-class women audience members who related their oppressions with that of the blackface slaves portrayed in minstrel shows.

⁵ While Lowe reads Jim as a more sympathetic character able to adapt and learn black folk cultural humor, Jim still exploits Joe Kelsey (as his “pet negro”) and Alfredo Corregio. For instance, Cynthia Ward argues that “Jim appropriates the vernacular for material and social gain,” suggesting that Jim’s appreciation for African American expression is really just a useful business tool. Besides Ward, see Brannon Costello and Laura Dubek for detailed readings about Jim’s exploitation of his black workers as well as the complicated nature of Arvay’s complicity in this. I agree with Costello who sees Arvay as another casualty of paternalism, while Dubek argues that Arvay knowingly participates in southern racist ideologies.

Hurston evokes Foster's song to ask readers to uncover the intersections between race and gender represented in early minstrel performances which suggests that all minority communities suffer (albeit under different constructions) at the hands of southern paternalism. As Lott describes, in minstrel productions and music, African Americans were often portrayed as extremely feminine and weak: "like women, blacks were considered creatures of feeling at a time when feeling was paramount in the culture" (32). While white men might be creatures of reason, representations of African Americans (like those of women in early plantation fiction) were often associated with feminine and inferior arts like music and theatre (Lott 33). The sentiments represented in minstrelsy certainly reinforced the white patriarch's imagined need to care for and control women and African Americans alike.

Many minstrel show plots revolved around "male mastery" over women's bodies, further exemplifying the male need to objectify and possess women (Lott 135). In sexually explicit minstrel songs—which both policed and indulged in fantasies of the black phallus and miscegenation—Lott argues that black men and working-class white women act as "figures for a thrilling and repellent sexual anarchy" because black men and working-class white women were often typed as "dirty, disruptive, and disorderly" (122). Because black and white women were often used to the same stereotypical ends as black men in minstrel shows, white female audience members related to the blackface characters: "If for workingmen the plantation was implicitly an ideal image of the family, for women, the family felt, well, like a plantation" (Lott 198). Though Lott speaks to how northern working-class women related plantations to factories, readers also consider how southern white women might relate their own lives on the pedestal to the lives of their slaves—a connection Hurston later cements in reflexive musical moments of resistance between Arvey and Joe. As Lott argues, "it appears that some women, in discerning the real

continuities between these spheres, understood the ways in which paternalist familial ideologies (such as those of slavery) infected freedom in the home” (198). In fact, “the vogue of the mournful plantation song”—a song like Foster’s “Old Folks at Home”—“seems in more than its sentimental appeal a subtle product of women’s identification with (blackface) slaves” (Lott 198). By opening her novel with a reference to minstrelsy, Hurston asks readers to re-examine the minstrel tradition and uncover the complex ways this music exposed interracial bonds between southern gender and race performances; critically investigating minstrelsy also exposes an oppressive connection between the expected performances for women and African Americans under paternalism. Foster’s mythical song becomes both true and untrue; while this romantic depiction of the South negatively stereotyped women and African Americans, it also ironically forged bonds between them as white working-class women related their own performances with those of the black community. If the struggles of white women and African Americans can be partially conflated through minstrelsy, Hurston’s use of Foster’s song foreshadows not only an unmasking of complex racial relationships in the South, but also the way gender constructions and oppressions underpin such relationships.

While Hurston sets the stage for an interrogation of the confusing South (as supported by gender and race divides) with minstrelsy, the majority of *Seraph* meditates on the gender performance of Arvey Henson—whose music offers her limited resistance to the construct of southern womanhood. Before Arvey submits to Jim Meserve, she turns to religion to shield her from her sinful lust for her preacher and brother-in-law Carl and to keep her protected from other suitors, supposing that the church might offer women some safety from the patriarchal strictures of marriage. However, Arvey’s unmarried status serves to other her in the church community: “...Arvey was all of twenty-one, and according to local custom, should have been married at

least five years ago” (SS 3). Hurston’s portrayal of Arvey as similar to the black folk causes the white Sawley community to further discriminate against Arvey. Hurston again forges bonds between white women and African American culture when she describes Arvey’s zealous religiosity: “Arvey had turned from the world. Such religious fervor was not unknown among white people, but it certainly was uncommon...Excessive ceremonies were things that Negroes went in for. White folks just didn’t go on like that” (SS 4). Even while the church pretends to be moved by Arvey’s pledge to missionary service, Hurston tells how the “community soon put Arvey Henson down as queer, if not a little ‘tetched’” (SS 6). Chuck Jackson notes that music in the text is also explicitly linked to black culture and that Arvey’s organ talent makes her “more like blacks than whites”(19). Hurston reveals that the church is not a safe harbor of protection or musical expression, but instead a paternalist institution that discriminates on a gender and race basis. As an unmarried, zealously religious woman, Arvey fails to live up to society’s expectations of the white woman, and her organ talents only lend to her “queer” status.

Although Hurston ties Arvey’s othered status to that of African Americans in Sawley, she also uses Arvey’s musical status to ask readers to uncover white women’s performances in southern music and the ways those performances reveal southern gender oppression. Jackson (who attacks Arvey as obsessed with her whiteness) argues that Hurston figures Arvey’s musical talents and religious fervor as markers of black culture “to shed light on the way in which Arvey’s own behavior does not exist in an isolated, pure-white space which has been passed down from generation to generation, but rather there exists more cultural overlap than she might suspect” (20). However in his focus on how black cultural forms infiltrate the dominant white world, Jackson neglects Hurston’s attention to how the white woman’s organ or piano playing also positively shaped an interracial popular music. While Hurston connects Arvey to black

culture through her music and religion to expose white essentialism, she also signifies on the historical role of the white female pianist to interrogate how gendered musical performances further illuminate the interrelated racial oppressions under southern paternalism.

Hurston tells us that Arvay's music is the one thing that sets her apart from her sister, Lorraine, to whom she feels at first so terribly inferior:

Arvay could play music and Lorraine just couldn't learn it. Arvay had been asked to spend a summer with her mother's sister in Madison one time, and this aunt could play on the organ some. Arvay had shown great interest and a quick ability and had surprised the family on her return to Sawley in the fall, by being able to pick out melodies, and to play a few songs with full harmony all the way through. The Henson parlor organ, which had been bought years ago for style and had seldom been sounded, began to be used. Arvay was in there nearly every day practicing and practicing. She showed herself very apt with music. (SS 9)

Arvay's musical abilities set her apart from her sister and also link her to a long line of piano-playing white women in the southern literary canon—for example Belle in John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* and Mademoiselle Reisz in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*—two texts in which piano playing becomes an expressive outlet for female characters confused and oppressed by patriarchal society.⁶ These characterizations of white female pianists descend from English Victorian novels, which as Mary Burgan argues, often utilized such domestic figures as either “harmonizing” (such as might be seen in *Swallow Barn*) or “resistant” (as might be seen in *The Awakening*) (43). In *Seraph*, Arvay first uses her organ talents to resist patriarchal oppression, but she is eventually coerced by Jim's paternalistic conception of community.

Instead of transforming Arvay's talents to harmonize with southern patriarchy, Hurston shows

⁶ This is another musical trope that occurs throughout southern women's writings, which will be addressed in the first chapter (on classical music) of the book-length project that stems from this project. Note that beyond Arvay in *Seraph*, the white woman piano player seems to symbolize an oppressed figure in Lillian Hellman's play, *The Little Foxes*, where Birdie's musical talents are downplayed and mocked by her money-grubbing husband; in Eudora Welty's story “June Recital,” Virgie Rainey seemingly escapes this role by quitting her piano lessons and playing popular music at the local movie theater—a move which separates her from the rest of the community, but also contributes to its stereotyping of her as a sort of “fallen” woman. Note, too, Ms. Eckstein's “outsider” position in “June Recital;” she connects to the community through her playing, but at the same time, is deemed peculiar as a German old maid.

how Arvay's new-found complicity silences the white woman's musical abilities completely. Arvay first resists Sawley's and Jim's marriage plans for her through her role as church organist, but later Arvay's expressive talents are completely absorbed into her performance of southern womanhood.

Delia Caparoso Konzett notes that Arvay's "unusual and refined musical talent" contribute to Hurston's portrait of Arvay as "retain[ing] the antebellum image of white Southern womanhood" (120). As Anne Goodwyn Jones argues, southern white womanhood constructs southern women as powerless and overly sacrificial, and when Arvay begins to play the part, it leaves her confused about and ignorant of her predicament, unable to perform her duties as a church organist and leader.⁷ Arvay's poor cracker status would normally exclude her from the privileged ranks of southern womanhood, but in a changing modern South, her marriage to Jim offers Arvay the chance to climb onto the pedestal. Jim constructs Arvay as "a king's daughter out of a story-book with [her] long, soft golden hair"—a "deserving" and "noble" woman who is "due a much higher place" than the turpentine camps of her youth (SS 263).⁸ But Arvay's performance of this higher position means that she will simply have to forego education—both in a formal sense and in the simple sense of knowing her own husband's life plans. When Jim hints at a marriage proposal, Arvay asks for time to make up her mind since she plans to give her life in service as a church organist and missionary. At this response, Jim tells her, "so far as making up your mind is concerned, that matters a difference. Women folks don't have no mind to make up nohow. They wasn't made for that" (SS 25). Jim simply wants Arvay to love, marry, and

⁷ As Jones describes, the imagined role of the southern white woman "is a marble statue, beautiful and silent, eternally inspiring and eternally still" (4). Furthermore, this image denies women "authentic selfhood" and creates them as "sexually pure, pious, deferent to external authority, and content with their place in the home" (Jones 4).

⁸ Feminist critics of *Seraph* have long attested to Jim's position as a chauvinist white male. See Costello, Meisenhelder, St. Clair, Wall. John Lowe also concedes that Jim acts chauvinistically and suggests that such hyper-masculine behavior acts as a mask for Jim's inability to express true feelings of love.

sleep with him—to take away her possible freedoms as a female church organist and activist.⁹ Cynthia Ward argues that “Arvay’s identity—insignificant as it is—is located and fixed within a rigid structure of the white working-class community’s values. Jim’s challenge to her to play with and redefine that structure in effect threatens her tiny self” (81). Arvay’s continued disbelief that she was meant to play the part emerges, when time and time again, she fails to act like the southern woman and disappoints Jim; in repeated moments when Jim expresses anger and frustration with Arvay, Hurston exposes Arvay’s wifehood as a clearly constructed role that must be performed correctly in order to, as Jones argues, “justify the perpetuation of the hegemony of the male sex, the upper and middle classes, and the white race” (10). If the southern wife refuses to serve the southern father and husband, his overall social control becomes questionable.

As in the earlier scenes where Arvay is excluded from the church community because of her racialized musical and religious fervor, Hurston asks readers to consider how the southern institution of religion props up the institution of patriarchy; the southern woman should serve her husband as she serves God, faithfully and without question. Jim uses religion to build his idea of how their marriage should be conducted when, echoing a particularly Pauline philosophy, he says “A woman who knows her master is all right, and she answers to his commands” (SS 33). Jim also invokes a religious hymn to describe Arvay’s role: “I told you, like that old hymn says, marriage with me never was designed to make your pleasures less. Rest easy...” (SS 74). Arvay is particularly unsure of what Jim expects, and she begins to view her marriage to Jim as related to southern religion: “But this was like coming through religion, Arvay considered...Put your

⁹ See Schweiger, “Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South” and Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion.” In Esther Rothenbusch’s essay on America’s nineteenth-century hymn tradition, she discusses women’s prominent roles in shaping religious music (and in turn “broader social values”), concluding that women could use song for “protest, praise or an expression of women’s commitment to live out their faith in a changing society and time” (191). Similarly, Beth Barton Schweiger and Lynn Lyerly both suggest that while women’s roles in church were often restricted, services and revivals still offered a public arena where they might exercise some power.

whole faith in the mercy of God and believe. Eternal life, Heaven and its immortal glory were yours if you only would believe. The hold-back was that it was not all that easy to believe. That was just the trouble” (SS 26). Arvay’s thoughts reveal her class insecurities as a “cracker” woman undeserving of the high-bred Jim, unable to faithfully perform the role of southern wife.

If at first Arvay expresses disbelief in her place in both heaven and marriage, she later conflates Jim with God, as Hurston underscores the elements of white womanhood that ask a woman to obey her husband as she would God (a theme, as I argue in successive chapters, that Walker and Lee Smith use music to tackle in *The Color Purple* and *The Devil’s Dream*). Hurston makes this particularly clear shortly before Earl’s death, as Arvay thinks to herself, “What God neglected, Jim Meserve took care of. Between the two, God and Jim, all things came to pass. They took charge of things. She had been praying ever since she found out that Earl was surrounded in that swamp. So far, God had not made a move so it was up to Jim” (SS 152). Later when Jim leaves and issues Arvay with an ultimatum, Hurston sarcastically describes the imagined connections between southern men and southern gods: “God and the Devil can relieve their melancholy by the exercise of power. Men, therefore, feel themselves more or less god-like to the extent to which they can create happiness, tears, and terror among their fellowmen” (SS 269).¹⁰ However, Jim’s power—as the white southern patriarch—also depends on Arvay’s performance of southern womanhood; because white women’s musical abilities contributed to this performance, Arvay attempts to take her place as the parlor pianist in Jim’s life.

Arvay’s piano playing as a memorial site asks readers to carefully assess the oppressive tactics in white women’s tenuous privilege to play piano. By giving white women freedom through their musical talents, white men both praised and controlled them; women’s piano

¹⁰ See Costello: this is the crux of his argument, with which I strongly agree. He argues that paternalism leaves the southern white wife even more powerless than her husband’s black workers. See his reading of a certain scene where Jeff exerts more control over the Meserve homestead than Arvay ever could, p. 31.

playing was a form of parlor entertainment that was not encouraged beyond the domestic sphere.¹¹ Arvay's talents rarely extend outside of the home, except in her thwarted attempts with the church organ and later in her son Kenny's talents. In her depictions, Hurston asks readers to recall how women were shut out of the professional musical sphere in order to keep the image of the southern woman firmly intact.

In his "social history" of the piano, Arthur Loesser argues that the piano (as object) is gendered feminine, and from its beginnings as a "house furnishing," women were the chief pianists because they had more leisure time and because the piano was the only proper instrument that reinforced a feminine image.¹² For white southerners, like other white Americans, antebellum women pianists were kept sheltered in the home while men were afforded positions as professional concert pianists. In Christie Anne Farnham's study of college-educated antebellum white women, music education was the most popular of "ornamental" or "extra" studies that contributed to the image of the belle as "accomplished" (86-7). Farnham describes, "The purpose of a musical education was home entertainment. Consequently, instruction was organized with a view toward developing a repertoire of pieces that might be enjoyed by family and friends. Sentimental compositions were popular," and women's musical instruction was relegated to simple pieces (87). In fact, tunes like "Old Folks at Home" were

¹¹ In fact, in her essay, "Passed Away is the Piano Girl," Judith Tick speaks of the transition from women's roles as domestic pianists to their progress in professional orchestras. Around the turn of the century, a female group named the Fadettes combined vaudeville acts with symphonies because they were not accepted in the orchestral world. Tick makes a connection between such female groups and later African American minstrel groups: "Just as black performers entered the entertainment world through genres that exploited racial stereotypes, women formed their own separate orchestras. They too got their start within vernacular rather than cultivated institutions" (332).

¹² Loesser argues that women could not play flutes because they pursed their lips while doing so, and this pursing could lead to other imaginative acts. Similarly cellists played with uncrossed legs, and violinists twisted their bodies in an "unnatural" way and sometimes developed bruises or scars (65). Therefore, since women were seated and fairly hidden as pianists, the piano allowed women to uphold an image of chastity and purity: "There she could sit, gentle and genteel, and be an outward symbol of her family's ability to pay for her education and her decorativeness, of its striving for culture and the graces of life, of its pride in the fact that she did not have to work and that she did not 'run after' men" (65). Tick has also argued that, in the United States, pianos "were instruments for domestic entertainment and required no facial exertions or body movements that interfered with the portrait of grace the lady musician was to emanate" (327).

directed at female pianists; Ken Emerson suggests that Foster's sentimental songs were marketed to be purchased by white women: "In an era when it was widely considered unladylike to appear on the stage (much less go on the road), most public performers...were men. It was these men's performances that popularized songs so that women would purchase the music" (165). In making this connection, readers see how Arvey's piano performances reflect the history of Foster's song, again underscoring (as Lott argues) how women related to sentimental compositions that exposed the patriarchal restrictions of the home for women and African Americans. Just as minstrelsy suggested that African Americans remain in stereotypically demeaning roles for white audiences, parlor piano playing kept women performing the feminine ideal of southern womanhood for their husbands and communities.

Still, not all women suffered in their roles as home-bound musicians; as the music industry progressed, so did women's roles as professional musicians. As Farnham argues, colleges spent a great deal of money on instruments like pianos, and women's early musical education should not be dismissed as trivial: "The cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities was an important achievement even if most students had neither the talent nor the opportunity to study at sufficient length to reach advanced levels" (88). This exposure to the piano and other "suitable" feminine instruments led to what Tick describes as an evolution in women's rights in the music world during the early 1900s. Jane Hassinger argues that this early training led to women's participation in jazz: "The long established tradition of training genteel black and white young ladies in piano and music theory provided the entrée for many women into jazz playing and arranging...as the jazz craze grew and work opportunities increased, band-leaders needed arrangements set to paper" (196). Black women (like Lil Armstrong for example) benefited especially well from this growth, but fewer white women entered the jazz scene because "jazz

was generally regarded as black music—exotic, rough, and having to do with unsavory subjects such as sex, drugs, and crime” (Hassinger 197).

Hurston represents Arvay as a burgeoning pianist to underscore these limited opportunities for white women to develop their artistic talents, which in turn underscores larger gender oppressions in the South. Although Lowe argues that “Arvay, hardly an artist or would-be business woman, has neither the aspiration, training, or inherent talent to be anything” other than a housewife (263), Hurston suggests that Arvay does possess real musical talent that is never nurtured; Arvay complains—in moments which will be discussed later—that she never had the opportunity to musically develop and express herself. When Arvay takes Earl to live at her mother’s, she considers her ability to earn a living through music lessons and sewing. Arvay knows that her talents can serve her as a career, but class also comes into play when she understands where her family stands on the economic ladder: “If she was to give music lessons, she would need a piano. Where was the money coming from for that? Then it was a considerable distance for children to walk to take lessons” (SS 134). Arvay’s lack of musical career opportunities stems from class position (a class position that mirrors Bone’s position and inability to become a gospel star in Allison’s text); her family literally lives on the margins of Sawley life, making them powerless to progress.¹³ Instead of struggling to teach music, Arvay finds herself a slave to Jim Meserve and the comfortable life he can provide—a life where she is expected not to work, except in her service to Jim and their children (notably, Alice Walker and Lee Smith revise these circumstances when they show how women artists are able to use their talents to earn a living and to challenge their roles as wives and mothers). Because Jim constructs Arvay from the mold of southern womanhood, her piano talents never develop into a blues or

¹³ See Chuck Jackson for a reading that combines class theories about white trash with twentieth-century eugenics studies to read Arvay as desperately wanting to shed her trash status. Jackson insists that Hurston parodies any notion of pure whiteness and constructs Arvay as her ultimate joke on the subject.

jazz career (even though she loves the blues ballads sung to her on her wedding night); Arvay's performance of the imagined ideal of southern womanhood imposes limits on her creativity that keep her in her place as a parlor musician—a performance that overpowers any blues feelings she holds in common with Joe Kelsey, *Seraph's* resident bluesman.

In Joe's character, Hurston introduces to the novel the male blues musician, akin to Teacake in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (a trope which, as I later argue, Alice Walker expands upon and critiques in *The Color Purple*). When Jim hears a blues tune in the air, he knows that he approaches Joe. Lowe astutely argues that “the fact that a disembodied blues voice represents [Joe] initially makes him representative of black folk culture” (285). When Jim accuses Joe and the black community of living only for Saturday nights at the jook, Joe answers, “Fact of the matter is, I knows youse dead right. But if you ever was to be a Negro just *one* Saturday night, you'd never want to be white no more” (SS 44). Joe's absolute preference of blues culture over white culture echoes Hurston's celebrations of the jook and the blues in *Mules and Men* and *Dust Tracks on a Road* and also attests to the power of agency afforded by the blues in a patriarchal South.¹⁴ After Joe's success with the whiskey still, he becomes even more emblematic of a bragging, wandering bluesman who neglects his wife Dessie at home: “Joe bought himself a car and announced that he had got to be people in Citrabelle. Doing things on a high-toned scale. Heavy-set Daddy. If a woman asked him for a nickel, he gave her a ten-dollar bill. Ask him for a drink of likker, he bought her a whiskey-still”(SS 117). Hurston's musical rhyming description of Joe invokes not only the picture of the bluesman—a “heavy-set daddy”

¹⁴ Starting with Hurston's comments in “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” she describes the “jook as the most important place in America” (89). The jook is the founding site of blues and jazz. As Hurston describes in *Dust Tracks*, the black folk sing to establish themselves as dominant (146), they sing while in prison and while they work (146-149), they sing while in the jooks (149-151). For the black folk, singing acts as a powerful form of expression. Hurston's folklore collection, *Mules and Men*, is also filled with the songs she collected, suggesting again that music is at the core of communications for the rural southern black community.

getting into trouble—but also reveals the way that Joe (perhaps unconsciously) absorbs Jim’s paternalist behavior by becoming “people” in Citrabelle and disrupting the family life he builds with Dessie (a character trait Walker further criticizes in her portraits of Albert and Harpo). While Joe can exercise some power and agency through the blues on Saturday nights at the jook, Joe’s economic and social power emerges only when he performs his role (as Jim’s servant and admirer) in the South’s paternalist system.

Joe’s internalization of oppressive plantation values extends to his treatment of women. He advises Jim to use violence as a way of taming Arvay: “Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make ‘em knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in they mouth and ride ‘em hard and stop ‘em short. They’s all alike, Boss. Take ‘em and break ‘em” (SS 46). Readers might easily categorize Joe as a misogynist and critique his character as another example of violent male domination as Konzett suggests: “This conversation between white master and black servant foregrounds a complex cross-racial patriarchal bond that upholds the oppression of women and places Joe, the pet negro, in a position of complicity. Joe does not simply affirm Jim’s position of patriarchal power but shares it as a male” (121). Rather than depicting Joe’s behavior as complicit, Hurston shows how Joe’s advice stems from his continued absorption of the dominant white culture’s exploitative and abusive tactics; the patriarchal bond he shares with Jim is not consciously complicit but ingrained. In Hurston’s construction of Joe as a bluesman, she asks readers to recognize Joe’s “blues advice” (as Baker terms it) to Jim in the context of blues violence—a violence inherited from plantation culture’s lingering effects in the modern South, which Hurston recalls to expose an intertwining racial and gender oppression rather than a shared patriarchal bond through the oppression of women.

In *Seems Like Murder Here*, Adam Gussow uncovers the ways that bluesmen and women—literary characters or musical protagonists—use the blues to address the white world’s lynching of African Americans, arguing that even blues expressions of violence against other black subjects “was an essential, if sometimes destructive, way in which black southern blues people articulated their somebodiness, insisted on their indelible individuality” (5). Like the blues musicians that Gussow describes, Joe’s blues advice, while violent, does allow him temporary agency. This “intimate violence,” as Gussow names it, was not simply male-on-male, but was inextricably linked to sexual freedom as well: “the intimate violence (and somewhat rarer retributive violence) of blues culture not infrequently has a sexual dimension” (10). While Gussow speaks of men and women’s jealousy and infidelity leading to violence, no doubt Joe Kelsey’s advice to Jim to “break” Arvay could be cited as a form of “intimate violence” (especially since Jim subsequently rapes Arvay), which Joe implies is frequently used between black men and women.¹⁵ What Gussow’s study adds to a reading of Joe’s advice is that Joe is not simply a mistreating, woman-hating bluesman, but a bluesman whose violent ideas about “riding” women stem from a larger systemic racism that devalues black humanity. Even though Hurston does not explicitly tell us that Joe has suffered from racial discrimination, her characterization of Joe as a bluesman suggests such a history, and we later watch as Jim

¹⁵ Joe’s comments to Jim about “breaking in” Arvay lead to Jim’s utter domination over Arvay in the controversial rape scene before their marriage—a scene that continues to baffle critics because of Arvay’s complicity in and even enjoyment of Jim’s sexual conquering of her. See Meisenhelder for a strong reading of the scene as rape that leads to Jim’s ultimate objectification of Arvay, with which I am inclined to agree. While Arvay does seemingly enjoy the rape and, as John Lowe argues, only refers to it as “rape” because she fears for her reputation, afterwards Arvay is broken; Hurston’s referral to Arvay as enslaved only bolsters Arvay’s broken state. Attempting to outline the similarities between the rape of Arvay under the mulberry tree with Janie’s pear-tree experience in *Their Eyes*, Reiger suggests that Joe’s “equivocation of women, horses, and trees provides Jim with justification for his act, but Hurston’s depiction of the scene complicates any attempt to neatly categorize Arvay as passive victim” (110). While the similarities are striking in the rape scene itself—as Reiger points out the phrasing “a pain remorseless sweet” is a commonality which cannot be ignored—Arvay later refers to herself as a “slave” to Jim. I would suggest that Hurston connects Joe Kelsey’s plight as a bluesman to Arvay’s plight as a white woman; both characters have here internalized the plantation culture so readily romanticized in “Old Folks at Home,” becoming slaves to a modern rendition of the patriarchal South.

continually takes advantage of Joe's labor skills.¹⁶ Joe's incitement to "knuckle" Arvey reveals the violence Joe has internalized to the point of advising such violence against women as a form of power and dominance. Hurston suggests that black men imitate violent white male behavior left over from plantation culture—a behavior that Walker's female characters challenge in *The Color Purple*.¹⁷ While Joe can be read as internalizing the dominant white world's systemic abuse of women, his blues also offer him a temporary resistance in which Arvey shares; Hurston undermines Jim's ultimate power in reflexive musical moments between Arvey and the black community. When viewed separately, Arvey's performance as parlor pianist and Joe's performance as bluesman seemingly conform to southern paternalist expectations, but when the two merge their performances, Hurston shows how a resistant musical community can challenge dominant southern narratives of gender oppression and segregation.

On Jim and Arvey's wedding night (the night that Arvey officially steps into her role as the southern woman), Joe leads a group of African Americans in serenading the couple outside of their bedroom window. Hurston reminds readers of the long history of African American musical forms in the South: "[Arvey] stood in her bare feet and wedding nightgown and lived through the serenade. Instrumental pieces, blues sung by men and some by women; spirituals, not sad and forlorn, but sung with a drummy rhythm to them; work songs and ballads" (SS 58-9). Through Arvey's reaction, Hurston again underscores Arvey's identification with the black folk community:

The music outside did something strange and new to Arvey. The strains induced pictures before her eyes. They conjured up odors and tastes. Streams of color played across the sky for her, and she tasted exotic fruits. Looking out into the woods for the first time

¹⁶ Just as Gussow suggests, scholars Ralph Ellison and Craig Werner contend that the blues arise from the brutality of racism and racist experiences. See Ellison's essays on music in *Shadow and Act* and Werner's *Playing the Changes*, which riffs off of Ellison's comments.

¹⁷ Take for instance, some of the best examples of white masters "breaking in" their slaves (male or female) in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life*.

from inside. The sky-scraping pines became feeling beings, standing there forever watching, and watching, and whispering with their branches in a rumbling song. They were the tree-men with the many toes probing into the earth. The giants who stood forever on one foot and waited. (SS 59)

In this reflexive musical moment, Arvay's instinctive identification with the music allows for a temporary resistance to prescribed gender and racial boundaries. While Arvay should be busy performing her new role as southern woman (a role which would further uphold those boundaries), she instead becomes a participating audience member who listens to the black community's musical performances. As Baker argues, "for this one moment, Arvay is able to turn her attention away from herself and away from her feelings of insecurity. She is not alone, but part of someone else, as well as part of the land that lies beyond her. It is the blues, performed by Joe Kelsey and his friends, that evokes such a response from Arvay" (108). On her wedding night, instead of performing her prescribed role, Arvay takes on a different role—that of a white listener who bonds with the black community through the comic and tragic sentiments of the blues.

Through her depiction of Arvay's ability to feel and live through these blues—to truly participate as a listener—Hurston revises her earlier writings on the white world's understanding of black music. In a frequently-quoted passage from "How it Feels to be Colored Me," Hurston compares her excited response to Harlem jazz to her white counterpart's unmoved response.¹⁸ As her white friend quietly comments on the "good music they have here," Hurston feels a continent divides them and mourns that the white male friend has "only heard what I felt" ("How it Feels"

¹⁸ As the jazz musicians begin to improvise, Hurston finds herself taken back to the music's African origins: "I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark *yeeoooww!* I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow, and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something—give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly" (828).

828-9). Hurston carefully distinguishes between “hearing” and “feeling” the music, suggesting that her companion’s racial (and perhaps gender) status does not allow him to understand the musical protests offered in jazz. James H. Cone argues for white people’s inability to “feel” black music as stemming from a lack of love: “White people obviously cannot understand the love that black people have for each other. People who enslave humanity cannot understand the meaning of human freedom; freedom comes only to those who struggle for it in the context of the community of the enslaved...the blues are openness to feeling and the emotions of physical love” (47). However, because Arvey is similarly enslaved as a woman—particularly a woman in love with a mistreating man—Hurston’s depiction suggests that she can “feel” the blues; Hurston again uses a reflexive musical moment to reflect the interconnectedness of gender and racial oppression in the South.

Similar to Hurston’s own early reactions to jazz, on her wedding night, Arvey sees many colors, tastes the “exotic” nature around her, and personifies the woods in folkloric idioms. As in her description of Arvey’s religion, Hurston creates an affinity between Arvey and the black community—one that Arvey does not deny but instead embraces; unlike Arvey’s experiences with the church, the Sawley community cannot police Arvey’s identification with the black folk in this moment. Contradictory to Hurston’s earlier descriptions in “How it Feels to be Colored Me,” Hurston intimates that Arvey can truly feel these blues, especially a certain song that exposes the oppressive power of love, which again stresses Arvey’s plight as a woman under Jim Meserve’s paternalist rule.

In reprinting the lyrics from a specific blues song during this moment, Hurston asks readers to reflect on the blues history represented; the song that so touches Arvey is “Careless Love,” sung by a black woman about the destructive powers of love—a blues and jazz standard

that was often reinvented, perhaps most famously by W.C. Handy and later Ray Charles. As Hurston describes, “Arvey resolved that she would learn that song the very next day. The song was an old, old ballad and it haunted you. Sweet and bitter mixed up in just the right amounts...Arvey was all but moved to tears” (SS 59). The song bemoans the fate, while simultaneously celebrating the strength, of the lover: “careless love” acts as quickly as wine and breaks “the heart of many a poor girl” causing them to “weep,” “moan” and abandon their “happy home” (SS 59). While the song takes love for its subject, the protagonist warns against its destructive powers. While Handy and Charles may have popularized the song from a male perspective, “Careless Love” was also in blues queen Bessie Smith’s repertoire. As Angela Davis has argued, Bessie Smith (along with Ma Rainey) sang songs about love which “openly challenged the gender politics implicit in traditional cultural representations of marriage and heterosexual love relationships” (41). As readers recognize the history behind this memorial site, they conclude that Hurston certainly invokes this tradition of women’s blues to not only interrogate black working-class women’s plights with patriarchy (as Davis argues) but also to show a cross-racial connection between southern women under this oppressive system.

Hurston does not return to the song again in *Seraph*, suggesting that Arvey never learns it. Even if she never learns the tune musically, she certainly lives it, as she continually battles with Jim and begins to ascend to the white southern woman’s pedestal. In Arvey’s “feeling” the blues, Hurston suggests that white women share in certain sentiments behind African American music, specifically music like “Careless Love” that challenges women’s expected roles in love and marriage. The song also serves as a symbol of Arvey’s thwarted musical potential after marriage; Loesser speaks of “the ancient observation that feminine keyboard practices droop sharply after the mating season” (457). After Arvey’s marriage, even though Jim provides her

with a new status-symbol piano, Hurston makes little mention of Arvay's talent and love for music until she passes it on to her son, Kenny—where her potential is stifled by her continued performance as wife and mother. Still, in this reflexive musical moment, Arvay feels a connection to the African American community, perhaps specifically the woman in love, and Hurston forges connections between white and black women's plights in a paternalist South. However, Arvay's resistance to paternalism is fleeting; directly after this moment, Jim rather condescendingly argues for Joe as his "pet negro" or his most trusted black worker who is "different" from any other black man (SS 60). Arvay, in her complicit performance, recognizes what this means and seems delighted when Jim offers her Joe's wife, Dessie, as a help-mate. Through Jim and Arvay's designation of Joe and Dessie as pets, Hurston shows how southern patriarchy polices any bridging between women and the black community.

While Arvay feels temporarily linked to the black community, her performance as a southern woman spurs racist ideologies, which won't allow for lasting connections to be made. As Meisenhelder argues, Arvay shares much in common with other minority female figures in *Seraph* like Belinda and Fast Mary: "The relationships all three women have with white men are built on the elevation of the male and the dehumanization of the female" (109). While Meisenhelder makes an astute point, Arvay cannot relate to any other woman in the novel once she plays the part of the isolated southern woman on the pedestal. For instance, when Arvay believes Joe to be of more importance to Jim than she is and finally succeeds in forcing the Kelseys off the Meserve property, she soon realizes her mistake and expresses her intense desire for Dessie:

[Arvay] was too proud to own it to Jim, but Arvay missed them, and wanted them back very much. It was denied her the simple way of just going to Dessie and telling her to move on back. . . . Keeping her remorse to herself, Arvay could not know how Dessie wanted to return. With Joe cutting the tom-fool like he was, Dessie had small pleasure in being the

mistress of her own home. A word of welcome from Arvey would have brought her and her children back. (SS 118)

While the two women are brought together by their struggles under patriarchy, Arvey's performance as the southern woman denies her the comfort of Dessie's friendship; both women suffer at the hands of a race- and gender-role system that segregates them and leaves them unhappy. Unlike the southern black blues women of this same era, Hurston's portrait of Arvey disrupts any sense of an interracial female community.

This blues women's community is evident in Hurston's earlier folklore and fiction works and also inspires Walker's vision of a womanist blues community in *The Color Purple*. Hurston's critiques about the poor appropriation of black culture by white women dancers and singers in "Characteristics of Negro Expression" account for the glorification of strong black women throughout her autobiography and folklore collection—for example, Big Sweet in *Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Mules and Men*.¹⁹ Hurston intersperses music with folktales throughout these works, from the blues renditions on Joe Clarke's porch to the hoodoo chants of New Orleans. When Hurston enters Polk County, Florida on her travels, the women seem to rule the community. She meets Babe, who is jailed for shooting her husband but later released, and Big Sweet, who participates in the lying and story-telling and can handle a pistol and knife better than any man. Big Sweet emerges as a blues woman straight out of Bessie Smith's songs when she wields her switchblade to save Hurston from the jealous Lucy, another blues woman ready to stab Hurston for talking to her man. As Hurston describes, Big Sweet proved a loyal friend and a great help for Hurston's work: "Big Sweet helped me to collect material in a big way. She had no idea what I wanted with it, but if I wanted it, she meant to see that I got it. She pointed out people that knew songs and stories. She wouldn't stand for balkiness on their part. We held two

¹⁹ See Adam Gussow's chapter in *Seems Like Murder Here* for an excellent reading of Big Sweet and Hurston's relationship and how Big Sweet's character ultimately influences characterizations of Teacake in *Their Eyes*.

lying contests, story-telling contests to you, and Big Sweet passed on who rated the prizes” (*Dust Tracks* 154). In her memories of Big Sweet, Hurston reveals a resistant community that existed between southern black women; Big Sweet not only helps Hurston with her work, but also Big Sweet is willing to fight and possibly die for her friend. As Big Sweet explains the dangers of inexperienced fighting to Hurston, she tells Hurston, “But don’t you bother ‘bout no fighting. You ain’t like me. You don’t even sleep with no mens. I wanted to be a virgin one time, but I couldn’t keep it up. I needed the money too bad. But I think it’s nice for you to be like that. You just keep on writing down them lies. I’ll take care of all de fighting” (DT 155). Hurston underscores the class issues of the black community through Big Sweet’s words; Big Sweet has to fight for and prostitute herself to survive. Yet through Arvay in *Seraph* (as well as in Janie’s time with Joe Clarke in *Their Eyes*), Hurston reveals that residing on the pedestal of southern womanhood produced different challenges for survival. Hurston shows how Arvay’s position leaves her without a sense of female community as her friendships with other women are ultimately mediated by Jim.

Hurston’s memories of Big Sweet in the Polk County jooks and lying contests reveal a strong community of women who protect each other, much like the protagonists depicted in blues songs of the day.²⁰ Unlike the isolated woman on the pedestal, blues women formed relationships with one another—even if sometimes antagonistic—that resisted and transmuted southern gender roles. While Gussow argues that Big Sweet is reincarnated in Teacake in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Big Sweet is also present in Hurston’s transformation of Janie—a blues woman who learns to fight for herself and also maintains her sense of dignity. Hurston uses the characteristics she found so admirable in Big Sweet and the other women of the jook to foster

²⁰ For superb readings of 1920s blues women and their lyrics, see the afore-mentioned Angela Davis’s *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, and for a specific reading of violence in women’s blues see chapter 4 in Adam Gussow’s *Seems Like Murder Here*.

Janie's strength in the final chapters of *Their Eyes*. As critics have noted time and again, Janie's friendship with Pheoby represents a female community that resists the male-dominated porch talk on Joe Clarke's storefront—no doubt a community represented by women like Big Sweet and the female blues singers of the 1920s. In her last novel, Hurston shows how Arvay's voice is policed by the white system of paternalism, which leaves her unable to sing the blues and restricts her connections with other underprivileged southern women. If in the conclusion of *Their Eyes*, as Gussow argues, Hurston presents us with a “kinder, gentler woman's blues” (271), in *Seraph*, Hurston reveals the sad consequences of white southern womanhood that leave Arvay isolated and unable to express herself. If readers compare the two texts, Hurston affirms Joe Kelsey's notion that black life is better than white life—that the blues offer some power and agency for the black community—even for blues women like Janie and Big Sweet who must fight to survive.

Unlike Janie, who never becomes a mother, Arvay's insecurity about her ability as the expected perfect mother, the imagined role Jim (and the Sawley community) sees her as fit for, shapes her racist ideology, as Hurston reveals how gender roles, particularly for white women, shaped racism. Earlier in the novel, we consider that Arvay (as a member of the Sawley community) has no appreciation for its violent history of domination, but she does know that she is a “daughter of the South” and therefore understands Jim's love of Joe as a “pet negro” (SS 60-61). Arvay's romantic acceptance of a condescending depiction of the relationship between black and white southerners foreshadows her blind racist discrimination against the Corregio family, specifically the Corregio women. Arvay cannot create a space (like Joe and Dessie's role as “pets”) for the Portuguese Corregios in the southern plantation system, so she types them as “foreigners”—non-white people who can't speak English and who smell distinctly different.

Hurston again underlines the use of religion to afford sexist and racist images when Arvay describes the Georgia-born Mrs. Corregio's choice to marry Alfredo: "The woman had gone back on her kind and fallen from grace" (SS 120). After Arvay's deformed son Earl is lynched when he attacks Lucy Ann Corregio—a tragedy that Hurston depicts ironically to correspond with Arvay's own racial hate—Arvay's dislike of the Portuguese family deepens.

When Kenny decides to quit college and move to New York to pursue his music career, Arvay invokes racism to deal with her feelings of abandonment; she cannot face her emotions and what she considers her failure as a mother, but instead must construct a racist portrait of the Corregio women to console herself. Hurston exposes the process of construction: "In order to hate deeply and completely, one must have an image stripped of everything but that which lends itself to scorn and hate" (SS 241). Arvay again relies on her religious fervor to build negative images of the Corregios:

Felicia and her mother were nothing but heathen idolaters, and not to be treated white. Arvay proceeded to set up images of them among the African savages and heathen Chinees. They were not fellow-humans, nothing of the kind. She stripped them bald-naked and mocked at them. They were as stark-naked as a jay-bird in whistling time, and Christianity was the gospel of sufficient clothes. (SS 242)

In Arvay's judgment, the word "white" equals "right." The image of nakedness recalls Arvay's own humiliation by Jim after Kenny takes Felicia to the football game (where he strips her naked because of her inability to act correctly), and Hurston wants readers to understand that Arvay learns this kind of hierarchal blame from Jim and her religious (mis)interpretations. Arvay revels in "her home-made picture" of the Corregios, knowing that God will strike them down as evil, until she eventually pities them. Hurston succeeds in revealing the sticky web of white southern womanhood, religion, and racism; ultimately the role that Jim expects Arvay to play (as

bolstered by religion) leads Arvey to insecurely create racist configurations of those who she feels threaten her status.

While Arvey's protection and loss of Kenny fuel her created racist cruelty, Kenny's role as musician also deconstructs southern racist divides. As Baker suggests, "Kenny Meserve's development as a professional musician is the most obvious example in the novel of Hurston's desire to express the melding of cultures that makes up American art" (110). Hurston's portrait of Kenny also complicates any easy exchange of cultures; Kenny's music offers cultural exchange at the expense of the women's and African Americans' agency. Earlier in the novel, Kenny emerges as the picture of his father, Jim, especially in his unintended exploitation of black culture. Meisenhelder offers a short, but astute reading of Kenny's relationship with Joe and Dessie's daughter, Belinda, when Kenny unknowingly charges the townspeople to gape at Belinda's bare behind: "Even though he had not planned the consequences, it is certainly significant that Kenny profits from Belinda's humiliation and that Belinda sees no degradation in her situation. Although they are too young for their relationship to be sexual, it is—like the adult ones in the novel—built on female debasement and service to men" (109). While Meisenhelder is correct in identifying the gender politics in this scene, she makes little comment on the racial politics, which directly relate to Kenny's later exploitation of African American music—a connection between racial and gender oppression which Hurston repeatedly asks her readers to make through her use of music. Importantly, Kenny loves Belinda because of her artistic ability to stand on her head; this is what leads Kenny to offer Belinda up to the townspeople as a spectacle, and it is those townspeople who throw him money because they see her exposed. Perhaps, it is also significant that Belinda's talent is displayed at the train station and that Kenny feels moved to offer Belinda's talent in worship of the train (SS 109). The train—the age-old

symbol of the bluesman and his wandering from home—might recall Joe’s earlier blues advice about “breaking” and taking control of women. Whether knowingly or not, Kenny exploits Belinda’s assets to profit for himself; Kenny acts just like his father, who also speaks of his love and admiration for women and black southerners, but at the same time, repeatedly exploits them for their workmanship.²¹ Furthermore, Kenny’s actions recall the complex origins of and responses to minstrelsy—both the fascination with and exploitation of African American artistic talent.

Kenny’s early blues exploitation of Belinda reflects the earlier role of minstrelsy in the novel, as well as Hurston’s own comments in “Characteristics of Negro Expression” about the white community’s admiration for and poor imitation of black artistry. In the essay, Hurston writes:

Speaking of the use of Negro material by white performers, it is astonishing that so many are trying it, and I have never seen one yet entirely realistic. They often have all the elements of the song, dance, or expression, but they are misplaced or distorted by the accent falling on the wrong element. Everyone seems to think that the Negro is easily imitated when nothing is further from the truth. Without exception I wonder why the black-face comedians are black-face; it is a puzzle—good comedians, but darn poor niggers. Gershwin and the other ‘Negro’ rhapsodists come under this same axe...And God only knows what the world has suffered from the white damsels who try to sing the blues. (844-845)

While Hurston is particularly critical of white women in her essay, in *Seraph*, her critique falls not only on Arvey but also on the new generation represented by Kenny Meserve, who later participates in this appropriation more directly when, after years of tutelage under Joe Kelsey, he appropriates black musical forms to make a career for himself. Arvey, of course, balks at the idea, telling Jim that Kenny will probably never profit from such “darky” box-picking. Earlier in

²¹ Notably, it is Arvey who is morally outraged by the children’s behavior here, but she turns her outrage into racist morality when she blames the show on Belinda as “that no-count Joe’s” daughter (112). Joe brings Arvey to her senses by insisting that Belinda could never “lead” Kenny and laughs about Kenny’s ability to profit; neither seem to understand how the incident could be offensive to Belinda (as Meisenhelder argues) as an exploitative moment.

the novel, Arvay expresses annoyance at Kenny's playing of "rag-time and reel" music including the Charleston and Ethel Waters' "Shake that Thing" (SS 141). After Kenny decides to pursue his music as a career, Jim consoles Arvay:

[Kenny] keeps up with that kind of a thing, and claims that white bands up North and in different places like New Orleans are taking over darky music and making more money at it than the darkies used to. Singers and musicians and all. You do hear it over the radio at times, Arvay. Kenny claims that it is just a matter of time when white artists will take it all over. Getting to it's not considered just darky music and dancing nowadays. It's American, and belongs to everybody. Just like that swamp; so far they have slept over the darky way of picking a box. He aims to be the first one to make it something for the public, and he might be right for all we know. (SS 202)

Kenny's way of thinking recalls the history of white appropriation of black music, and nearly every *Seraph* critic loves to cite this passage as evidence of such exploitation.²² Meisenhelder, maintains, "Like the swamp, Joe's music becomes domesticated, 'owned,' and used for white profit in Kenny's hands. A rich black musical tradition, thus, becomes 'Kenny's piece,' and Kenny, not Joe, reaps the financial rewards from it" (114). Yet Meisenhelder, like other critics, ignores the woman's part—Arvay's part—in producing Kenny's talent, privileging racial appropriations over gender appropriations when Hurston so clearly asks readers to connect the two. Baker argues that Hurston resolves the question of white appropriation by suggesting that "music is symptomatic of the passing of days gone by, as well as emblematic of an unstoppable modern condition. Once the music moves from its isolated cradle in the jooks to the radio, the union of cultures is complete, the influence of one to the other continuous. Kenny's music becomes a symbol for the future" (112). While Baker argues for Hurston's exposure of the positive effects of musical interchanges between black and white southerners, I expand on her argument to foreground Hurston's exposure of how this "union of cultures" rests on the musical

²² For an analysis of the history of white appropriation of blues and jazz as it transformed to a predominantly white-produced swing genre, see LeRoi Jones, *Blues People*, Chapters 9 and 10. Notably Jones focuses mainly on the tragic consequences of appropriation for male musicians.

sacrifices of white women and the black community. Through these sacrifices, Hurston asks readers to connect the appropriations and exploitations of southern patriarchy along gender, race, and class lines—to question just what kind of symbolic future Kenny’s music offers.

In fact, Hurston’s depictions in *Seraph* are as ambiguous as her other writings on the development of southern music. On one hand, in her folklore writings, she showed great pride in African American music and scorned white imitation. Yet in her letters to editor Burroughs Mitchell about *Seraph*, she intimated that the Kenny subplot was important for showing the history of American music and the black contribution to it. She describes a chapter apparently excised from the text:

But I felt that I had to add a chapter on Kenny in New York to explain his success. Though no one to my knowledge had come right out and said it as yet, we have had a revolution in national expression in music that is equivalent to Chaucer’s use of the native idiom in England. Gershwin’s PORGY AND BESS brought to a head that which had been in the making for at least a decade. There is no more Negro music in the U.S. It had been fused and merged and become the national expression, and displaced the worship of European expression. In fact, it is now denied, (and with some truth) that it ever was pure Negro music, but an adaptation of white music. That is as over-simplified as the former claim that it was something purely negroid. But the fact remains that what has evolved here is something American, and has come to be the national expression, and is influencing the music of the world. Kenny is only one of the thousands of white artists who in one way or another work through the accepted medium, and is explained. (563)

Hurston’s comments suggest a reversal of her earlier opinions that American music originated and was sustained in the jook; she now concedes that European musical expression also influenced such music.²³ She stresses the complicated interracial process of making American music and readily accommodates white influence in her later writings. Still, her editors were not moved. In attempts to recover this lost chapter, I discovered an editor’s letter to Hurston suggesting that the “development of American music tied to Kenny’s success too elaborate; why

²³ Barbara Baker traces how Hurston’s thinking about the blues evolves from African American in origin to a shared musical history; yet while Baker confirms Hurston’s new celebratory vision of cultural amalgamation, she fails to tie together the patriarchal appropriation and exploitation of Arvey and Joe across gender and racial lines.

not just have him a success and some small explanation of the uniqueness of his music, killing the dissertation [sic], almost pedantic, on the changes in jazz (doubt if it is completely accurate)” (Unpublished Letter from Archives).²⁴ In this last note, the editors even boldly accuse Hurston of misunderstanding jazz history. While Hurston believed this musical development important to portraits of the South and the United States, editors—and possibly the reading public—were not ready to understand the complex relationships between black and white southerners as underscored by a musical history of interchange and appropriation—one that, in *Seraph*, stems mostly from exchanges between white women and black men.

Hurston suggests that Kenny—unlike the white musicians she criticizes in “Characteristics of Negro Expressions”—actually possesses the talent to appropriate and imitate African American music, a talent that emerges not only from Joe Kelsey’s teachings but also from Arvay’s organ playing. In a conversation between Arvay and Joe that deserves extensive quoting, Hurston exposes a southern community that resists, through a cultural mixing of white and black musical talent, the sexist and racist configurations of paternalism:

Arvay felt the same painful twist that she had felt years ago about Joe and Kenny. Then she took hold of herself. It wasn’t right to feel jealous that way. She saw now why she had been so set against the music. It gave Joe a hold over her boy that made her feel excluded.

“Between me and you, Miss Arvie, we sure pulled that boy through, didn’t us?”

Arvay shook her head slowly. “You mean you did, Joe. You learnt Kenny all that your ownself. I don’t know the first pick on a box.”

“That’s where you’s ever so wrong, Miss Arvay. Tain’t everybody that can learn music like that. Kenny took to it because he brought that talent in the world with him. He got that part from you. He just naturally worried and pestered me to death to teach him. I knowed that he couldn’t help hisself. What’s bred in the bones’ll be bound to come out in the flesh. Yeah, that boy come here full of music from you.”

“I always thought about Kenny as taking after Jim,” Arvay said as if she were talking to herself. Joe looked at Jim and gave a great guffaw.

“Mister Jim? Why Mister Jim couldn’t even tote a tune if you put it in a basket for him. Looks, yeah, but that music part he takes right after you.”

Arvay thought a minute, then her face lightened. “You could be right at that, Joe. I ever

²⁴ A special thanks to Dr. John Lowe for allowing me to peruse his microfilm collection of Hurston’s works.

loved to hear and to play music. I took to it just like Kenny did when I was a chap of a child. And just like you say, Larraine never could learn none. Only different from Kenny, I had small chance to learn much of it. I ever wanted to learn more though. I know that I could of learnt a lot more than I know if I had of had a chance.” Arvay sat quietly for a minute and her face lighted timidly. “Yeah, I guess, I hope, that Kenny did take his music after me.”

“Couldn’t be nobody else, Miss Arvay,” Joe said positively. “And it sure is a noble gift to have. I learnt what I know the hardest, but you and Kenny is just gifted to that. It’s a shame and a pity that you didn’t have more chance.”

“I thank you, Joe,” Arvay smiled diffidently. “And I want you to know that I’m ever so proud about the way Kenny is making out. I’m glad too that he appreciates you and what you have done for him enough to send for you to be with him up North there...”(SS 251)

This conversation is important for many reasons. First, Arvay begins to understand how she constructs racist feelings—as she did earlier when she belittled Kenny’s music and called it “darky” box picking—because of her own feelings of inadequacy. While Chuck Jackson dismisses Joe’s flattery as a patronizing joke on Arvay that reveals how folk traditions are “swapped and traded”(14), Joe’s comments still serve to alter Arvay’s understanding of her racist configurations, as well as her opinion of her role as mother. In the beginning of this chapter, Arvay complains about Kenny’s leaving home for the North: “Arvay had no arrangements for spending idle time. She did not read things, and was not given to fancy work. Her life had been patterned to serve and now there was nobody for her to wait on and do for” (SS 244). In suggesting that Arvay’s life “has been patterned” for service, Hurston exposes the construction of wife- and motherhood that Arvay feels she must choose. In the conversation between Joe and Arvay, Hurston reveals that Arvay also possesses musical talent—a talent that could have been nurtured had she not given in to societal expectations of marriage.²⁵ Joe’s compliments assuage Arvay’s fears that she exists only as a useless servant and show her that she contributes to something larger through Kenny’s musical talent. As Baker suggests, “Hurston makes an explicit

²⁵ This recalls Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, where pianist Mademoiselle Reisz suggests to Edna that she must devote all time to her artistic talent – that mothering and art simply don’t mesh. However, in the earliest tradition of southern women’s musical talents, mothers were the ones who sang to their children. This conflict between duty to family and duty to art will be further explored in Chapter 4 on Lee Smith’s *The Devil’s Dream*.

connection for the reader between Arvay's self-security and her contribution to music and the future" (112). Meisenhelder makes clear the connections Hurston draws between Arvay and Joe when she notes that Joe travels as a "surrogate mother" to Kenny: "Joe travels not as a respected black musician but as a nursemaid" (114). Even while Joe and Arvay are relegated to service positions under Jim's authority, Hurston employs their shared music in a collective southern memory which represents a resistant community that challenges dominant southern racial and gender boundaries.

Jackson's argument that Joe makes a condescending joke of Arvay's musical talent ignores the possibility that Hurston creates a shared understanding between the southern black male and the southern white female—a dangerous idea to explore, even in the late 1940s. Jackson argues that Joe's own joking manner during the conversation asks readers to consider Joe as pandering to Arvay; instead Joe employs a humorous air to mask the dangerous implications of white women and black men "raising" a child together. If anything, the joke here is on Jim, who doesn't contribute anything to Kenny's musical talent (except in his teachings of how to exploit such talents). Kenny's music becomes not only a site of memory for the appropriation of black music, but also a veiled critique of the patriarchal limitations on an acknowledgment of the merging of white women's and African Americans' artistic talents, as well as an understanding of white mothers' musical roles in southern culture. Historically, white and black mothers often passed down music to their children, and in Joe's revelation, Hurston points us to Arvay's thwarted potential to sing the blues.

Buzzy Jackson argues that while men were at the popular forefront of the earliest country blues music, "women generally sang at home with their families" (8). Jackson shows how "in this role women blues singers fulfilled another essential cultural function as they passed on a

musical heritage to their children” (8). While in rural blues forms, mothers sang to their children, in women’s classic urban blues, references to motherhood are less frequent. Angela Davis argues that blues women did not necessarily reject motherhood, but “blues women found the mainstream cult of motherhood irrelevant to the realities of their lives” (13). Davis suggests that these female blues express freedom from such duties: “there is often an emancipatory quality about their music that almost certainly would not have been present had their lives been fundamentally anchored in family pursuits” (72). Unlike Walker’s later character Shug Avery, Hurston’s depiction of Arvey has more in common with rural blues mothers and with white southern mothers from both the upper and lower classes. In the folk beginnings of country music, white mothers also sang to their children while their husbands were away working.²⁶ In upper-class families, as Loesser argues, women were trained as parlor pianists, and mothers were often responsible for passing down the proper playing techniques and etiquette to their daughters. For southern mothers, then, their music—whether blues, country, or parlor music—was linked to motherhood and absorbed by their children. Although Arvey does not act as Kenny’s instructor (that is Joe Kelsey’s blues role), through Arvey’s piano talent, Hurston asks readers to recall a long history of southern women and mothers who contributed to their children’s musical repertoires. Yet in playing the role of the southern white woman, Arvey also sets aside her talents for her children—a sacrifice which she mourns in her conversation with Joe. Unlike the blues women Davis examines or Shug Avery in Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Arvey is not emancipated to sing her blues. But while Arvey cannot express herself through the blues, she can contribute to the development of blues and jazz through her role as mother.

²⁶ See Chapter Four on Lee Smith for a continued discussion of how Appalachian and rural white women passed down what would later become country music songs to their children.

Carol P. Marsh-Lockett argues that even Arvay's mothering is mediated by Jim, especially the depicted disconnections between Arvay and Angeline or Arvay and Earl. Marsh-Lockett concludes, "Thus while the novel was ahead of its time in raising strong feminist questions, especially regarding the institution of marriage, it also fails...to empower mothers, to lift the maternal voice, and to move mothers from the periphery to the center of social concerns and expectations"(110). While Marsh-Lockett suggests that in Arvay Hurston creates a weak mother-figure with "without credibility and respectability," she also dismisses Arvay's musical connection with Kenny (110). Hurston shows the crippling limitations and sacrifices that conceptions of southern motherhood engender, but at the same time, she also depicts Arvay's musical contribution to Kenny's success—asking readers to question how the conflicting narratives of Kenny's successes and Arvay's sacrifices will (re)shape the progressing modern South.

In an ending that continues to be critically debated, Jim leaves Arvay and supposedly puts the power in her hands, ironically telling her that she must conform to the role he constructs for her. After she returns to Sawley for her mother's funeral, Arvay decides that she does not want to live like her mother or sister, and she returns to Jim, reveling in her ability to serve him as he wants to be served. Just as Edna gives herself to the sea in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Arvay also goes to Jim at the sea; yet while Edna's drowning represents the achievement of freedom, for Arvay, her sea-life represents a symbolic drowning of identity. Costello argues that Arvay finally learns to perform paternalism when she returns from Sawley with gifts for Janie and Jeff and later learns just the right way to compliment Jim's black shrimping crew. Costello notes that while paternalism undoubtedly offers a better life than Sawley, the system "also places [Jim and Arvay] firmly and forever on a public stage and forces them to perform according to

very strict rules for a watchful African American audience without whose approval they cannot maintain their wealth and standing—an audience whose approval would be less and less forthcoming in the years to come” (34). Jackson also makes a strong point in his argument that Arvay must shed her “white trash” status to ascend to Jim’s aristocratic throne, suggesting that Hurston plays the ultimate joke on the white world by exposing their need to identify as purely white (17).

While these readings show Hurston’s exposure of white aristocracy as a constructed performance, critics like John Lowe also argue that Arvay finally learns how to participate in black folk culture while Christopher Reiger and Janet St. Clair read Arvay’s choice as a form of independence; she does after all make the choice to serve Jim. As Baker suggests, unlike Janie who is left alone in *Their Eyes*, “once Arvay has learned the lessons of life, she has the opportunity to live out the possibilities with the person she loves” (115). For Baker, this ending symbolizes Hurston’s resolution of the question of interracial musical interchange: “The novel identifies blues as integral to the lesson of self-identity that Hurston wants to teach, and the overall progression of Hurston’s artistic representations of the African American contribution to American music, suggests that, as an artist, she had come to a realization that the blues can teach us to accept the reality of our circumstances, and to move into our future together with confidence”(116). Yet Baker’s astute reading mostly celebrates blues culture as accepted and unappropriated by American culture, while I argue that *Seraph* also exposes musical appropriation to critique the continued gender and racial oppressions faced by minority cultures in the modern South.

Critics who read Arvay’s return to Jim as a harmonious fairy-tale ending ignore the brutal exploitation of both Arvay and the minority communities that Hurston presents throughout the

text. By turning to Jim's "way of handling things," Arvay complicitously resigns herself to be a serving wife and mother. The question of choice or force is as complicated as in the rape scene, especially since Jim gives her an ultimatum near the novel's end: "I'm sick and tired of hauling and dragging you along. I'm tired of excusing you because you don't understand. I'm tired of waiting on you to meet me on some high place and locking arms with me and going my way. I'm tired of hunting you, and trying to free your soul" (SS 266). As Jim has earlier stated, in southern paternalist systems, men lead women in marriage. In this passage, he intimates that Arvay has a choice, but in order to sustain the relationship, ultimately Arvay must choose his way and learn to act like the statuesque southern woman that Jones describes.

As the critical debate over the novel's conclusion shows, the ending is utterly ambivalent—at once Hurston's exposure of Arvay's complicity in paternalism and perhaps a celebration of Arvay's independence through choice. To use Romine's terms, Arvay joins a coercive patriarchal community and believes it to be cohesive, even though the relationships she sustains with minority cultures are at best superficial. Can one be both complicit and independent? Certainly southern African Americans like Joe Kelsey (and other "pet negroes") were forced to submit (often by threat of lynching) to such a way of life; while Joe lives independently, he never gains the profit and power which Jim gains. Perhaps this conflicted way of life—similar to what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as double-consciousness or what James Baldwin referred to as hitting the ceiling of supposedly unlimited opportunities in "Sonny's Blues"—influenced what Ellison terms the conflicting blues feelings of laughter and tears. When African Americans began to participate in blackface minstrelsy, they faced a similar lifestyle choice; minstrel performances at once offered an artistic opportunity, but at the same time minstrelsy enforced limits in its stereotypical rendering of black culture. While acting

submissively and independently seems a contradiction, southern black communities and—as Hurston understands—white women often lived in such a contradictory state. As Hurston’s musical representations show, white women and African Americans carved out resistance through whatever means possible—whether blues music or parlor piano tunes.

The musical elements in Arvay’s reunion with Jim reflect Hurston’s desire to deconstruct the gendered power dynamics behind confusing portraits of southern community. When Arvay returns to Sawley after Lorraine and Carl have picked over her mother’s possessions, only the organ remains: “There was nothing in there except that relic of an organ, which had been nothing for years but a rat’s nest” (SS 301). This image reminds us directly of Arvay’s talent as a musician—a talent deep inside her that was never nurtured, but instead nixed away by her years of service to Jim. As Arvay burns the organ along with the house, she burns a symbol of the one trait that connected her to Joe Kelsey and his blues, as well as provided her independence and difference from Jim.

The destruction of Arvay’s talent seems complete when, as Arvay joins Jim at sea, she notices the birds above: “They fly pretty, Jim, but from what I heard so far, they got mighty poor voices for singing,” to which Jim responds, “None of these birds that live around the water got any voices for singing worth talking about”(SS 326). If as Meisenhelder has argued, the soft-bodied sea life thrown away by the men reflects Arvay’s position, one might also read the birds as the final metaphor for Arvay—a pretty ornament with no voice of her own—birds which Hurston later describes as letting out “unmusical cries” as they attack the sea life (SS 337). Perhaps Hurston equates Arvay with the birds, who without their musical abilities, are left to prey on the shell-less sea creatures. The soft-bodied creatures could represent the Kelseys, the Corregios, and the other shrimpers, which, as Costello argues, Arvay learns to exploit and

manipulate. Whether Arvay becomes the soft-bodied sea life or the preying “unmusical” birds, her resistant voice has been silenced as she turns to Jim’s “way of handling things” in a paternalistic South.

The mother and baby sharks offer another fitting metaphor left unexplored by past critics. As Jim and his men stab a dying mother shark, the shark babies slip off the deck and into the freedom of the sea. This scene connects with Arvay’s pride in her music as it lives on through Kenny: “Kenny had come bringing the musical part inside her that she had never had a chance to show herself. It had to be there or it could never come out as it did. He represented those beautiful sounds that she used to hear from nowhere as she played around with her doll under the mulberry tree” (SS 350). If Arvay’s self is killed, her children live on; if Arvay is silenced, Kenny speaks for her. Moreover in Kenny’s accepted union with minority figure Felicia Corregio, Hurston suggests a true merging of southern cultures that complements Kenny’s music. Even while Hurston shows Arvay’s pride at this, readers understand that Arvay’s right to sing the blues is appropriated as much as Joe Kelsey’s. Those moments where she seemed to find her identity under the mulberry tree are consumed, like her music, by Kenny and her performance as a mother.

To recall Hurston’s words to Mitchell: “the South presents a very confusing picture...I want the book to look like the people it is written about” (Kaplan 561). In *Seraph*, Hurston succeeds in reaching her goal, in portraying a southern community that like a minstrel show, both embraces human similarities (despite the constructions of gender, race or class) but also limits such embraces. In the end, Arvay can never sing her blues or exist outside her role in Foster’s myth; she will always be, as Costello argues, performing a role that leaves her powerless and absorbs her resisting musical performances. The resistant community Arvay and Joe once

symbolized fades into Kenny's showmanship, and Arvey's relationships with minority figures remain superficial as she takes her final step onto the pedestal of southern womanhood. Even so, Arvey and Joe's triumphant resistant community lives on through Kenny's music, even if in the shrouds of patriarchal appropriation. Through her musical *lieux de mémoire*, Hurston reveals to readers the complicated version of southern music history derived from the exploitation and celebration of white women and the African American population. She teaches readers to expose the paternalist system that controls white women and black people and to simultaneously celebrate the artistic and labor talents of these southern folk that lived on. In the next chapter I will discuss how Alice Walker expands upon many blues themes in Hurston's *Seraph* in *The Color Purple*. Unlike Hurston, who asks readers to continually question music's role in overturning a patriarchal South, Walker shows how the blues fully triumph over southern paternalist violence and misogyny in her reimagining of a southern community based on a blues womanist vision.

CHAPTER TWO: “MY MAN TREATS ME LIKE A SLAVE”: THE TRIUMPH OF WOMANIST BLUES OVER BLUES VIOLENCE IN ALICE WALKER’S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

“...if Celie were singing, she would be like Mamie, Bessie, and Ma Rainey, all of whom were abused. Those women were abused by men. I always feel so deeply when I listen to them, and then I think about how people took it for granted that your man would be this way. Of course you’ll be abused. And so they weren’t really heard, and they got used to it, actually dancing to this. It was like a spiral that was not going up but going down. People sing about this and then expect it in relationships. It was self-perpetuating. I doubt if any of these people had relationships that nourished them. They had relationships, instead, that prompted cries of anguish that were then used to entertain. The people who were entertained modeled themselves on what they were hearing, and it was just a very bad cycle.”
– Alice Walker, “I Know What the Earth Says”

In the blues-filled world of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker uses the narrative of Celie, a poor uneducated black woman living in post-Civil War Georgia, to revisit and revise the historical era of 1920s blues singers like Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, and Ma Rainey. Walker’s female characters Shug, Celie, Sofia, and Squeak revive the spirit of the great blues divas and their audiences but also break out of the cycle of abuse to which Walker alludes above. In these characters, Walker engenders a new type of blues performance—a blues that combines her love of these historical women’s songs and lives with her conception of “womanism.” Walker defines womanists as feminists of color, women who love women, women who are concerned with the salvation of the *entire* race (not just women), and women who love to sing and dance. Unlike Hurston, who questions how much power the blues affords in a paternalist South in *Seraph*, Walker merges womanist characteristics with the resistant performances of the first popular blues women to create a womanist blues that demonstrates how her female characters emerge as successful women who combat the violence done to them by men—a violence that is emblematic of the abusive discriminations in a dominant white patriarchal South divided by race, class, and gender distinctions (a theme that I will argue Dorothy Allison approaches in *Bastard Out of Carolina* through her use of southern gospel and country).

Because womanism is interested in uplifting men as well as women, Walker also uses the blues to consider how black men, who internalize violence from a racist white power structure, are caught in these same cycles of abuse when they exercise violence on their daughters, wives, and lovers (as we recall from Joe Kelsey's violent blues advice in *Seraph*). As briefly discussed in chapter one, in *Seems Like Murder Here*, Adam Gussow considers domestic violence as it occurs in blues culture, terming it "intimate" violence. Gussow defines intimate violence as "the violence that black folk inflict on each other: the cuttings, shootings, razor slashings, beatings, and murders described—and more often than one might expect, celebrated as a locus of power and self-making—by African American blues people in both story and song" (196). In her revision of blues history, Walker suggests that the blues community's celebrations should not be imbued with violence, but instead with harmony and love. While women can also inflict intimate violence (as Walker herself depicts), I argue that intimate violence in *The Color Purple* is aligned with a dominant male perspective as readers watch Pa, Albert, and Harpo brutally try to tame their wives and children. Walker pits intimate male blues violence against an intimate female blues womanism; the latter ideology triumphs over blues violence and allows for a collective union between black men and women. In critiquing the brutality present in historical depictions of the blues, Walker twists the abuse "spiral" upwards; she creates an alternate womanist blues history that calls for unity amongst southern African Americans in order to transcend the "very bad cycle" of gender and sexual violence perpetuated by racism and sexism.

Although Walker draws from the history of blues men and women to fill the pages of the novel, she employs these historical portraits to create the fictionalized *memory* of narrator Celie. Because Celie does not sing (like Mamie, Bessie, or Ma), she writes—letters that are first

addressed to a white God and then to her sister Nettie.¹ Walker tells Celie's life story in the vernacular language of a poor, uneducated black woman living in the Jim Crow South. Celie's fictional letters act as recorded memories, reclaiming the working-class black woman's historical voice, which was virtually absent from southern text book histories written by whites. As briefly discussed in the introduction, in her essay "Coming in from the Cold" Walker submits that a love of memories is what unites non-elite people:

It is because the language of our memories is suppressed that we tend to see our struggle to retain and respect our memories as unique. And of course our language is suppressed because it reveals our cultures, cultures at variance with what the dominant white, well-to-do culture perceives to be. To permit our languages to be heard, and especially the words and speech of our old ones, is to expose the depth of the conflict between us and our oppressors and the centuries it has not at all silently raged. (63)

Walker suggests that historical accounts do not often acknowledge the voices of those oppressed by a racist, sexist, and classist social structure, no matter how loudly they might be speaking. In combining Celie's vernacular language with the oral form of the blues (both the voices of "our old ones"), Walker recreates the collective memory of black southern communities and asks readers to reclaim those *unsilent* cries—particularly about abuse—voiced in blues music.²

Although Walker tells her story through the individual memory of Celie, *The Color Purple* is not simply one black woman's story. As Thadious M. Davis argues, "Despite her

¹ In the first lines of the novel, Celie's Pa forbids her to speak of the rape to anyone except God, which automatically signals to readers the black woman's silent plight with domestic abuse. In incorporating women's blues (a public acknowledgement of abuse) through Shug, Walker allows Celie to voice her interior struggles out loud by the novel's end. Her transition – from first addressing letters to God and later addressing them to her sister Nettie—shows how Celie moves from an object in a patriarchal society to a subject in a womanist space.

² For explorations on the oral-literate debate as expressed in the novel, see Maria Lauret's chapter on *The Color Purple* in *Alice Walker* (2000) for more on the way Walker uses the blues to give a historical voice and place back to black women. Lauret concludes: "Ultimately, *The Color Purple* is a monument, not just to Bessie Smith and Zora Neale Hurston, but to the black victims and survivors of sexual abuse who historically have been silenced in white (and black male) literature, but who have expressed their pain in the vernacular of the blues. It is also, crucially, a monument in which the black English of the oral tradition is forever carved in stone"(120). Gunilla T. Kester argues that Celie and Shug must learn to speak to each other through the blues: "Because *The Color Purple* juxtaposes the epistolary mode (with its long standing western tradition) with the blues, it intensifies the issue of cultural voice...it shows that healing can only begin when women share the tradition of black cultural representation thematically inscribed as the blues..."(120).

concentration on the brutal treatment of black women and the unmitigated abuse of children, Walker believes in the beauty and the power of the individual, and ultimately of the group” (37). In endowing her characters with blues qualities, Walker engenders a collective memory that speaks to an alternate experience of oppressed southern blacks in the Jim Crow era by celebrating black folk life and the black community’s will to endure. Celie’s narrative challenges white-perpetuated stereotypes of black people as somehow less than human—as happy lazy children, primitive male brutes, and overly-sexed female seductresses; through Celie’s memorial descriptions, the readers watch the black community overcome struggles and experience growth. While Celie’s memories are private, Walker uses them to recall how the publicly-performed blues influenced the social identity of black southerners as a group. As Ralph Ellison writes, the blues evoke the private sphere: “As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically” (79). Yet, the blues also speak for the black community and the brutal trials they faced during and after slavery. Again, according to Ellison, the blues are “thus a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice. As such they are one of the techniques through which Negroes have survived and kept their courage during that long period when many whites assumed, as some still do, they were afraid” (257). Although a blues singer meditates on a personal situation, when performing to an identifying audience, the blues man or woman voices collective frustrations about oppression. In Walker’s novel, when Celie reflects on her private life through letters, the reading public can also identify with her situation, almost as if Celie sings her blues just like Mamie, Bessie, or Ma.

Because the African American blues man or woman sings of an individual experience that serves as an alternate voicing of collective oppression (dissenting from idealized white literary and historical depictions of supposed racial integration and equality in the South), this

music can be linked with definitions of cultural or collective memory: an individual memory that is constructed from and thus recalls a cultural memory that challenges dominant history. Marita Sturken writes of collective memory: “The collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual—it provides cultural identity and gives a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed” (1). One person’s memory is inevitably tied to the memories of the larger group with which they identify—whether a racial, national, regional, religious, gendered, sexual, class, or ethnic group (or some combination). W. Fitzhugh Brundage explains, “Nearly all personal memories, then, are learned, inherited, or at the very least, informed by a common stock of social memory... The act of remembering the past and of assigning levels of significance to it... is an act of interpretation. No longer can we presume the existence of fixed images of the past that we retrieve intact through acts of memory... Collective memories, like personal memory, are constructed, and not simply reproduced” (4).³ Because Walker, as an author of fiction, configures Celie’s memory, the reader questions the consequences of Walker’s choice to use historical traces of the blues in Celie’s constructed memory. What larger blues community is she asking readers, as an identifying group, to remember or revise? What resistances and agendas are revealed?

My reading of how blues history interacts with the collective memory presented in Celie’s letters relies on Pierre Nora’s previously discussed theory of *lieux de mémoire*. *Lieux de*

³ See Brundage’s introduction to *Where These Memories Grow* for a great synopsis of recent memory theory and a generalized reading of Maurice Halbwachs. As discussed in the introduction, Halbwachs believed that musical communities in particular offered a great example of collective memory because musicians often tailor performances by audience response. Musicians do not merely play a song from sheet music—especially in popular forms like blues or jazz—but instead recall the audience response from a past performance, which influences playing styles.

mémoire, as defined by Nora, are symbolic sites of collective memory such as portraits of historical figures, archives, memorials, monuments, books, and letters. Nora's study asks scholars to focus not on the facts of the historical person or event, but on why and how the cultural memory of such a person or event is portrayed (in these sites) the way it is. Discussing African American memory and history, Robert O'Meally and Genevieve Fabre use Nora's concept of sites of memory to argue that such sites perform a crucial role in bridging personal and collective memory: "in the quest for identity and the assertion of birth right and ancestry, sites are anchors and frames...memory ultimately becomes the essential metaphor, a means to confront the troublesome past and the uncertain present" (O'Meally et. al 10). With O'Meally and Fabre, I argue that popular music functions as *lieux de mémoire*: "the blues, sounding through a hundred years of the music in a variety of forms and fashions" constitute an important site for African Americans trying to reconstruct a collective memory and identity (8).

In using Nora's theory of collective memory to understand the history of the blues as represented in *The Color Purple*, I turn attention away from the singers and their songs; the pictures of blues men and women and the written and oral recordings of their tunes are simply representations of their historical presence. Using Nora's theories to read Walker's novel challenges readers to consider what resistances Walker exposes through her memories of blues people and their music. How and why is the history of blues people portrayed, and who gains power from what portraits? What power does Walker gain from using traces of the blues? What message is she sending forth and why? While she alludes to historical blues women, Walker includes more than just historical images, delving into what caused black people to sing the blues, what healing or harming effects these blues had on the community, and what challenges and changes the blues posited against a racist, sexist white southern power structure, particularly

about the concerns of abuse and violence in the southern black community. Keith Byerman sees Walker as abandoning her blues folkways because Celie later transcends her oppressive conditions: “In *The Color Purple*, she has in effect moved to allegorical form in order to transcend history and envision the triumph of those principles she espouses. But in doing so, she has neutralized the historical conditions of the very folk life she values” (66). I argue that Walker purposefully neutralizes those historical conditions by using memorial traces of the blues—sites that ask readers to investigate further the conflicts between southern black men and women in those blues, to search for the meanings behind and consequences of those conflicts.

While Celie’s plight as a black woman is the novel’s focus (it is her memory we read), Walker also engenders a collective memory about the abuses that all black blues people faced—whether men or women—in the Jim Crow South. As blues scholars concur, one of the main themes of the blues is violence. For black women especially, Angela Y. Davis argues, the blues offers a place to voice conflict about domestic violence, which was otherwise silenced by ideals of white womanhood: “There is...a body of preserved oral culture...about domestic abuse in the songs of blues women like Gertrude [Ma] Rainey and Bessie Smith. Violence against women was always an appropriate topic of women’s blues” (25).⁴ As Davis argues, in singing about the

⁴ As discussed in the introduction, Anne Goodwyn Jones describes the ideal of southern white womanhood as perhaps informing roles for all American women (9). This ideal represents white upper-class women as southern culture’s “idea of religious, moral, sexual, racial, and social perfection” (Jones 9). The white woman was innocent, chaste, and virtuous: “Finally, she serves others—God, husband, family, society—showing in her submissiveness the perfection of pure sacrifice” (Jones 9).

In contrast, in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Davis’s overall arguments about working-class women’s blues invoke the concept of collective memory to challenge the ideal of white womanhood: “Through the blues, black women were able to autonomously work out—as audiences and performers—a working-class model of womanhood. This model of womanhood was based in part on a collective historical memory of what had been previously required of women to cope with during slavery. But more important, it revealed that black women and men, the blues audience, could respond to the vastly different circumstances of the postslavery era with notions of gender and sexuality that were, to a certain extent, ideologically independent of the middle-class cult of ‘true womanhood’” (46). While Shug and Sofia’s characters more closely resemble Davis’s descriptions of working-class blues women, Celie’s character fits almost perfectly within the confines of white womanhood—a role ultimately unavailable to her because she is African American.

abuse they faced from their men at home—a private matter—classic blues divas brought the issue to the public, making the collective community aware of this problem. Blues men also sang about violence (what Adam Gussow terms “intimate” violence amongst the black community) in order to divulge publicly the threats they faced from whites in the Jim Crow South. Using the guiding principles of womanism in *The Color Purple*, Walker forges connections between the blues violence that black men and women sang about by revealing how white racist, sexist, and classist southern hierarchies instigated the intimate and domestic violence that took place in the black community. She employs blues themes to unite separate visions of male and female black communities and to critique how blues people reacted to the threat of white violence collectively; she exposes the sometimes veiled cultural memories left to us in blues songs and proposes an end to the cycle of abuse perpetuated in the blues. Ellison suggests that the blues “at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self” (94). Unlike Ellison’s blues, Celie’s blues-inspired memories move beyond examinations of the “self” to propose a collective womanist solution to blues violence—a solution that fosters love and cooperation in a utopian black southern community (a solution that Allison similarly proposes for the southern “queer white trash” community in *Bastard Out of Carolina*). Walker asks readers to re-focus their attention away from Shug’s performances as a classic blues diva to how Shug’s collective audience members (Celie, Albert, Sofia, Mary Agnes, Harpo) respond and remake her performances into a blues womanist ideology that exists despite white constructions of racism and sexism.

As many critics have suggested, through the fictional blues singer Shug Avery, Walker evokes the 1920s classic blues divas that first recorded and popularized the form. Shug’s

character calls to mind the historical blues woman, who, according to Daphne Duvall Harrison, “speaks directly of and to the folk who have suffered pain and assures them that they are not alone; someone understands” (6). Harrison explains that black women had special reason to sing the blues:

Life for working-class black women had been especially difficult because of their bottom-rung status due to racism and sexism. The grief of a broken love affair is always poignant; it is more so when cast within a racist system. Black women’s quest for independence is constrained by racial and sexual barriers and sometimes leads to types of behavior that appear to be arrogant, promiscuous, or violent, but are in fact manifestations of a large repertoire of defense mechanisms employed to gain or defend respect in a hostile environment. . . [Blues women] turned to the church for solace and strength; to the other sisters in the community for companionship; or to the local lounge for warmth and good times (6).

In her inspiring connections with Celie, Sofia, and Squeak, Shug becomes one of these blues women, who speaks about and for her fellow black women. While Shug—and perhaps Sofia—at times appears downright mean (her first words to Celie are “You sho is ugly”) Walker’s characterization relates to Harrison’s assessment that blues women acted arrogantly in response to racial and sexual discrimination in order to reclaim and protect their bodies and their lives from oppressive black men and white southerners. As critics suggest, Shug not only revises her own life and dreams but also aids in revising Celie’s identity through the creation of positive attitudes towards sex, womanhood, race, and religion.

Cheryl Wall discusses Shug’s character as influenced by the 1920s female blues community. Wall argues, “Shug inspires Celie’s and Albert’s transformations because she is the novel’s moral agent. Of course, hers is not the perceived morality; when judged by conventional standards, Shug is deemed profoundly immoral (as were Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and others)” (149).⁵ In their well-known cultural studies of blues women, Angela Y. Davis and Hazel

⁵ See Wall’s chapter “Writing beyond the Blues: *The Color Purple*”; Wall reconstructs the lives of 1920s blues divas to match Shug by relying on Angela Davis and Daphne Duvall Harrison. Wall considers Walker’s new portrayal of

V. Carby also mention Shug Avery as a literary archetype of these great singers.⁶ In varying ways, these critics argue that, like the classic blues women, Shug remains unafraid to sing about and live her life outside the confines of society's mores and gender roles. Most works that investigate blues tropes in *The Color Purple* focus on how Shug transforms Celie's religious and sexual self. Like many of the classic blues women, Shug and Celie find an alternative to abusive heterosexual relationships by trusting in one another and remaking traditional white Christianity. Drawing from blues women's advice songs (like the song from which this dissertation takes its title) that preached the dangers of men to other female audience members and also songs which celebrate lesbianism like Rainey's "Prove it on Me Blues," Walker uses Shug and Celie's sexual relationship to revise dominant heterosexism—a revision Allison continues through Bone's country invocations of Patsy Cline as tied to memories of Raylene in *Bastard Out of Carolina*.⁷

Thomas F. Marvin and Jerry Wasserman carefully compare Shug to blues singers Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, using blues lyrics from the era as evidence of Shug's similar characteristics.⁸ Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, like Shug, flamboyantly expressed their sexuality through not only their personal style ("wild" clothing and jewelry) but also through songs that

religion as drawn not only from African traditions (as Marvin argues) but also traditional Christian values—she views this religion as a "futuristic" merging of the two. For other readings of blues in the text, see Gunilla T. Kester's "The Blues, Healing, and Cultural Representation in Contemporary African American Women's Literature" and Keith Byerman's "Walker's Blues."

⁶ See Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* and Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," as well as Harrison's *Black Pearls*.

⁷ See Maria V. Johnson's "Jelly Jelly Jellyroll: Lesbian Sexuality and Identity in Women's Blues" for a closer reading of how blues women created a female community through their songs and how, in particular, these songs often celebrated and affirmed lesbian sexualities. For specific readings of lesbianism in *The Color Purple*, see Linda Abbandonato's "A View from 'Elsewhere': Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in The Color Purple" and Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos' "'As Purple to Lavender': Alice Walker's Womanist Representation of Lesbianism."

⁸ See Marvin's "Preachin' the Blues: Bessie Smith's Secular Religion and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" for a comparison between the religion in Smith's lyrics and Shug's ideology, which Marvin argues stems from African religions; see Wasserman's "Queen Bee, King Bee: *The Color Purple* and the Blues" which more generally compares Shug to Smith, Rainey and other blues favorites, using images and song lyrics to argue that Shug blurs gender roles in her appropriation of bad bluesmen and divas. To counter Wasserman, I suggest that Shug combats "bad" bluesmen instead of taking on their qualities; her power is in making them over, not imitating them as Sofia and Celie do.

spoke to the experience of the southern black woman. Rainey especially remained loyal to her southern roots, touring on the southern and mid-western TOBA circuit until her decline in 1929, when she returned home to Columbus, GA (Harrison 40-41). Smith also began her career singing what is sometimes termed southern or Delta “country” blues under the tutelage of Rainey during a touring session with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels (Harrison 51). While Smith was unafraid to incorporate the vaudeville styles she heard in northern urban clubs, some of her most famous songs still attest to the struggles of southern women and men. Harrison describes the blues woman’s public power as engendering freedom from sexist restraints:

...the silent, suffering woman is replaced by a loud-talking mama, reared-back with one hand on her hip and with the other wagging a pointed finger vigorously as she denounces the two-timing dude. Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston employ this scenario as the pivotal point in a negative relationship between the heroine/protagonists and their abusive men. Going public is their declaration of independence. Blues of this nature communicated to women listeners that they were members of a sisterhood that did not have to tolerate mistreatment. (89)

While Shug’s role as a blues woman is certainly important, as Harrison intimates, Shug’s effect on her audience—in advising the community to rethink and remake their violent values—becomes equally important in considering why and to what powerful end Walker imbues Celie’s letters with the blues. Furthermore Shug sings to not only a “sisterhood” audience of black women but also to the black men who face oppression from paternalist residues of plantation culture in the Jim Crow South.

This chapter turns further attention to the blues themes of violence and abuse to explore how Walker engenders a womanist story that testifies to the experiences of blues women *and* men. From the beginning of the novel’s reception, critics and reviewers have critically debated whether or not Walker depicts black men as stereotypical sexist brutes. Early reviewers Robert Towers and Darryl Pinckney unabashedly attacked Walker’s depictions of Albert and the other

male characters in the novel as overtly violent and brutal. Trudier Harris's article, "On *The Color Purple*, Stereotypes, and Silences" discusses her own love-hate relationship with the novel as well as classroom reactions to the text; she ambivalently agrees with male students' descriptions of male characters as either cruel or weak.⁹ In this reading, I suggest that Walker's use of blues memories does not reinforce stereotypes of black men but asks readers to uncover the formation and perpetuation of such stereotypes as embodied in white southern racist and sexist social structures represented in the blues.

Walker asks her readers to recognize how racist tactics were passed down to the black community in the form of oppressive gender tactics and to sympathize with the plight of black men (as well as women) under patriarchy. While Walker defines a womanist as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually [and] appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength," she makes clear that a womanist is also "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist..." (*In Search* xi-xii). A womanist loves women and women's culture first and foremost, but a womanist works to save her entire race; she is universal in her love for the black folk and their ways. In promoting a blues-inspired womanist agenda in *The Color Purple*, Walker asks that readers understand how black men's struggles with racism inform black women's struggles with sexism, linking men and women's plights to reveal how the black community unites in resistance against a powerful white patriarchal South.

Shug's love for singing and dancing, her professed outrageous behavior and her love for women and men fit within Walker's prescribed definitions of womanism. In merging Shug's

⁹ For discussions of the critical debate about Walker's men, see Erna Kelly's "A Matter of Focus: Men in the Margins of Alice Walker's Fiction" and Pia Thielmann's "Alice Walker and the 'Man Question.'"

blues with a womanist perspective, Walker creates a blues womanist figure able to conceive of a black community free of sexist, racist, and religious constraints imposed by the elite white South—a challenge to Hurston’s visions in *Seraph* of the resurfacing domination over African Americans and women by southern paternalism. Shug’s combatant attitude towards abuse no doubt reverberates with songs of the classic blues women as described by Angela Davis. Davis recounts numerous songs detailing violence and how to fight it as sung by Rainey and Smith, concluding “Women’s blues suggest emergent feminist insurgency in that they unabashedly name the problem of male violence and so usher it out of the shadows of domestic life where society had kept it hidden and beyond public or political scrutiny” (29). While Walker uses traces of the blues women of which Davis speaks in the novel, Walker does not simply rewrite the history of the classic blues female. Through Celie’s memory of not just Shug, but also Sofia, Squeak, Pa, Albert, and Harpo, Walker creates a collective story about blues violence—a memory that displays the cultural trauma of racism and sexism and simultaneously proposes a womanist solution of cooperation and love.

Walker tackles the intimate male blues violence expressed by the male figures in the novel in order to uplift black blues people as a whole. As Davis suggests, women’s blues failed to consider why men beat women: “In Ma Rainey’s and especially in Bessie Smith’s blues, the problem of male violence is named, and varied patterns to implied or explicit criticism and resistance are woven into the artists’ performance of them. Lacking, however, is a naming or analysis of the social forces responsible for black men’s propensity (and indeed the male propensity in general) to inflict violence on their female partners” (33). Similar to Hurston’s brief depictions of Joe Kelsey’s violent ways in *Seraph*, in Walker’s memorial revision of classic blues women’s history, she investigates how black men have (perhaps unconsciously) inherited

the violent ways that white plantation owners maintained power over their black subjects. Like the racist white community of the plantation and the subsequent Jim Crow South, black men sometimes used brutality to control their women and children. Walker's story can be linked to blues themes, and it becomes particularly important to return in detail to the intimate blues violence discussed in the first chapter (of which Adam Gussow writes in *Seems Like Murder Here*).

Gussow explores the seeming absence of southern blues lyrics and lifestyles that protest southern violence and lynching. His study proposes that “black southerners evolved blues as a way of speaking back to, and maintaining psychic health in the face of, an ongoing threat of lynching” (xii). Gussow understands the violence present in blues lyrics (and in the jukejoints) as one of the three main themes of blues music (along with travel and sexuality). He argues that “intimate violence”—the violence acted out between black people in jookes or sung about in the blues—“was an essential, if sometimes destructive, way in which black southern blues people articulated their somebodiness, insisted on their indelible individuality” in the face of white racism (5). In order to feel powerful (in a racist society designed to make black people feel powerless), the black community used the blues to boast about (and to mourn) the stabbings and beatings that often took place in jukejoints, at home, or in the workplace. Gussow considers blues violence as containing a sexual dimension since the blues often meditated on the beatings and mistreatings between black men and women. His reading of the blues offers new insight into the violent actions of Harpo, Albert (Mister), and Celie's step-father (Pa) as reactions to the threat of southern racism.

Gussow views Celie's history—the fact that her real father was lynched because he stood up to the white community—as engendering her blues character: “If Celie's life-journey will

eventually lead, with blues singer Shug Avery's help, to sexual liberation, expressive mastery, and spiritual homecoming, her father's spectacle lynching and her mother's traumatized response is what prompts her birth as a blues subject: Celie is a true child of Jim Crow terror" (123). But before Celie ever learns of her real father's death, she faces emotional, physical, and sexual abuse from both her step-father (Pa) and her husband Albert (Mister), which are also consequences of Jim Crow era violence. At age fourteen, Celie begins an account of how her step-father rapes and impregnates her (thereby sterilizing her), sells away her children, and forces her into a marriage with Albert. As Pa barter Celie away after describing her as a sexually spoiled cow, readers see that he values women as he would livestock: for reproductive and labor power. Pa's treatment of other women is no better; when he remarries after Celie's mother dies, he simply uses his new wife as a sexual object, maid, and care-taker for his six children. When the new wife becomes sick, Celie must sacrifice herself to ward off Pa's advances toward her younger sister, Nettie. Pa remains an unsympathetic, revolting character throughout the novel; many critics view him as an example of Walker's negatively flat portrayals of men, but I argue that Walker offers some insight as to why Pa mistreats women.

When Celie discovers that Pa is her not her real father but her step-father, she and Shug visit Pa to confront him. Walker analyzes the legacy of slavery and white control as influencing Pa's attitude and infiltrating his every action. After he tells Celie that her real father was lynched for standing up to the white townspeople, Pa reveals how he manages to stay alive and sustain his lifestyle:

I know how they [white people] is. The key to all of 'em is money. The trouble with our people is as soon as they got out of slavery they didn't want to give the white man nothing else. But the fact is, you got to give 'em something. Either your money, your land, your woman or your ass. So what I did was just right off offer to give 'em money. Before I planted a seed, I made sure this one and that one knowed one seed out of three was planted for *him*. Before I ground a grain of wheat, the same thing. And when I

opened your daddy's old store in town, I bought me my own white boy to run it. And what makes it so good, he say, I bought him with whitefolks' money. (182)

Through this performance, Pa believes that he has cheated the racist white community, but Walker intimates that, because of his greed, Pa has in fact become just like the white men he wants to manipulate. Walker solidifies Pa's relationship with the town's white men when, after forbidding Celie to return to school because of her pregnancy, he hunts with them, and Celie dresses wild game for a week. Celie's description of the scene symbolically reveals how Pa follows their violent ways: "He never look up from cleaning his gun. Pretty soon a bunch of white mens come walking across the yard. They have guns too. Pa git up and follow 'em" (10). Pa relies on his wives and children to maintain his lifestyle, brutally using them as slaves just as white plantation owners used the black populace. By juxtaposing the histories of Celie's step-father and real father, Walker simultaneously discloses the two consequences black men faced in a white-controlled South: the threat of becoming like the white oppressor or being lynched for fighting for freedom and individuality. The stories of Celie's father and her step-father demonstrate that neither path—rebellion nor conformity—benefits the black community. Even though Celie's real father emerges as a hero, his grave remains unmarked, and his death leaves fatherless children and an unstable wife. As I will discuss later, the black community revises their ways of life and thinking to exist outside of the white mainstream—a revision that Walker suggests relies on blues themes and womanism. Walker's subtle insertion of these men's histories illuminates the racist system under which black men and women were forced to live. In doing so, Walker explains that while Pa's behavior and choices are despicable, his performed actions are compelled by the white racist world around him.

The examples of Celie's father and step-father exemplify the very limited opportunities for black males, exposing their frustrations and their misplaced blame of black women. With

Albert, Walker roots these conflicts more directly in the blues. Albert's love for Shug creates a bluesman out of him—a frustrated bluesman who cannot possess the woman he loves. Because he cannot be with Shug, he beats his misery out on Celie. Like Pa, Albert views women as objects to be used and controlled. Celie describes her situation with Albert as worse than being dead: “If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work” (17). She slaves away under Albert, allowing him and his children to abuse her, and she describes her sexual encounters with Albert as a form of rape, as if he uses the “toilet” on her (77). When Albert deprives Celie of her sister Nettie's letters, he exercises ultimate control over Celie—body and soul. Albert reveals the way he views women when Harpo asks why he beats Celie: “Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for—he don't finish. He just tuck his chin over the paper like he do. Remind me of Pa” (22).

Celie's connection between Albert and her step-father might lead readers to believe that Walker suggests that all men are alike: abusive and unappreciative of women. Walker actually presents readers with not only black men's propensity for violence against women, but also a view of the white racist structures which enable and influence such mistreatment. In “Coming in from the Cold,” Walker explains how the reader gains insight into Albert's (Mister) misogynist attitude by understanding his relationship with his father: “...it is clear that Mister's father is part-white; this is how Mister comes by his run-down plantation house. It belonged to his grandfather, a white man and a slave owner. Mister learns how to treat women and children from his father. Who did Old Mister learn from? Well, from Old Master, his slave-owning father, who treated Old Mister's mother and Old Mister (growing up) as slaves, *which they were*” (81). The legacy of self-loathing and powerlessness left to black men from their white slave-owning fathers induced men like Old Mister and his son (Albert) to grasp at power wherever they could.

In a racial hierarchy that placed only black women and children below black men, these men often exercised control over their subjects violently—just as their racist white counterparts used lynching in the Jim Crow South.

Albert's need to possess and control women through violence relates directly to how Adam Gussow terms intimate blues violence as a need to express power and individuality through blues brutality. Matthew B. White also connects black men's limited opportunities with their use of the blues to control women. He argues that, in the early twentieth century, "due to societal restrictions and structural constraints, black men in general were restrained—politically, socially, and economically. They were unable to assert all of their power and realize their full potential. In addition, while black men were living in a patriarchal society, they were unable to use much of the power and privileges which came with being a man in such a culture" (White 3). Albert tackles his powerlessness with Shug through his beatings of Celie. Albert's inability to marry (and so possess) Shug again stems from Old Mister's plantation-derived beliefs about women. Albert tells Celie how he mistreated his first wife, Annie Julia, because he really loved Shug: "I didn't want her [Annie Julia]. I wanted Shug. But my daddy was the boss. He give me the wife he wanted me to have" (270). Walker shows readers that black men are not immune from the cruel exclusions of patriarchy, extending her womanist focus on the entire race by exposing how both Albert and Celie's stories are informed by a paternalist southern system; both characters' fathers control their lives and choice of partners. In "Coming in From the Cold," Walker comments on Old Mister's internalization and subsequent performance of the slave master's role when he discourages Albert from taking Shug in because she is too black and ugly; Walker describes Old Mister's words as "*a slave owner's description of a black woman*" (81). Albert is denied Shug because of his complicit performance in the white supremacist and sexist

system passed down to him from the southern plantation, and when he cannot possess Shug, he begins to mistreat the other women in his life—first Annie Julia and then Celie.

Albert's views of and violence toward women fall in line with the songs of early bluesmen. White describes how bluesmen used song to usurp control over women they described as gold diggers or unfaithful lovers: "By reducing all women to simple stereotypes, the bluesmen are able to assert control over women. Stereotyping or categorizing women makes women manageable; by understanding the stereotype, the bluesmen are able to understand all women. He believes he knows their drives, traits and very nature" (8). Like a frustrated blues man, Albert's comments about women (as only sexually useful or requiring beatings like children) expose a need to stereotype and reduce women to an inferior status. Whereas blues women often sang about retributive violence against abusive men, as evinced by Davis's analysis, men boasted about the brutal ways they controlled women in their blues. White discusses songs like Blind Willie McTell's "Married Man's a Fool," where the singer threatens to beat his wife when she disobeys, and Robert Johnson's "32-20 Blues," where the singer threatens to slice his "unruly" wife with a razor (10-11). Just as Old Mister passed on his misogyny to Albert, Albert passes it on to his son, Harpo. Walker envelopes Harpo's conflict with his wife Sofia in the blues; when Harpo's beatings fail to control Sofia, he transforms their old home into a jukejoint (or jook), a gathering place historically referred to as the center of blues culture.

While Zora Neale Hurston defines the jook as "a Negro pleasure house" ("Characteristics" 841), Adam Gussow argues that the jukejoint or jook was also a hub for violence in the black community, with the "roughest black jooks...termed 'Buckets of Blood'" (202). In trying to gain power in a southern society based on racial and sexual hierarchies (where white male was at the top and black woman was at the bottom), the black blues community

performed violence on each other as a symbol of power and freedom. As Gussow explains it, “Cutting and shooting, literal and figurative, were ways in which black blues people, male and female, claimed and reclaimed their own and each other’s bodies within a self-created passionate economy that was none of the white man’s business” (209). Even as blues people exercised rights over their own bodies through abuse, ironically, their power was negated as they threatened and inflicted harm on one another. As Gussow argues, because black bodies were no longer valued economically after the abolition of slavery, the white community looked on and condoned such violence as long as it remained within the black community (211).

Harpo intends his jukejoint to be a place free from white restrictions and therefore open to intimate blues violence. Sofia leaves Harpo after fighting off his abuse for too long, and he starts construction on the jook as a way to gain back the control that he has lost. When Celie asks what Harpo is building way down in the woods in place of his old house, he and his friend Swain explain the nature of the jook to Celie:

Jukejoint supposed to be back in the woods, say Harpo. Nobody be bothered by the loud music. The dancing. The fights.

Swain say, the killings.

Harpo say, and the police don’t know where to look. (69-70)

The jukejoint operates not only as a place for dancing and singing but also for fighting and killing. In Harpo’s blues jook (just as Gussow describes in his study) blues people act intimately violent with one another beyond the arms of the white law. For Harpo, this freedom also relates to his (mis)treatment of women; in the jukejoint setting, Harpo gains control over women much like his father. Harpo finds a new half-white girlfriend, Squeak, who Celie describes as “a nice girl, friendly and everything, but she like me. She do anything Harpo say” (82). Harpo gives Squeak her name to solidify his ownership over her, refusing to call her by her family-given name, Mary Agnes, and thereby relegating her status to that of his child. Harpo’s jook becomes

not just a violent locale for the blues community, but also a place where Harpo can personally exercise control over women like Squeak. While the reader witnesses Harpo's failed attempts to "break" Sofia, in this new blues setting, Harpo finds a woman he can own just as Albert owns Celie.

As Walker suggests in the opening quote, the blues audience often internalized the abusive behavior sustained by the music, and Walker uses Harpo's jukejoint to criticize how black women have absorbed the brutal attitudes shown to them by black blues men. Readers already understand how Celie believes women should be subordinate to male authority—much like the prescribed role of the southern woman. From the beginning of the novel, when she obeys her step-father and silences herself on the rape she endures, Celie allows herself to be abused with no hope of escaping her circumstances. When Harpo asks Celie how he can dominate Sophia, Celie tells Harpo to beat his new wife, even though Celie believes the couple to be happy as they are (36). Celie bows to a racist and sexist system, where black men (like their white slave owners and Jim Crow counterparts) flaunt their possession over black women through violence. Once married to Albert, Celie accepts her mistreatment as part of her role as his wife. She tells Sofia, "Well, sometime Mr. _____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk with Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways" (42). Similar to the way Hurston describes Arvay's belief in a patriarchal God, Walker critiques Celie's internalization as made worse by her belief in a white God that asks her to obey and serve her father and husband.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further readings on the connection between religion and patriarchy in *The Color Purple*, see these compelling essays: James C. Hall's "Towards a Map of Mis(sed) Reading: The Presence of Absence in *The Color Purple*," Kimberly R. Chambers' "Right on Time: History and Religion in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," Peter Kerry Powers' "'Pa is Not Our Pa': Sacred History and Political Imagination in *The Color Purple*" and Stacie Lynn Hankinson's "From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*."

Sofia, on the other hand, stands up to the abusers in her life—whether they are men or women—and challenges the subordinate role through her resistant performance of the southern wife. Like a female blues protagonist, Sofia retributively deals back the violence Harpo commits on her and then finally leaves him. Similar to the classic blues divas, Sofia emerges as a dominant, independent woman of whom Celie feels jealous. While readers view Sofia as strong and capable (like Shug), Walker explains that Sofia has internalized violence as a defense mechanism because she was raised in a home where her father's word ruled (41). As Sofia tells Celie, "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight Daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (40). Sofia's and Celie's plights as black women under black men's authority are very similar, but Sofia's response is to fight back. While Celie and Shug suffer under sexism, Walker also uses their characters as a reflection of the choices that black men faced under racism; neither conforming (as Celie does) nor rebelling (as Sofia does) helps women gain power in the patriarchal structure that the black community has inherited from an oppressive Jim Crow South.

In a scene that takes place in Harpo's jook, in using violence to fight back, Sofia's resistant performances resemble those of the men she defends herself against. When Sofia visits Harpo's, Squeak feels threatened when she sees the two dancing together. Harpo tells Squeak that he has a right to dance with his wife, and Squeak responds by antagonizing Sofia and affirming that Harpo is now her possession. In two tiny words, "my man," Squeak expresses her need to own and control Harpo. Celie tells what happens next: "Sofia don't even deal in little ladyish things such as slaps. She ball up her fist, draw back, and knock two of Squeak's side teef out. Squeak hit the floor. One toof hanging on her lip, the other one upside my cold drink glass" (83). Celie's words demonstrate that Sofia also takes on the role of the controlling male in the

jook; Sofia's actions are not "ladyish" by any means.¹¹ While Celie describes the fight between the two women comically, Walker makes plain the connections between female and male violence, suggesting that brutality is not a productive way of gaining power for either sex. Squeak and Sofia take on the roles of violent bluesmen; Harpo's jook becomes not only a metaphorical setting for male blues violence, but also an actual stomping ground for the female characters who have internalized such a system of fighting for dominance.

When Sofia practices violence outside of the jook in the larger southern community, she faces much worse consequences. In the chapter following the incident in the jook, Sofia verbally challenges the white mayor's wife Ms. Millie and subsequently assaults the mayor. Walker investigates how this form of control is unsustainable when pitted against a powerful white community that exercises the same oppressive tactics when African Americans do not perform submissively. Through Sophia's situation, Walker critiques the white threat of violence and the culture of fear that promoted blues violence. As Gussow describes, as long as blues violence was kept within the black community, the white Jim Crow South did not interfere: blues people "*claimed* each other's bodies through the medium of intimate violence; asserted their fragile pride with the help of guns and knives; became agents of their own fate at the cost of inflicted pain and social mayhem... The jooks roared on, by and large, with the white man's approval" (211). Violence performed outside the safety of the jooks threatened the white-dominated social order, leading whites to reassert their power through lynching. When Sofia's violence emerges outside of the black community, the white police force beats her and takes her to prison. Sofia tries to act a good prisoner, but she describes how she must perform the subordinant role and

¹¹ See Tuzyline Jita Allen's "Women and the (Ab)use of Power in *The Color Purple*" for another reading of violence between women in the novel. Allen argues that Walker creates interracial and intraracial conflicts between the female characters in the novel to critique feminist ideologies that simply reinscribe patriarchy. While I agree with Allen, I argue that Walker is not only critiquing women's abuse of power, but also using blues metaphors to show how the underlying systems of (white) racism and sexism inform such abuse.

lower herself to do so: “Good behavior ain’t enough for them, say Sofia. Nothing less than sliding on your belly with your tongue on they boots can even git they attention. I dream of murder, she say, I dream of murder sleep or wake” (89). In Sofia’s predicament, Walker not only blatantly critiques the larger white racist southern community but also she wants readers to forge connections between white racism and black sexism. Celie later tells Harpo, “If you hadn’t tried to rule over Sofia the white folks never would have caught her,” underscoring that sexist violence at home is ultimately intertwined with the racist violence of the Jim Crow South (Walker 200).

Walker extends her womanist objectives in exposing how Sofia’s plight under a racist system creates violent murderous compulsions, linking Sofia with Pa, Albert, and Harpo. As with Celie’s father and step-father, Sofia seemingly has two choices—to continue bowing or to fight back. Yet, Walker reveals that Sofia has no choice when it comes to preserving her sanity or dignity in the face of the white Jim Crow South. When Sofia dreams of murder, Walker illustrates how the abuse Sofia endures at the hands of the white world threatens to make her like her oppressors. As Gina Michelle Collins writes, Sofia “does not realize that any attempt to fight the system by its own rules and on its own ground is doomed inevitably to failure. This is why it is so vitally important to oppressors that the oppressed share their values” (81).¹² But if the jook is a setting that promotes power and individuality through intimate violence (the brutal tool of the oppressor), in Walker’s novel, the jook also provides a celebratory gathering spot where individual domination can be remade into collective cooperation and acceptance.

¹² See Collins “*The Color Purple: What Feminism Can Learn from a Southern Tradition*” for a slightly subversive reading of the novel, which suggests that Sofia, Nettie, and even Shug are trapped within patriarchal strictures whereas Celie never identifies with patriarchy; it is Celie who teaches these characters “sharing, cooperation, and love” (84). While I find Collins’s argument compelling, I also believe that Celie is, at least at first, firmly entrenched in patriarchal values, which Walker signals to her reader through Celie’s undying faith in a white Christian God and the promise of heaven.

Harpo's jukejoint represents not only the negative consequences of blues violence but also provides a breeding ground for a womanist blues perspective, particularly through the audience response to Shug's performances. While Walker situates the male characters on the periphery of the blues (Harpo as the jukejoint owner and Albert as Shug's lover), Walker's women—particularly Shug and Squeak—take on centralized roles as blues singers. One crucial moment in Celie's changing view of herself happens when Shug sings a public song for her at Harpo's. After Shug sings the Bessie Smith standard "A Good Man is Hard to Find" for Albert, she begins to sing an original composition, "Miss Celie's Song," inspired by Celie's warm demeanor as she nurses Shug back to health. Walker's shift from a classic blues song to an original composition signals a revision of blues themes. Walker explains how Shug's song inspires Celie to escape from the patriarchal restrictions of intimate blues violence; Celie describes how the song "all about some no count man doing her wrong, again. But I don't listen to that part. I look at her and I hum along a little with the tune. First time somebody made something and name it after me" (73). Importantly, even while Shug's lyrics remain within the confines of the destructive heterosexual relationship (which so many blues women's songs are based on), Celie revises the meaning of Shug's tune. As Celie makes her own meaning, Walker also revises the audience response to women's blues about abuse and no-good men.¹³ Shug's song acts as a catalyst for Celie's change, but Celie as a female audience member (similar to Bone's understanding of "real" gospel in Allison's text) shrugs off the patriarchal values and understands the song's hidden meaning as a tribute to her individual person- and womanhood. In this brief moment, Walker revises the "very bad cycle" of abuse as sustained by the blues. The

¹³ In Steven Spielberg's movie production of the book, the song is further revised. Shug addresses Celie as "sister", and the song is clearly not about some no-count man, but about her appreciation and love for Celie. While I admire Spielberg's change—the song more clearly develops the love between the women through music—I also believe that the scene in the novel better underscores Celie's independent transformation and revision of heterosexual love as a blues audience member.

jukejoint begins to represent a place where change—as well as violence—can take place. While the blues allow Celie to understand herself outside of male control, Walker also uses the character of Squeak (Mary Agnes) to show how performances of blues womanism can triumph over blues violence.

When Sofia is jailed for her offense against the mayor, Celie visits her and sees that the police continually beat the spirit out of her. Afterwards, Harpo's blues community—normally engaged in singing and violence—unites to combat Sofia's white oppressors, knowing that Sofia will surely die if left to suffer in jail. Walker implies that collectivity between black men and women can be achieved when fighting back against the white Jim Crow South. Squeak (Mary Agnes) reveals that she is the white warden's niece, and Albert urges her to see him and plead for Sofia. When Squeak visits the warden, Walker makes the threat of white violence—particularly against black women—absolutely clear. Squeak returns with her clothes ripped and tells how she was raped because she looked so much like the warden: “He took my hat off, say Squeak. Told me to undo my dress. She drop her head, put her face in her hands... He say if he was my uncle he wouldn't do it to me. That be a sin. This just a little fornication. Everybody guilty of that” (96). The warden rapes Squeak to control her and to prove that, just because she shares his blood and physical traits, she does not demand his respect or equal treatment; the rape allows him to excise through violence the familial ties he shares with a black woman. Just as in the plantation system, the white power structure employs the rape and abuse of black women as sites of domination in the Jim Crow South.

Walker also inserts Squeak's interaction with her white uncle to continue to relate white power abuse to black men's abuse. After Celie's transformation occurs when she hears Shug's song, she advises Squeak to make Harpo respect her by calling her Mary Agnes (84). Squeak

finally understands Celie's advice when she makes the connection between her rape by a white man and Harpo's condescending treatment of her. As Harpo wraps his arms around her after the rape to reassure her that he loves her, Squeak makes a bold move and takes possession of her own body: "She stand up. My name Mary Agnes, she say" (97). Squeak literally stands up for herself; she decides to become, like Shug, a blues singer so that she can voice her individual frustrations with oppression as brought on by the white and black male communities. Harpo describes Mary Agnes's need to sing as "sudden," and Celie concurs that Mary Agnes's new career seems unfit for her: "she got the kind of voice you never think of trying to sing a song" (98). Like the 1920s classic blues women, Mary Agnes's song is brought on by the male abuse—white and black—visited on her; Walker transforms her into a singer to combat male blues violence but also to remake her as a womanist figure.

Walker suggests Mary Agnes's womanist similarity with Shug when Celie tells us how, at first, Mary Agnes sings Shug's songs (98). Mary Agnes begins to make up her own songs, and in fact, the only song lyrics in the book come from Mary Agnes, suggesting that her song might be more important than "Miss Celie's Song." Mary Agnes's song clarifies her need to belong in a black sisterhood denied her because of her half-white "yellow" status: "But if yellow be my name/Why ain't black the same/Well, if I say Hey black girl/Lord, she try to ruin my game"(99). Unlike Old Mister or his son Albert, who are still trapped by their inherited white blood, Mary Agnes wants to shed her status as a part-white woman, which allows her to be abused by white and black men and also excludes her from the community of black women. Gussow describes the stereotypes of women in the jook as perpetuated by male blues singers. He explains the conflict between the "violent, ax-wielding 'black gal'" as a "figure for black blues culture in its rough, vulgar, unrepentantly low-down incarnation" (like Sofia or Shug) and the less-threatening

“sweet-talking, sweet-loving ‘yaller wife’” (like Mary Agnes) (207). In her song, Mary Agnes revises these stereotypes and calls for equal treatment within the black community, regardless of color. She wants to be desired and respected as a “black” woman instead of mistreated as a near-white “yellow” girl. When she sheds her yellowness, Mary Agnes sheds her cowardice and servitude in her relationship with Harpo, whom she leaves for a blues career in Memphis. Sofia responds to Mary Agnes’s call by promising to care for her daughter while she is away: “Go on sing, say Sofia, I’ll look after this one till you come back” (204). Where the two women once fought over Harpo’s attention in the jook, they now support each other in a non-violent way. Mary Agnes’s song and transformation begin a shift towards a blues womanist consciousness that is just as important as Celie’s revising of Shug’s song at Harpo’s.

Still, Mary Agnes faces challenges in her growth when she takes up with Shug’s husband Grady, who Walker represents as another archetype of the bluesman similar to Hurston’s Joe Kelsey. When Celie and Squeak leave for Memphis with Shug and Grady, Celie describes Grady’s bragging and wandering blues personality:

Well, you know, wherever there’s a man, there’s trouble. And it seem like, going to Memphis, Grady was all over the car. No matter which way us change up, he want to sit next to Squeak. While me and Shug sleeping and he driving, he tell Squeak all about life in North Memphis, Tennessee. I can’t half sleep for him raving bout clubs and clothes and forty-nine brands of beer. (205)

Grady, who latches on to Shug for her monetary success and social status as a blues singer, becomes a bluesman who values women as “sugar mamas,” whom he can own and exploit at the same time. While Grady’s bluesman role is not rooted in violence (like Albert or Harpo), Walker’s comic portrayals of Grady as a Panama reefer farmer connect him to plantation culture. Shug’s revelation that “at least Grady let her sing” attests to Grady’s power as a bluesman figure whom exploits and controls not only minority workers on the plantation in Panama but also blues

women like Mary Agnes (250). At the novel's conclusion, however, Mary Agnes breaks free of Grady's blues control and comes back to Harpo's for her daughter, evincing the power he held over her when she tells Celie: "After while, being with Grady, I couldn't think" (287).

While Mary Agnes learns to free herself from male blues control and trust in her family for support, Sofia also grapples with the residual punishment of her internalized blues violence in her relationship to the racist white world and Ms. Millie's daughter Eleanor Jane. Through their interactions, Walker shows how a womanist blues vision not only inspires change in the southern black community but also between the black and white communities. When Eleanor Jane brings her infant son to visit Sofia, Walker again reveals the dominant white male world's racist strictures. Sofia tells Eleanor Jane, "I got my own problems...and when Reynolds Stanley grow up, he's gon be one of them...The first word he likely to speak won't be nothing he learn from you...I'm telling you I won't be able to love your own son. You can love him just as much as you want to. But be ready to suffer the consequences. That's how the colored live" (266). In Sofia's pointed attack on Eleanor Jane's helplessness and complicity with racism, Walker recalls Hurston's critique of Arvey as bowing to paternalism in *Seraph*. Yet in also allowing Eleanor Jane to resist patriarchy's racist divides, Walker revises Hurston's final stance in *Seraph*. Eleanor Jane discovers how Sofia came to work for her family and then pledges herself in service to Sofia. When Celie asks what the white people think of this, Sofia tells her, "They carrying on just like you know they would. Whoever heard of a white woman working for niggers, they rave. [Eleanor Jane] tell them, Whoever heard of somebody like Sofia working for trash" (281). Even though Harpo thinks that Eleanor Jane's "menfolks" will convince her to abandon her service to Sofia, Walker clearly suggests that Eleanor Jane will work toward a genuine relationship with Sofia (unlike Arvey's superficial connections with minority cultures at the end of *Seraph*): "Let

her quit, Sofia say. It not my salvation she working for. And if she don't learn she got to face judgment for herself, she won't even have live" (281). Here Walker's womanist blues vision—Shug's version of love and tolerance as dispersed and interpreted throughout the community—offers the possibility of growth, not just within the black community but within the larger interracial southern community. Walker extends the temporary resistant moments between Arvay and the blues community in *Seraph* to reimagine a South where white women can overcome the patriarchal shackles placed on them and perhaps form honest relationships with the African American community.

Brought together, the actions of Walker's female characters challenge intimate male blues violence (as also representative of white racial violence) and inspire changes in the South. As Barbara Christian writes, "...Celie's attainment of freedom affects not only others of her sisters, but her brothers as well" (53). Because Walker incorporates a womanist perspective with the history of the classic blues women, Walker also illuminates how Albert and Harpo are redeemed (while Pa dies and Celie subsequently inherits his property). After Celie curses and leaves him, Albert falls into a state of misery, and Harpo finally breaks into the house to care for him. Albert and Harpo turn to each other like the women in the novel have previously done, and Harpo makes Albert send Nettie's letters to Celie. Once Sofia sees the love between the men, she takes Harpo back into her life. While Sofia says that being with Harpo is not always easy, the two are able to sustain their relationship without violence; Sofia works while Harpo tends to the house, and they learn to accept each other as equals. Albert apologizes for his treatment of Celie, and they spend time together while Shug is away with her new lover Germaine; their love for Shug brings them together. Walker uses Shug's blues womanism to foster forgiveness and communication between Celie and Albert, who chat like old friends and sew pants together.

Mary Agnes retrieves her daughter and leaves the bragging bluesman Grady to return to singing in Memphis full time, and Shug later leaves Germaine to return to Celie and singing at Harpo's. Finally, the entire community is restored when Nettie and Celie's children return from Africa. bell hooks has written about the novel's conclusion, "The message conveyed in the novel that relationships no matter how seriously impaired can be restored is compelling. Distinct from the promise of a happy ending, it allows for the recognition of conflict and pain, for the possibility of reconciliation" (227).¹⁴ While reconciliation between men and women is overtly womanist, the recognition of pain and conflict is inherently blues-oriented; Walker combines blues and womanist themes to revise the history of abuse in the black community. Just as Hurston creates musical *lieux de mémoire* through Arvey's story to expose the interconnected and oppressive racial and sexual consequences of southern paternalism, Walker uses Celie's letters (like the blues) to publicly recognize black women's private domestic abuse, while the female blues audience in the novel remakes blues violence into a womanist-inspired resolution.

Notably, in the last scenes of the novel, Walker shifts the setting of a family celebration from Harpo's jook to Celie's home, signaling an ultimate break in the blues cycle of abuse; the Harpo's blues community now unites in cooperative harmony as everyone takes on a duty in preparing the July 4th feast. Harpo and Mary Agnes exchange a brief conversation over the meaning of the day, again signaling Walker's revision of the black experience in southern history:

¹⁴ hooks also criticizes the novel's ending because Celie gains power through inheritance and not political struggle: "To make Celie happy she creates a fiction where struggle—the arduous and painful process by which the oppressed work for liberation—has no place. This fantasy of change without effort is a dangerous one for both oppressed and oppressor. It is a brand of false consciousness that keeps everyone in place and oppressive structures intact"(227). While hooks makes a strong critique, I would argue that Walker shows the propensity for struggle and change from "oppressive tactics" in the relationship between Sofia and Miss Eleanor, suggesting that, like the black community, the white community can learn to give, love, and cooperate despite the racist social structures present.

Why us always have family reunion in July 4th, say Henrietta, mouth poke out, full of complaint. It so hot.

White people busy celebrating they independence from England July 4th, say Harpo, so most black folks don't have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other.

Ah, Harpo, say Mary Agnes, sipping some lemonade, I didn't know you knowed history. (287)

Harpo's version of history—the black folk celebrating one another—challenges the white version of history; Harpo's small statement represents the black community as subordinate to white power (“most black folk don't have to work”) but also reveals his revised perspective on the historical holiday as a celebration of black community and independence from the white world. Celie's memory speaks collectively to an alternative history of southern African Americans that exists outside of the white mainstream. As Sturken writes, collective memory and history are “*entangled* rather than oppositional” (5). Collective and cultural memory contribute to how history is created, especially the cultural memory of oppressed peoples which is suppressed by white-dominated portraits of southern history designed to reinforce stereotypes and maintain the status-quo of an imagined white hierarchy. Walker's re-designation of a white historical holiday as interpreted by the black community is akin to her revision of blues violence in the novel; traces or sites of memory are reworked to constitute a harmonizing utopia for southern African Americans that breaks the “very bad” cycle of abuse.

At the novel's conclusion, Walker names herself as, not only “author,” but also “medium” for the characters. As a medium, Walker presents Celie's individual memory as a voice of the “old ones,” similar to singers Mamie, Bessie, and Ma. Like the classic blues divas, through Celie's memory, Walker makes the public aware of the abuse black women faced, but in womanist fashion, Walker extends that blues message to include male intimate violence as well—transforming an individual black woman's memory to a cultural memory of Jim Crow brutality. Celie's blues-inspired letters move beyond Ellison's blues “scapegoat” of the “self” to

question how the collective blues community internalizes and challenges violence inherited from the white-dominated South. Through Celie's blues memories, Walker teaches readers not simply to recognize the powerful and resistant performances of blues divas, but to uncover the driving force behind domestic and intimate blues violence: the white power structure that can only be transcended by the blues audience's revising of abusive tactics to loving acceptance of one another. In the following chapter, I consider how Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* memorializes women's roles in gospel and country music history to similar ends, showing how Bone both criticizes and remakes an imagined southern community which excludes her because of her gender and class status.

CHAPTER THREE: "IT WASN'T GOD WHO MADE HONKY TONK
ANGELS": MUSICAL SALVATION IN DOROTHY ALLISON'S
BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA

"The one thing that did keep me safe, that gave me a feeling of comfort growing up, was music. Music took me somewhere safe—a place where I was happy and free and comfortable being myself. I knew from a very young age that music was something I wanted to be a part of. It was something that made me feel good and helped me escape to a place where life was how I always dreamed it should be. Where life was like the movies. Fairy-tale endings and unconditional love." – Melissa Etheridge

"I believe in a higher power. I believe we all need to be connected spiritually...Music is a very supernatural thing."
– country singer Mark Collie

In her novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison interrogates the notion of musical salvation offered in the gospel and country music communities of the 1950s and 1960s American South to Ruth Anne "Bone" Boatwright, a mature narrator recalling her childhood trauma of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse inflicted by her step-father (similar to Walker's Celie). Bone, like Melissa Etheridge and Mark Collie, often endows music with an almost mystical power. For Etheridge, music becomes a safe place where she finds love and happiness, and for Collie, music represents a spiritual space where human beings come together. For these singers (as for many musicians, music scholars, and avid listeners) music holds a saving power, even if only imaginary like Etheridge's "fairy-tale endings." Bone tells a story enveloped in musical memories that sometimes provide her with an imagined safe, spiritual space but also expose her to the imagined discriminatory patriarchal hierarchies in southern culture that work to thwart her safety and peace. Just as Walker uses Shug's blues world as a catalyst for both Celie's and readers' transformations, Allison's fervent depictions of gospel revival tents and country radio stars work as *lieux de mémoire* (symbolic sites of memory) that invite readers to recover a musical portion of southern history, where music acts not only as a space to reflect on the trauma of childhood abuse, but also as a site that teaches readers to criticize and revise the exclusivity of an imagined southern community dependent on the divisions of gender, race, and class. Through

these musical tropes, Allison unfolds Bone's developing realization that (as Kitty Wells' song suggests) it isn't God who constructs roles for men and women, but instead patriarchal southern social structures.

Since the novel's publication in 1992, scholars have effectively discussed Bone's "white trash" status and its history in the South, the shame it brings on Bone in particular, and the different ways Bone challenges her assigned place in the community through her masturbatory fantasies, story-telling, and visual re-makings.¹ Few of these critics consider the musical elements in the novel, though James R. Giles intimates that these are aspects worthy of critical attention in his mention of southern Christian fundamentalism as an inoperative escape from trauma: "(one of the most fascinating aspects of *Bastard Out of Carolina* is its exploration of the gospel music subculture and especially of the close connections between gospel and 'popular' music in the South)" (91). Giles's parenthetical reference to Allison's use of music echoes other critics like Deborah Horvitz who recognizes how Bone "infuses her passion for music with her extreme self-loathing when she awakens to the pleasure of art in the form of live gospel music" and how this "artistic passion represents transcendence" from physical trauma (5). Also incorporating music, Ann Cvetkovich explores the intersections of Bone's sadomasochistic masturbatory fantasies, incest, sexual trauma, and queerness, beginning with an analysis of the lesbian band Tribe 8 and their openness in performing sexually "deviant" tendencies on stage.

¹ For instance, see Tanya Horeck's "Let me tell you a Story: Writing the Fiction of Childhood in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*" and Suzanne Juhasz's "Daughter Writing and the Search for Recognition" for explorations of how story-telling and writing act as Bone's expression of a complex childhood sexuality and her relationship with Anney. Along those lines, see also Katrina Irving's "'Writing it Down So That It Would Be Real': Narrative Strategies in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*" (1998) for an investigation of how Bone's story-telling "forges some control over her overwhelmingly disempowered context"(5). See Katherine Henninger's "Claiming Access: Controlling Images in Dorothy Allison" for an exploration of how the Boatwright women remake the photographic aspects of the novel to revise their white trash status by challenging the outside world's newspaper photos of the family with a family photo album.

While Giles and Horvitz connect story-telling and music in the novel, Cvetkovich (on a more general level) recognizes the ways music and story-telling create a “safe space” for queer women to express themselves.

While these scholars note such connections in passing, this chapter turns further attention to Allison’s use of music as a symbolic site of memory—where music becomes more than a site of escape from physical trauma but also attests to a collective southern cultural trauma of oppression. While Allison uses Bone’s gospel and country music memories as a “safe space” for an expression of personal trauma, she also recounts the history of gospel and country music (of which Giles hints in his chapter) to subvert the patriarchal narrative of southern history as racist, classist, and sexist. Allison’s text creates a musical interruption of the larger imagined community of the South, where, to invoke Jean-Luc Nancy, the resisting community of queer “white trash” women function as the background voices heard in the interruption; the Boatwright women represent a community resisting the domination of a paternal South.² Through Bone’s gospel and country *lieux de mémoire*, Allison asks her readers to channel the collective musical memory behind the traces—a history of southern women exposing communities that challenge southern Agrarian versions of history. While Allison illuminates the resistant communities in both gospel and country music through Bone’s fantasies of musical salvation, she also explores how the commercial music industry works to squash these resistances and renew patriarchal power in the South, creating an imagined “coercive” community which Bone’s memories

² To remember Nancy’s ideas about community in *The Inoperative Community* as explored in the introduction: echoing Foucault’s arguments about power, Nancy argues, “Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely resistance to [individual] immanence” (35). Using the concentration camp as an example of an attempted annihilation of community, Nancy explains how a community united in resistance in the camps, revealing that power hierarchies never completely destroy community. Nancy’s version of community arises from the very limits of individuality in knowing that there are other humans that live and die alongside the individual. Thus, we can never “lose” community. Nancy details how community exposes itself as resistant when myth is interrupted by “literature”—which can be art, philosophy, writing, or music—the act of expressing thought. In linking southern gospel and country music history with Bone and the other Boatwright women through literature, Allison reveals the resistance to a dominating, paternal South using two types of literature: writing and music.

interrupt—much like Hurston’s depictions of musical resistance and exploitation in *Seraph*.³ In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Allison uses southern music history to critique the coercive raced, classed, and gendered values of patriarchy; through Bone’s developing recognition of this coercive community, Allison also reimagines a cohesive South based on resistance to these oppressive values—a resistance found in the gospel community’s origins and in country music’s honky tonk angels.

While country music book-ends Allison’s novel—from Bone’s first safe space at her grandmother’s home to her final safe space at her aunt Raylene’s, gospel music rests literally at the center of the book, forming the heart of the text wherein Allison exposes the imagined coercive southern community that excludes Bone because she is labeled “white trash” and “bastard.” When the revival tents go up, Bone craves the attention and security gospel music affords its singers: “Gospel singers always had money in their pockets, another bottle under their seats. Gospel singers had love and safety and the whole wide world to fall back on—women and church and red clay solid under their feet” (Allison 168). Allison reveals how these singers gain love and security through their music—a potential escape from the unstable and unloving home life her step-father Glen provides for Bone. Bone dreams of the day when she becomes part of a real family—a gospel family—or better yet, a gospel soloist: “All I needed was a chance to turn my soulful black eyes on a tent full of believers, sing out the little break in my heart. I knew I could make them love me. There was a secret to it, but I would find it out. If they could do it to me, I would find a way to do it to the world” (Allison 143). Through Bone’s desire for love, Allison draws parallels between Bone’s gospel fantasies and the other stories she tells herself

³ As discussed in the introduction, the idea of “coercive” and “cohesive” communities comes from Scott Romine’s *The Narrative Forms of Southern Literature*. He understands the tensions between southern conceptions of community as either cohesive or coercive, where the race and class divides mean to act as cohesive, but in actuality act as coercive forces. This in some ways mirrors Nancy’s idea that myth *imposes* history while literature *proposes* several histories.

about Glen's abuse. Bone emerges as a heroine in these stories, which involve Glen beating Bone in front of a loving community who denounces him, as well as dreams of fire that engulf her like a martyr for the crowd. Allison suggests the common denominator in Bone's fantasies—whether of abuse, fire, or gospel (chock full of religious rhetoric about sin, salvation, and martyrdom)—is Bone's need for the love denied her by her mother Anney and her step-father Glen. As several critics have noted, these fantasies provide a space where she safely reenacts and gains control over the loveless existence she lives. Yet, in Bone's gospel musings, Allison unveils something equally as powerful as Glen's abuse—the power of a coercive, yet imagined, patriarchal southern community to deprive Bone of acceptance because of her assigned status as an illegitimate “white trash” woman. Just as Walker creates Celie's blues-inspired letters to ask readers to re-conceptualize an oppressive South, through Bone's narrative of the gospel revival tents, Allison creates a memorial site that offers Bone a safe space in which to fantasize and that also asks readers to unearth the history of southern gospel music and how its constructed patriarchal community upholds racism and classism.

In Bone's idealized fantasies about the love and acceptance provided to gospel singers, Allison invokes a southern history of gospel music founded from a cohesive resistant community with egalitarian evangelical origins. The ideals behind gospel music are deeply tied to southern evangelicalism; the music found its roots in popular southern camp meetings created by poor southern blacks and whites in the antebellum South and spurred by the evangelical Christian thought that began to permeate American Protestant religions.⁴ While evangelicalism was prevalent throughout America, Charles Reagan Wilson describes it as distinctively a southern religion: “Evangelicalism is that branch of Protestantism that has dominated the South, embodied

⁴ For further explication of evangelicalism and its origins and evolution in southern history and culture, see Charles Reagan Wilson's essays “Southern Religion,” “The Southern Religious Culture,” and *Baptized in Blood*. See also Donald G. Mathews's *Religion in the Old South* and his edited essay collection *Religion in the American South*.

institutionally in Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, and affecting even groups not normally a part of the tradition” (“The Southern Religious Culture” 8). Wilson describes “evangelicalism” as founded on the experience of conversion which “becomes the foundation for a new, transformed life” (“The Southern Religious Culture” 8). Because, as Wilson suggests, evangelicalism is based on conversion, “proselytizing becomes not one aspect of religion but the central concern of individuals and the church community” (“The Southern Religious Culture” 8). Spurred by the gospel music that moves her to joy and shame, Bone’s intense need for salvation (she is almost saved fourteen times) and also her desire to convert her family in the text evoke the prime tenets of evangelical thought.

Through its proselytizing, evangelicalism also allowed for the development of a sense of community between individuals—the gospel community to which Bone so wants to belong. Wilson argues, “These early evangelicals embraced an individualistic faith, centered on personal sinfulness and the saving power of God’s grace, which led to new spiritual communities that enforced considerable moral austerity. Thus appeared the Southern Evangelical dynamic of community and individualism” (“Southern Religion(s)” 240). Beth Barton Schweiger concurs with Wilson, suggesting that “Christian conversion was, in short, both a deeply personal and a profoundly social event” (51). Like Fundamentalists, Evangelicals also believed that good works, or what Wilson describes as “right behavior,” are essential for a religious life (“The Southern Religious Culture” 9); this “right behavior” and “moral austerity” implied equal treatment of all people—despite their gender, race, or class position—united through a love for Christ.

As Wilson describes, “early southern evangelicals, in general, targeted conversion of young people, empowered black exhorters and young itinerant ministers, and allowed women considerable leeway in prophecy and prayer. These were radical actions in a society that prized

order and hierarchy” (“Southern Religion(s)” 240). Donald G. Mathews also suggests that, in the years surrounding the Civil War, “social rank, learning, intelligence—most of the bases for making invidious distinctions among people—were cast aside” in hopes of creating a community through personal relationships with Christ (12). Evangelical theology introduced revivals, camp meetings, and gospel music as conversion tactics for the individual Christian and the group. In the camp meetings, after sermons, followers gathered to sing hymns set to popular folk tunes (Goff 18). These constructed choruses combined popular music with sacred music and allowed the larger crowd to sing together with the leading songsters; gospel music created a shared space where the individual could join in his/her community (and vice versa) through song.

Like evangelical religion, gospel music was characterized by interracial interaction in antebellum southern history as critics like Wilson, James Goff, and Paul Harvey explicate.⁵ As Goff suggests, “the evangelical success of revivalism was not limited by race;” he describes how camp meetings separated black and white preachers and congregations in different tents, but he also describes meetings where “no wall of segregation existed and interracial worship services carried the day” (19). Even where separate services prevailed, black and white southerners still influenced one another: “Here in the midst of a common worship experience, despite the invariable conflict of racial stereotypes and limits imposed by southern culture, worshippers listened, learned, and shared” (Goff 19). In the early years, gospel music emerged as an amalgamation of southern musical stylings that combined the secular and the sacred and mirrors egalitarian evangelical goals. These camp meetings and their music engendered a cultural mixing

⁵ In his essay, “God and Negroes and Jesus and Sin and Salvation: Racism, Racial Interchange, and Interracialism in Southern Religious History,” historian Paul Harvey investigates the ways early southern Holiness and Pentecostal revivals offered a place where all southerners came together—black, white, rural, urban, men, women, children. Though they were still barricaded by segregation—whites on one side of the tent and blacks on the other—these revivals offered a space where they could experience one another’s cultures. Harvey argues that this becomes especially evident with gospel music and especially clear when gospel radio programs were popularized.

of southerners—a resistant community—even while segregation seemed the rule. As Goff explains, these early confluences also

foreshadowed the cross-fertilization that would thrive in gospel music in the decades after Reconstruction when southern society moved rapidly toward segregation. Although white gospel and black gospel would emerge as separate industries by the early years of the twentieth century, proponents never ignored the progress and development of their racial counterparts. (20)

When Bone envisions a gospel career where the whole world loves and accepts her, Allison emphasizes these idealized origins, but Bone’s fantasies are thwarted by a segregated community found in the commercial gospel world (just as Arvay and Joe’s musical resistances are subsumed by the commercial blues world in *Seraph* and just as Lee Smith’s female musicians’ performances become exploited by the country industry in *The Devil’s Dream*).

As rural camp meetings shifted into urban revivals, gospel music became an even stronger conversion tactic—and a source of economic power. As Goff suggests, “all evangelicals had accepted the important role that music could play in achieving their religious goal of converting men and women to the gospel” (19). Because this new music combined sacred hymns with popular secular folk tunes, evangelicals reached a broader audience without alienating them. With the introduction of five- or seven-shape note books, lower-class followers who had not been trained to read traditional sheet music could learn to read and participate in the gospel. In the beginning, this innovation further expanded the reach of evangelicalism and created an evangelical community that offered every southerner—whether young, old, white, black, woman, man, child, poor or rich—an opportunity to join.

When gospel grew into a music motivated by profit and produced for the masses, evangelical intentions for equality collapsed into an industry divided by race and class. Gospel music shifted from a communal form of prayer to a business, where large shape book companies

used singers to promote their products. The shared singing between songsters and congregations at camp meetings gave way to gospel quartets and families, who now gained profit from their once-free performances. With this commercial evolution, individual salvation was supplanted by the construction of family values. Wilson describes how “family life became the ideal” (evincing the southern structure of paternalism, which viewed African Americans and women as children), and churches encouraged segregation and afforded less accommodation to women (“Southern Religion(s)” 241). Gospel music, once an art that encouraged acceptance and equality through a love of Christ, became an economic power locus that reinforced visions of a community ordered by gender, race, and class distinctions.

As evangelical thought was subsumed by southern paternalism, gospel families competed with all-male quartets, and promoting an imagined wholesome family became central to reinscribing the race and class hierarchy of the South. In response to what some religious leaders called a “breakdown of values” after World War II (the renewed revolutions for both racial and gender equality in the Civil Rights and Women’s movements), such leaders used gospel music families as a focus for rebuilding the family and hence restoring order to an unstable paternalist South. As Rex Humbard, a prominent preacher credited with starting TV evangelism, described, “Throughout the world, there’s a moral breakdown, which started with the home and family. That’s the basic unit of society, the church, even the economy. The Singers, together on stage as a family, make an impression” (qtd. in Bufwack and Oermann 204-205). Gospel music and the gospel family reflected the conservative shifts in evangelical ideals—from a belief in unity through God’s love to support for “family values”—and instituted a coercive vision that gained political and commercial profit for its powerful white managers.

Allison signals this shift in gospel history when Bone befriends Shannon, whose family is in the religious business through Mrs. Pearl's sewing for and Mr. Pearl's promotion of gospel singers. The Pearls become representative of imagined gospel family values, which Allison critiques as founded less on democratic evangelical ideals and more on race and class hierarchies that supply the middle class white community with money and power. Bone recognizes that Shannon and the Pearl family, of middle-class status like Glen's family, view themselves as superior to the Boatwrights. As Bone describes, Mrs. Pearl "reminded me of the way James Waddell looked at us, of his daughters' smug, superior faces, laughing at my mama's loose teeth and Reese's curls done up in paper scraps... Their contempt had worn my skin thin, and I had no patience for it. Whenever the Pearls talked about my people, I'd take off and not go back for weeks" (162). Shannon's smile is often "full of the pride of family position," a position afforded the Pearls by their selling of southern gospel (162). While the Pearls' life and business revolve around the gospel circuit and its connection to Christianity, they judge Bone by her "trash" status, representing a hypocritical southern family that warps evangelical and gospel ideals by discriminating on a class basis and participating in a coercive communal vision—a coercive religious community Smith also criticizes as exploiting country music's women in *The Devil's Dream*.

Shannon's parents profess to be full of Christian charity and spirit, but they continually ignore what happens on the circuit—the fact that many of the performers accost the young girls and offer them liquor. When one singer insults Shannon by calling her "the ugliest thing" he's ever seen, Mrs. Pearl ignores her child's crying and instead praises the singer. As Bone says:

It was a wonder to me that the truth never seemed to register with Mr. and Mrs. Pearl ... They never seemed to see all the 'boys' passing bourbon in paper cups backstage or their angel daughter begging for 'just a sip' ... Certainly sin didn't touch them the way it did

Shannon and me. Both of us had learned to walk carefully backstage, with all those hands reaching out to stroke our thighs and pinch the nipples we barely had. (163)

Through Bone's experience, Allison discloses the hypocrisy on the circuit—no one acts particularly “Christian,” and the Pearls turn a blind eye to these behaviors, divulging their need for the social status and wealth religion affords them, even at the cost of their daughter's “angel” innocence. In short, religion becomes a performance for the Pearls—a performance that furthers their dominant social position over Bone. Allison's critique recalls some southern scholars' suggestions that religion granted wealthy southerners both the power to help others and the power to discriminate against them. These writers theorize that upper-class southerners viewed their religion seriously—especially as a tool to further white patriarchy in the South.⁶ Allison constructs the Pearls as a typical gospel family—the image of white middle class respectability and family values—and exposes how they ignore the roving, drinking gospel singers that make up the circuit and discriminate against Shannon because of her ugliness; they uphold the image without questioning it, echoing Mrs. Pearl's own words that “questioning's a sin, it's pointless” (Allison 160). The Pearls represent Romine's coercive community as they enforce the class hierarchy of the South, subtly berating Bone as “white trash” while simultaneously accepting the immoral behavior of the gospel performers.

Even though Bone recognizes the hypocrisy on the circuit, the music still holds salvational power for her as Allison hints at its egalitarian inspiration when Bone identifies with the tragic personal (not religious) motivations behind the songs. While the Pearls use the gospel circuit as a form of business, ignoring the fact that many of the singers are drunks and womanizers, Bone identifies with their heartbroken lives more than their supposed religious

⁶ See Bertram Wyatt Brown's *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*, and Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* for discussions of how religion was interpreted and used to perpetuate heterosexual white male dominance.

faith: “It didn’t matter then if it was whiskey backstage or tongue kissing in the dressing room. Whatever it took to make that juice was necessary, was fine. I wiped my eyes and swore out loud. Get those boys another bottle, I said. Find that girl a hard-headed husband. But goddamn, get them to make that music. Make that music! Lord, make me drunk on that music” (136). In this reflexive musical moment, Allison suggests that, for Bone, the evangelical performances of “family values” do not sustain gospel but instead the salvational power people recall through the music—the earlier egalitarian community ideals of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. For Bone, the pure gospel music surpasses any (falsely) constructed religious doctrine, just as Shug’s blues womanism revises dominant Christian values in *The Color Purple*. While Bone recognizes the coercive religious values in this imagined community and realizes that its “Christian” values are more of a performance than the music on the stage, the gospel music itself holds a resistant power that deconstructs hierarchies and allows for tolerance and love. The Pearls instead devalue the music’s power and use it for profit: “Gospel was [Shannon’s] family’s life, and she knew all there was to know about it, though she didn’t seem to feel the music’s impact the way I did. Shannon made fun of preachers and choir singers...I could never have told her my secret ambition, never have told her that I cried when I listened to tent shows on the radio late at night” (159). Allison makes clear the differences between Shannon and Bone. Like both Arvey and Celie, as a participating audience member, Bone feels a resistant power in music beyond its dogmatized religious and commercial message, while Shannon views the music as a joke and uses the circuit to further her privileged middle-class position.

As Bone continues to tour with the Pearls—thriving on the music—Allison not only asks readers to critique the class power dynamics in the evolution of the southern gospel community, but also the changing racial dynamics. She presents Bone’s struggles with her family’s

sometimes racist trajectory earlier in the novel to highlight Bone's ultimate comprehension of the racism prevalent in the gospel world. Bone recognizes that "People were crazy on the subject of color, I knew, and it was true that one or two of the cousins had kinky hair and took some teasing for it, enough that everyone was a little tender about it" (54). Bone internalizes many of her family's views on race; because she is not fair and pale like the rest of the Boatwright women, she obsesses over her ugliness and feels like an outsider in her own family. Bone begins to question southern race relations when she longs to befriend a young black girl at her cousin Gray's apartment house. As Bone watches the girl, she thinks:

I had heard all the hateful jokes and nasty things people said about 'niggers,' but on my own, I had never spoken to a colored person in anything more than the brief careful 'sir' and 'ma'am' that Mama had taught us...As nervous as the idea made me, I wished that girl would come out so I could try to talk to her, but she never did more than look out the windows at us. Her mama had probably told her all about what to expect from trash like us. (86)

In Bone's desire to meet the young black girl, Allison evinces a community resistant to the imagined structure of racism. Even so, Allison relates how Bone succumbs to the classist ideology of the South, believing what separates the girls is not race, but her own "trash" status.

In Bone's developing recognition of racism, Allison offers a critique of southern patriarchal structures that distinguish between race and class in attempts to keep people of the lower classes from communing by creating a racial divide.⁷ Allison further emphasizes the connections between race and class discrimination through Bone's travels on the segregated gospel circuit.

⁷ Allison's connection between race and class discrimination asks readers to meditate on how race and class constructions similarly challenge upper-class white dominance. Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray describe how "white trash" becomes racialized: "Unlike unmarked hegemonic forms of whiteness, the category of white trash is marked as white from the outset. But in addition to being racially marked, it is simultaneously marked as trash, as something that must be discarded, expelled, and disposed of in order for whiteness to achieve and maintain social dominance. Thus, white trash must be understood as both an external and an internal threat to whiteness. It is externalized by class difference but made the same through racial identification. White trash lies simultaneously inside and outside whiteness, becoming the difference within, the white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness" (169-70). In this definition, white trash threatens mainstream white values as much as people of different races. See David Reynolds' "White Trash in Your Face: The Literary Descent of Dorothy Allison" for an analysis of the

When Bone and Shannon stumble on a black choir in the back woods, Allison demonstrates how privileged white southerners used racial differences (to the same end they used class demarcations like “white trash”) to dominate the economic and political spheres of the gospel circuit. Upon hearing the music, Bone recognizes it as the best she has ever heard: “Gut-shaking, deep-bellied, powerful voices rolled through the dried leaves and hot air. This was the real stuff. I could feel the whiskey edge, the grief and holding on, the dark night terror and determination of real gospel” (169). Bone immediately tells Shannon that they should go to her father, but Shannon’s reply reveals the Pearls’ interest in gospel music as economic power only: “He don’t handle colored. An’t no money in handling colored” (170). Bone deduces that the choir is black by the location of their church: “At that I froze, realizing that such a church off such a dirt road had to be just that—a colored church. And I knew what that meant. Of course I did. Still I heard myself whisper, ‘That an’t one good voice. That’s a churchful’” (170). Allison suggests that Bone now realizes that race, like class, determines where community is “placed” in the South—on the margins of society unable to grasp political or economic power. Bone’s gospel memories recall the segregated history of black and white southern gospel music as it surged to popularity after World War II. Goff describes how Civil Rights and the *Brown v. Board of Education* influenced the southern gospel circuit: “A decade that began with frequent appearances of the Golden Gate Quartet, one of the most famous black groups in the nation, on concert venues headlined by major white gospel quartets thus ended with the almost total segregation of gospel music” (159).

Still, in this reflexive musical moment, Bone feels saved by the music which almost restores the faith that her time with the Pearls has eroded: “‘My God,’ I breathed, and it was the

origins of “white trash” in culture and literature, as well as how Allison’s “realistic” portrayals in *Bastard Out of Carolina* participate in deconstructing the binary of romanticized and demonized (good/bad) poor.

best ‘My God’ I’d ever put out, a long, scared whisper that meant I might just start to believe that He hid in cottonwoods” (169). Kelly Thomas notes, “Bone’s enthusiasm for gospel music transcends a racist and racially segregated society” (181). Allison suggests that, for Bone, the music sounds out a resistant community—a joining of black and white southerners in resistance to oppressive values like those of the Pearls. Through Bone’s desire for a racially cohesive community, Allison recalls the cultural mixing that engendered the evolution of gospel music, mirroring the reflexive musical moments between Arvey and the black community in Hurston’s *Seraph*. Even while, as Goff suggests, black and white gospel groups no longer toured together, radio created a world not fully controlled by the South’s racial codes. As Paul Harvey argues, music offered a place where the boundaries of segregation might remain intact on the surface, but performers and musicians could also borrow easily from one another: “In gospel, then, the streams of southern religious music, white and black, flowed alongside one another, exchanging tunes and lyrics and styles while remaining distinct” (Harvey 305). While gospel’s commercial evolution shifted from a musical focus to an economic power locus, this evolution also spurred resistant cultural mixings through the medium of the radio. Then southerners could once again inadvertently share gospel songs, styles, and traditions with people of different races, classes, regions, and genders—evincing the resistant community (rooted in early egalitarian evangelicalism) for which Bone longs.

Bone’s transcendent feelings of connection and salvation are eclipsed when Shannon dismisses the choir as “coloreds” and “niggers” and blames Bone for making her say that un-Christian word. Allison critiques the hypocrisy and racial divide of the Pearl’s brand of southern religion when Bone connects Shannon’s comments with her own class status: “The way Shannon said ‘nigger’ tore at me, the tone pitched exactly like the echoing sound of Aunt Madeline

sneering ‘trash’ when she thought I wasn’t close enough to hear” (170). Bone retorts by calling Shannon a “white-assed bitch,” and Bone’s continued attack on Shannon as a “monster, you greasy cross-eyed stinking sweaty-faced ugly thing” exemplifies Bone’s feelings about whiteness—issues of shame and anger at the privileged class like the Pearls and the Waddells that keep her in her place as “trash” (172).⁸ In response, Shannon blasts the word “trash” at Bone, describing the Boatwrights as “drunks and thieves and bastards” and suggesting that Bone only visits the Pearls to eat scraps from their table (170-171). Shannon confirms Bone’s own connections between class and race in the gospel circuit—between “trash” and “niggers”—again uncovering how this supposedly Christian community represents a once-egalitarian evangelical theology hijacked by the southern values of racism and classism.

Through Bone’s memories of the gospel circuit, Allison asks her readers to link gospel history with an imagined southern community, where barriers of race and class kept the black choir and “white trash” from gaining power in an industry reserved for white middle-class southerners like the Pearls. Just as Hurston critiques the white paternalist South through Arvey’s story, Allison uses Bone’s gospel memories to criticize the same lingering system; while Bone’s belief in gospel music might transcend these barriers, the gospel industry—in the form of the Pearl family—upholds them. Through the music, Bone fantasizes about a life filled with love and tolerance, but the southern patriarchal structure of the gospel music business will not allow for this fantasy to become a reality. As Giles suggests, “Ultimately, though, Bone is disillusioned by the hypocrisy, racism, and morbidity of the gospel scene...” (92). While Bone abandons the

⁸ See Kelly Thomas’ “White Trash Lesbianism: Dorothy Allison’s Queer Politics” for an important reading of Shannon Pearl, (one of few essays that concentrates on Bone and Shannon’s relationship) where Bone is both attracted and repulsed by “whiteness” as Other; Bone longs to be like Shannon while at the same time hating her for her privileged status. See also J. Brooks Bouson’s “You Nothing But Trash”: White Trash Shame in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*” for a reading of shame as a “cultural phenomenon” rooted in class and its effects on the Boatwright family.

gospel world as Giles suggests, in reflexive musical moments, she also imagines gospel music as a site of communal resistance from race and class segregation. Allison uses Bone's new-found understanding of the imagined gospel community as a site for resistance from both personal and cultural trauma, recalling a democratic evangelical theology that revealed the sharing and mixing that spurred the creation of gospel music. Allison further emphasizes this idea of a resistant community—a specifically female community—when she shifts Bone's fixation with gospel to a fascination with country music and her eccentric aunt Raylene. Unlike Hurston, who concludes by depicting Arvey's voice as silenced by a paternalist South, Allison uses country music and its female performers (as Walker uses blues womanism) to revise an imagined southern patriarchal community.

While country music book-ends the novel and gospel forms the midpoint, country music never fully disappears from Allison's narrative. As exemplified by the structure of the text, the genres of country and gospel interweave thematically and historically. Bone narrates this intertwining history of gospel and country music as both genres reached popular heights in the mid-twentieth century American South:

The gospel circuit ran from North Carolina to South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama. The singers moved back and forth on it, a tide of gilt and fringed jackets that paralleled and intersected with the country western circuit. Sometimes you couldn't tell the difference, and as times got harder certainly Mr. Pearl stopped making distinctions, booking any act that would get him a little cash up front. (162).⁹

⁹ Promoters staged festival-like concerts in the tradition of "all night sings" that combined both country and gospel performers: "This interaction of gospel and country artists throughout the 1950s opened up new opportunities for some gospel singers. By the latter years of the decade, groups like the Blackwoods and the Jordanares of Nashville, Tennessee, were providing back-up vocals for popular country and rockabilly stars like Hank Snow, Red Foley, and Elvis Presley"(Goff 165). While the fundamentalist gospel community tried to create boundaries between the two genres, the country community embraced (and continues to embrace) the spiritual influence on their music as is evidenced in the religious songs popularized by The Carter Family, Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, and Dolly Parton. For a thorough examination of many contemporary country singers and the gospel influence, see Ted Olson, 'Your Inner Voice That Comes from God': *Country Singers' Attitudes toward the Sacred* in *Country Music Annual 2000*.

Allison's depiction of this mingling country-gospel community emphasizes the driving force behind both industries for families like the Pearls: economic power. Through Bone's country music memories, Allison shows how unearthing popular country music history explodes paternal conceptions of gender in the same way that remembering the origins of gospel explodes race and class conceptions. While a close look at gospel music history (in the context of the novel) illuminates the resistant cultural confluences between southerners of different races and classes, an examination of country music history divulges women's resistance to the patriarchal Nashville industry as it relates to Bone's relationship with the women in her family.¹⁰ While gospel and country represent an imagined coercive South for Bone, the music also allows Bone to reinterpret and reinvent a cohesive South free from patriarchal restrictions.

Throughout the narrative, Allison situates country music in the background when Bone experiences both happiness and trauma, underscoring the music's cultural significance as empowering and disempowering lower-class women. In the beginning of the novel, Allison combines the intertwining soft strains of her aunts' voices with country music to create the last place Bone considers "safe," where Bone positions herself to hear the mingling sounds of Kitty Wells and George Jones and her family's talk and story-telling (19). Bone describes the way country music was infused with the environment: "When I think of that summer—sleeping over at one of my aunts' houses as easily as at home, the smell of Mama's neck as she bent over to hug us in the dark, the sound of Little Earle's giggle or Granny's spit thudding onto the dry ground, and that country music playing low everywhere, as much a part of the evening as

¹⁰ Southern music scholars acknowledge how country musicians often draw from their religious backgrounds for their lyrics and melodies, while gospel also borrows secular beats and commercial tactics from the country music world. Bill C. Malone describes how, although the two genres were often separated by their differing messages, one would not exist without the other: "the two, in short, were different expressions of the same mind and experienced a similar commercial evolution" (67). While Allison doesn't explicitly explore the race and class issues in country music, the sustained connection between the two genres intimates that both gospel and country are similarly exclusive communities.

crickets and moonlight—I always feel safe again”(22). The love of her aunts combined with the dissemination of country music creates this protected space before Anney marries Glen—a space where Bone still feels happy and loved.

Country music reappears during a traumatic moment—the first time Glen molests Bone as they wait for Anney to give birth to Glen’s child in the hospital. Bone remembers Glen obsessively talking about the sex of the newborn, hoping beyond hope Anney will birth a boy to carry on his name. As Glen mumbles to himself, Bone notes, “The song playing low on the radio was a Kitty Wells tune that Mama liked. I rocked my head to the music and watched the night. I was thinking about the baby Mama was having, wondering what it might be like, if maybe it wouldn’t be a girl” (46). Glen pulls Bone onto his lap and masturbates while he sexually assaults her, all the time humming to the Wells tune on the radio. In this traumatic moment, Allison uses the sounds of Kitty Wells to highlight the complicated gender power dynamics of Glen’s abuse. As Glen controls the bastard Bone through his molestation, he dreams of a legitimate boy child that will further his power as the head (father) of Anney’s family. When the child is born dead, Glen’s power is thwarted, and he begins to physically and sexually abuse Bone frequently. For Bone, the country music that once represented a safe space with her aunts now also becomes associated with Glen and his attempt to control her; Bone no longer relates the music with the love of and protection by her family but instead with the anger and hate Glen’s abuse inspires in her.

Later, as she walks to her Aunt Raylene’s after learning that her mother plans to return to Glen, Bone empowers herself through song:

I sang to myself as I walked, sometimes out loud. Ruth Brown’s “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean.” Patsy Cline’s “Walking After Midnight.” Out at the intersection of White Horse Road and the Eustis Highway, I even started on Elvis Presley. Singing kept

me from crying. Singing kept me walking. The spirit of meanness that had come up in me broke out in song and movement. I felt hateful but strong, mean but powerful. (Allison 256)

Bone no longer sings gospel music, but belts out country and pop hits. Allison's choice of songs signifies Bone's building feelings of hate and powerlessness in her relationship with Glen. In Ruth Brown's "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," the speaker rants about how her lazy, crazy man cannot be trusted. He takes all of her money and forces her to squeeze him and call him honey against her will. In Cline's upbeat rendition of "Walking After Midnight," the speaker walks in search of her former lover, hoping to reunite and profess her love. These songs represent Bone's relationship with Glen and her mother—her battle against the man that treats her mean and her hope that her mother will return to her. Bone finds strength and power in these women's songs, but notably, after Glen has abused her, Bone's power is now rooted in meanness and hate—emotions Raylene will later teach Bone to transform to the love and acceptance in the earlier country music memories of her family. In these moments, Allison uses country music to hint at Bone's growing understanding of music as both a fantastical retreat from reality and a mechanism of power for southern society. As the narrative progresses to Bone's gospel memories, the reader recalls Bone's earliest experiences with country music as they relate to Allison's overall employment of music—as a refuge from and reminder of Glen's abuse and the paternalist community (the same racist and classist community represented in the Pearls) which fosters such abuse. Just as Smith suggests in her memorial to country divas in *The Devil's Dream*, Allison's continued use of country music's resistant females makes clear how the gendered power dynamics relate to the raced and classed dynamics of the gospel world in this imagined coercive South.

Bone's obsession with country music takes her to the West Greenville Café, where she hangs out after school to listen to country singers on the jukebox: "Loretta Lynn, Teresa Brewer, Patsy Cline, and Mama's favorite, Kitty Wells" (140). Allison chooses a long line of divas, who challenged women's assigned roles in country music, as Bone's inspiration. Bone desperately wants to transform herself from a gospel star to a country star: "Everybody knew that Opry stars started as gospel singers. All those women singing about their unfaithful men sang first about the certain love of God. Half asleep in the sun, reassured by the familiar smell of frying fat, I'd make promises to God. If he'd only let me be a singer. I knew I'd probably turn to whiskey and rock 'n' roll like they all did, but not for years I promised" (140-1). Allison's connection between women singing first about God and then about men recalls both Hurston's and Walker's challenges to the religious underpinning of the construct of southern womanhood, where the ideal southern woman's duty in an imagined patriarchal southern society was first to God and then to the southern father and husband. For the gospel community, this gender hierarchy furthered the notion of "family values," which in turn furthered the race and class hierarchy that Allison depicts in Bone's gospel memories of the Pearls—a hierarchal system that Smith also deconstructs through country music in *The Devil's Dream*.

Country music engenders a similar dichotomy for rural southern women like the virgin/whore binary that southern womanhood creates for upper class white women. In country music, women were often portrayed as either dedicated wives and mothers or good-time girls, also known as honky-tonk angels—tropes that, as I argue in the last chapter, Smith further expands upon in her female characters. Barbara Ching describes how the wholesome country music "mother" (embodied in Maybelle Carter) "represented long-lost home, family, tradition"(207). Since Allison situates Bone at a "honky tonk" of sorts at the West Greenville

Café and the women singers she loves so much represent “honky tonk angels,” these singers and their songs become symbolic sites of memory—traces that ask readers to reexamine the rhetorical history of the honky tonk angel and understand how it illuminates the gendered classed struggles of Bone and the other Boatwright women. If the country mother (like the gospel mother or southern woman) stabilizes family life, then the honky-tonk angel (like the “whore” or fallen woman) de-stabilizes gender roles. Perhaps, for Allison, honky tonk angels also de-stabilize a belief in the southern God and father. The combination of the “honky tonk” and the “angel” furthers Curtis W. Ellison’s ideas that country music secularizes the evangelical theology in gospel music; country music shifts the belief in Jesus and angels to a secular devotion to real life “honky tonk” women made angels.¹¹ However, Allison’s country music references precede Bone’s gospel memories, suggesting a disruption of Ellison’s progression from sacred to secular. Allison asks the reader early on to question the “sacred” gospel family by asserting the importance of secular country music to Bone’s family and their struggles—struggles that directly relate to the honky tonk angel trope and the underpinning of gender roles that uphold racial and class discrimination in a coercive southern community.

As Sue Simmons McGinity describes, in country music, the persona of the honky tonk angel took on many roles—from a fallen country girl to a barroom queen redeemed by a man, from a hardworking waitress to a promiscuous dancer, or from a friendly pal to a mother figure waiting to comfort the barroom gentlemen. McGinity posits the honky tonk angel as a liminal figure: “ironically, in spite of her feminine traits, hers is a more realistic image than that of many other women in song and literature. She is not completely idealized or absurdly elevated, nor is

¹¹ For further explorations of how country music transforms sacred music to secular spirituality, see Curtis W. Ellison’s “Keeping Faith: Evangelical Performance in Country Music,” Jimmie N. Rogers and Stephen A. Smith’s “Country Music and Organized Religion,” and Bill C. Malone’s *Southern Music, American Music*. For a specific reading of female performers’ combined roles in gospel and country, see Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*.

she unequivocally damned” (210). Yet, McGinity admits, “regardless of whether the lyrics glorify or condemn her, however, they always define her in her relationship to a male or males” (204). The honky tonk angel comforts or exonerates men during their own failures and sins. As McGinity describes, “few traditional country music lyrics that portray the honky tonk angel as victim are sung by or from the female viewpoint” (206) and “rarely do the lyrics dwell on her association with other women” (209). While the honky tonk angel persona might be “realistic,” she remains a creation of a male-dominated society (void of women’s voice or community) that depends on her image either for nurturance or for confidence.

The honky tonk angel image resounds with the Boatwright women who also perform liminal roles in southern society—roles that expose qualities of both wholesome and fallen women who both comfort and disobey their men (much like the blues women represented in Walker’s *The Color Purple*). Bone’s aunts aren’t afraid to work for themselves or make their children work for them; they do what is necessary for survival, often forsaking the roles of the wholesome gospel or country southern mother. While the aunts challenge these submissive roles in their ability to work, express their independence from their children and husbands, and talk frankly about their sexuality, the Boatwright women—like honky tonk angels—still define themselves in relation to the men in their lives. Granny loves her husband despite his infidelities; Alma also returns to Wade after he cheats on her; Anney represents an extreme attachment and dependence on men when she abandons her own daughter for Glen. As Moira P. Baker suggests, “Though they share a woman-centered kinship network on the margins of society, the grid of heteropatriarchy is superimposed on their lives... Without a man in their lives, most of the Boatwright women feel worthless” (122). Like good honky tonk angels, the Boatwright women test the assigned role of southern womanhood through their fleeting independence; yet they still

look to their men—whether their husbands or their brothers—to define their identities. However, by the novel’s conclusion, Allison offers a revision of the honky tonk angel through her characterizations of Raylene and Bone, who emerge as Boatwright women unafraid to define themselves outside of the dominant heterosexual male world.

In Bone’s memories, Allison continually employs the songs of two country divas—Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline. Kitty Wells’s tunes appear during Bone’s safe moments with her aunts, but Allison also uses a Wells song during Bone’s first abusive experience with Glen, signaling how Wells’ music both empowers and disempowers women. Upon closer examination, the songs of Kitty Wells also represent the conflicts inherent in the honky tonk angel trope. As Bone repeatedly refers to Kitty Wells as her mother’s favorite country singer, Allison asks readers to explore how Wells’s honky-tonk-angel status relates to how the Boatwright women both defy and uphold their place in the paternal South. While southern gospel envisioned and promoted a recovery of the family unit, country music females sang about the realities of family life in the post-World War II South. The “Queen of Country Music,” Kitty Wells, who started out singing gospel tunes, is best known for her songs about the traumas women experienced in marriage, divorce, and child-rearing. While Wells’s reality centered on her husband and children (the traditional “gospel family”), the personas she created in song spoke of “guilt and remorse, of illicit romance and sin, of betrayal and broken dreams” (Bufwack 176). Wells sang songs that touched upon the complicated lives southern women led, exposing the perfect family as a created image and upholding the honky tonk angel as a casualty of this image.

The song that spurred Wells’s success came in direct response to Hank Thompson’s hit song “The Wild Side of Life” that tells the story of a man left by a honky-tonk woman who prefers liquor and promiscuity to his true love. Thompson’s persona bemoans that he didn’t

know that God made “honky tonk angels” or in other words, deceitful and disloyal females disguised as wholesome wifely women (good country mothers). Wells responded with the female point of view in her 1952 hit, “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels,” suggesting that, in fact, men created honky tonk angels with their own disrespectful and wayward actions. Wells’s song exonerates God and shifts the blame from deceitful honky tonk angels to the men that deceive them, foregrounding the secular world of country music. In this stinging indictment of southern men and the songs they sing, Kitty Wells popularized the southern female perspective in country music. While southern women had been singing about the woes of family life since the inception of country and folk music (in songs like The Carters’ hit “Single Girl”), Wells’s song transformed the role of woman as victimized to the role of woman as defiantly enduring.

The secret to Wells’s success may have been not only her controversial songs, but also her standing as a good country woman. As Mary Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann contend, “Kitty sang of honky tonk angels, but no one would have ever mistaken her for one. She was always proper, always dignified” (150). While Wells lived her personal life like a country mother, she still faced the same traps of a honky tonk angel; like most other female singers during this era, male producers and writers controlled the songs women sang. Owen Bradley suggests that Wells’s catalog was designed to sell instead of creating controversy: “Kitty was in the role of the mistreated housewife, and she was very believable. People identified with what she was saying. As long as she stuck to that formula, we had a hit” (qtd. in Bufwack and Oermann 151). Wells’s songs were often penned by men, evincing how men ultimately define women’s identities with their own prescriptions of women’s place in the world. As McGinity notes, the honky tonk angel can never exist outside of her dependence on a man. While Wells’s

songs expose the patriarchal framework under which women were expected to live, in reality, Wells remained loyal to her husband and often put his singing career before her own. Bone remembers Wells as her mother's "favorite" singer perhaps because Wells's status as honky tonk angel mirrors Anney's—women who understand their entrapment, but still suffer under constructions of love and duty.

Allison's continued allusion to another country diva, Patsy Cline, becomes central to the characterization of Raylene, Bone's avowedly lesbian aunt, who critics suggest changes Bone's world view. Bone suddenly finds herself "as fascinated with my reclusive old aunt as I had ever been with gospel music" (180).¹² Raylene, even though a Boatwright woman, lives her life differently from her sisters—alone on the river where "trash rises" (180). She lets children run free, she can fix a car like a man, she is the best cook in the family, and she encourages Bone more than anyone else.¹³ Raylene's varied performances of southern women's assigned roles recall Patsy Cline's ability to remake herself and to perform multiple gender roles. According to Joli Jensen, Cline's image resists clear definition; she appears sometimes extremely feminine, sometimes terrifyingly tough, sometimes contradictory and complicated. Jensen notes that Cline's mutable image has become particularly important to the gay and lesbian community, who construct her "to be idolized and ironized" (122). As Brett Farmer argues, lesbians and gay men construct Cline as a queer heroine from her struggles as a female in a male-dominated country music industry to the masochistic lyrics of her songs to the timeless contralto of her voice,

¹² Bone's comments again recall Ellison's argument that country music shifts the focus from love for Jesus to the love of a woman, when for Bone, Raylene replaces her fascination with gospel music.

¹³ This characterization of Raylene owes much to Moira P. Baker's reading in "The Politics of They" where she argues Raylene "transforms into a locus of resistance the domestic space that entraps her sisters" and that "Raylene's place overlooking the Greenville River affords Bone a space in which oppositional discourse reverberates, calling into question dominant narratives"(123). Raylene's challenges to southern gender norms also recall Judith Butler's concept of gender performance as outlined in my introduction. Butler's critique of traditional feminism as non-inclusive of queer women resonates with Allison's own goals as she exposes gender as a performance in the Boatwright women and the mutable Raylene.

asserting that Cline's struggle with patriarchal gender expectations make her a figure well-known to the gay and lesbian community (220). Patsy Cline's complex persona mirrors Allison's Raylene; both emerge as queer figures celebrated in their ability to challenge normative gender roles.

Bone tells us that even Raylene's music is different: "Sometimes she'd hum softly, no music I'd ever heard. Aunt Raylene hated almost everything on the radio, saved her greatest contempt for the kind of country ballads that bemoaned the faithless lover and always included a little spoken part during the chorus" (183). As Baker suggests, for Raylene, "the maudlin variety of country music is a highly effective working apparatus of heteropatriarchal ideology, one that tells a woman her worth comes from being loved and remaining faithful even to a 'faded love' that leaves her nothing but passivity and obsessive 'sweet dreams'"(124). Raylene's dislike of the sappy country ballads that reinscribe hardship and heartbreak is fitting; Allison uses Raylene to challenge representations of the submissive honky tonk angel exemplified by the other Boatwright women (a depiction mirrored by Katie Cocker's changing image in *The Devil's Dream*). Just as Bone comes to recognize that gospel music thrives under the southern norms of racism and classism, Raylene teaches her that country music thrives under this same system of southern norms, where white heterosexual southern men assign southern women's place just as they assign race and class position. Raylene offers Bone a perspective outside of these norms—a view of southerners as Nancy's being-in-common with one another through their resistance to such powerful coercive values.

Raylene's repudiation of the sad country ballads echoes Patsy Cline's struggle with her career during the Nashville Sound era.¹⁴ The country music industry manipulated Cline's dream

¹⁴ Because rock music surged to popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, country music was losing much of its fan base, and the industry looked for ways to update the country sound and re-attract the mass audiences that were

of country stardom by transforming her from a self-identified honky tonk angel into a pop diva. Cline, who considered herself “an up-tempo honky-tonker rather than a heartache ballader,” reportedly hated her first smash Nashville Sound hit “I Fall to Pieces” (Bufwack 255). Jensen suggests that Cline’s childhood was rooted in class turmoil—much like the Boatwrights—which explains her fight with the country music industry over her created image as a pop star. Cline’s life recalls characterizations of the Boatwright women, marginalized not only by gender, but also by class.¹⁵ Her abusive father left the family when Cline was only fifteen, and afterwards she quit school to pursue her dream of becoming a country music diva. Cline’s dream relates to Bone’s own need to find love and success through music—to escape the trauma of Glen’s abuse and her “white trash” status. Like Bone (who expresses pride at the Boatwright family history), Cline felt motivated by her enormous sense of pride for her poor Virginia background; Jensen argues that Cline was “aggressively, if not self-consciously, lower class” (125). When Cline forced her way into the male-centered country music scene, she was persuaded to perform Nashville Sound songs that she associated with “‘them’: upper-class, wealthy people who disdained country music—and her [Cline]. To cross over into the pop charts was also to sell out one’s friends, family, and heritage. It was to abandon class position, to assimilate, to try to ‘pass’” (Jensen 125). Jensen suggests that Cline hated to “pass” as a pop star; yet, Cline continued to popularize the Nashville Sound with hits like “She’s Got You,” “Heartaches,” and “Crazy”—songs that clearly establish woman’s place as mourning for the loss of her man, as well as the identity he defines for her.

enthralled by pop and rock music by introducing the “Nashville Sound,” a less rowdy, more stylized and structured form of country that crosses the pop-country boundary. In other words, the industry created a new sound that would gain popularity and, more importantly, increase profits. See chapter four on *The Devil’s Dream* for a continued reading of the country music industry and its exploitative effects on southern community.

¹⁵ See Margaret Jones’ *Patsy: The Life and Times of Patsy Cline* for an informative biography that stresses how Cline’s lower-class status influenced her career as she attempted to both escape and give back to her poor roots in Winchester, Virginia.

While Cline could not resist the music industry's transformation of her into a softer, more feminine country star, Cline subverted the patriarchal shackles of the country industry by exposing and encouraging a resistant female community (one that Lee Smith contrarily suggests is false and exploitative in her depictions of Virgie Rainette). Stars like Dottie West, Jan Howard, Barbara Mandrell, Loretta Lynn, and Brenda Lee recall the way Patsy supported them in the beginnings of their careers, whether emotionally or financially. As Dottie West describes, Patsy Cline "was really proving to the world, and especially the world of country music, that a woman could close the show and that she could sell tickets and that she could sell records...More than anyone, Patsy opened the door for us...Before that, we'd only been used as window dressings" (qtd. in Bufwack and Oermann 243). West's comments recall the way women had been used in gospel families, as non-threatening submissive wives and mothers that loved God and their husbands; because she was unable to defy it in her song, Patsy Cline defied this image with her life. As Bufwack and Oermann describe:

The Nashville Sound era was a time when a community of female country singers coalesced. Bonds of sisterhood were forged in an environment where women were striving for stardom in greater numbers than ever before. Because this took place at the barn dance and in the city that had been most resistant to females, these women supported one another personally and professionally. They understood one another's ambitions and pains. (277)

Cline was at the forefront of this community. While Allison's use of Cline's and Wells's music attests to how the country music industry assigned women to submissive roles, upon closer examination, Bone's memories unearth these resistant female voices and communities. In using the songs of female country musicians as a site in Bone's memory, Allison connects the female country music community with the Boatwright female community. Allison shows how Bone gains strength from the Boatwright women: "I liked being one of the women with my aunts, liked feeling a part of something nasty and strong and separate from my big rough boy-cousins

and the whole world of spitting, growling, overbearing males” (91). In the traces of Bone’s memories, the Boatwright women represent a resistant community that reverberates with the country sounds of the honky tonk angels during the era—women challenging a coercive community while unable to completely escape from its sexist values.

In Raylene, Allison posits a honky tonk angel free of patriarchal constructions—the type of woman Patsy Cline identified with before she sacrificed her class identity to the Nashville sound. Raylene’s perceptions of love and tolerance are central to her world view, and she asks Bone to rethink her worship of Uncle Earle (a serial womanizer) and the conceptions of love she takes from him. Similar to Walker’s depictions of the blues women in *The Color Purple*, Bone must revise her hate and anger (as engendered by abuse and violence) into love in order for music to inspire social growth in the South. When Bone sees the glaring children on the Brushy Creek Baptist church bus, she tells Raylene how much she hates them for looking down on her as nasty white trash (262). Like Patsy Cline’s “them,” the upper class Brushy Creek children become a repository of discriminatory anger for Bone, who unknowingly internalizes patriarchal structures of gender and class oppression from Glen. Raylene offers Bone a new perspective:

They look at you the way you look at them... You don’t know who those children are. ... You think because they wear different clothes than you and go by so fast, they’re rich and cruel and thinking terrible things about you... could be they’re jealous of you, hungry for what you got, afraid of what you would do if they ever stepped in the yard. (262)

Through Raylene’s comments, Allison suggests that the construction of class is not only created by a powerful patriarchal society, but also is sustained by a lower class complicity in this construction. As Lynda Hart suggests, Raylene “serves as a voice in the novel that understands how differences *between* people must be excavated from the *inside*” (191). Raylene’s remarks suggest a new understanding further removed from Cline’s position as honky tonk angel—a new resistant community that acknowledges not the imagined differences of gender, race, or class, but

perhaps the similarities of being-in-common. When one final brutal rape and beating by Daddy Glen lands Bone in the hospital, Bone returns to her Aunt Raylene's after her mother abandons her. Trying to explain why Anney leaves, Raylene unveils where her conception of love comes from when she acknowledges her lesbianism and the unthinkable choice she asked the woman she loved to make. Hart argues that Raylene and Bone's conversation "serves to remind us that the shaping of one's sexuality is also a matter of class," suggesting that Raylene's reformed perception of love emanates from her recognition of the prescribed class and gender roles of southern society (191). In these moments, Allison brings Bone's gospel and country memories together, associating the gender hierarchy (as revealed in country music) with the class and race hierarchies (as revealed in the gospel world).

When country makes its last appearance in a reflexive musical moment at the novel's conclusion, Bone comes to grasp the meaning of Raylene's story—that love and community endure in spite of humanity's flaws—a vision very similar to the utopian community Walker creates through her blues womanist vision. At the emotional moment when Anney appears to tell Bone good-bye, Bone notes that the next song was "another of Mama's favorites, Patsy Cline telling the world that it wasn't God who made honky-tonk angels" (305). The fact that Patsy Cline—and not Kitty Wells—is singing this rendition allows for a marriage of resistant female independence and community. As the song plays on and Anney comes to Bone, Bone suddenly realizes, "It wasn't God who made us like this, I thought. We'd gotten ourselves messed up on our own" (306). Allison's use of the song demonstrates that women are damned not only by the constructions men create for them, but also by women's complicity in this constructed patriarchy. The song signals to Bone men and women's own failures and blame in upholding an imagined southern community that won't allow Bone's musical fantasies of finding love and

acceptance to come to fruition because of her designated place as “white trash” woman. When the music finally stops as Anney prepares to leave Bone, Raylene’s voice emerges as the interruption—as the voice of a working-class, queer heroine that attempts to resist patriarchal conceptions of the South, similar to the resistant communities of gospel and country: “Raylene called Mama’s name softly, then mine, her voice as scratchy and penetrating as the chords of a steel guitar, as familiar as Kitty Wells or a gospel chorus” (308).¹⁶

As Anney abandons her child for the final time, Bone feels her gospel and country fantasies become a reality as she joins in a resistant community represented by Raylene, her aunts, and even her mother. In the final moments, she trusts in Raylene and her love: “When Raylene came to me, I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love. I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman. I wrapped my fingers in Raylene’s and watched the night close in around us” (309). As Baker suggests

Ultimately, Bone—whose emerging identity is forged in the crucible of conflicting discourses about what it means to be a woman, to be poor, to be a Boatwright—exerts agency by asserting her own worth no matter how poor or abused she may be: she refuses to return to a violent patriarchal household, even if it means leaving her mother and choosing a home with her lesbian aunt as surrogate mother. (125)

Like Walker’s Celie, Bone refuses to let her personal trauma define her place in southern society. In this same vein, much like Hurston and Walker, Allison teaches her readers to refuse an imposing patriarchal myth as defining the South. In her employment of gospel music and country music’s divas, Allison illuminates a southern community built on coercive patriarchal hierarchies of gender, race, and class; also through this employment, she illuminates Bone’s conception of a cohesive southern community that deconstructs these hierarchies. Through Bone’s musical *lieux*

¹⁶ The idea of an interrupting voice again recalls Jean Luc-Nancy’s ideas of resistant interrupting literature as further discussed in the introduction.

de mémoire, Allison exposes the resistant communities that are only heard when the music (or the myth) stops. She teaches readers to recover the South's musical past and female musicians' roles therein, so that readers can learn from women's assigned place and re-record a less restrictive musical world and southern social structure that allows for fairy-tale endings and musical salvation. While Allison's reimagining of an inclusive southern community mirrors Walker's vision of musical change in the South, in the following chapter, I focus attention on how the country music industry attempts to thwart women's resistances in the post-South in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*.

CHAPTER FOUR: “WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?”: LEE SMITH’S COUNTRY MUSIC POST-SOUTH IN *THE DEVIL’S DREAM*

“Country music, on the other hand, I think has always been perceived as music of a white culture that is really not necessarily a minority culture in American life, certainly not—too close, too reminiscent of the ills that have afflicted Southern life over the centuries and so have also afflicted American life as a whole. Associating the music with white folk culture also associates the music with racism and bigotry and ignorance and cultural degeneracy, the whole range of ills that have been identified for the last couple of centuries. I think Southern intellectuals, particularly Southern liberal intellectuals, have been very embarrassed by the music because it is so close, it’s so real, and I don’t know, maybe it reminds them not only of the dirty, unwashed white people around them, but maybe of some of their own relatives.”- Bill C. Malone, in an interview with Cecelia Tichi

“That’s the great thing about country music. It always embodies the opposites—the dream of the road, plus the dream of home, which are incompatible. So are songs about raising hell and getting saved and being a good woman and a honky tonk woman. All these opposites are right there, which makes it great stuff to write about!”
-Lee Smith, in an interview with Renee Hausmann Shea

Bill C. Malone and Lee Smith are essentially concerned with how southerners (and more broadly Americans) perceive the cultural history and themes of country music. While Malone argues that country music is negatively stereotyped and underappreciated, Smith celebrates the instabilities of the contradictory themes provided by the genre. This chapter argues that Smith employs gendered musical performances to expose the imagined narratives and stereotypes of country music’s female Appalachian origins and to interrogate dominant (yet imagined) pastoral narratives of the South as founded on gender, class, race, and religious injustices; Smith’s novel creates a fictionalized (and feminized) country music history to reveal how instabilities in conceptions of southern community are policed by those dominant narratives—how perhaps southern intellectuals choose to ignore what country music exposes about their culture. While the previously discussed authors (Hurston, Walker, and Allison) employ musical tropes as a catalyst in shaping southern women’s identities, Smith *centers* her novel on country music, its female foundations, community, and its evolution from the antebellum era to the post-South. Just as Hurston channels a history of modern Florida through music, Smith channels a history of Appalachia through country music, focusing on the effects of a commercialized post-South that at once empowers and oppresses female musicians. I argue that Smith, like Hurston, uses music

in reflexive moments to offer a temporary resistance from coercive southern communities—moments where women and other minorities employ their musical talents to gain power and break down the imagined barriers which separate them. However, unlike her contemporaries Walker and Allison, Smith does not view music as affording sustained social growth and a cohesive community. More like the blues in Hurston’s modern South, in Smith’s country music post-South, dominant paternalist narratives and hierarchal structures of the Old South become reified and commodified, acting as a veneer for oppressive southern values, where women and minority cultures are nearly subsumed by a new capitalist system of slavery.

As Smith shows in *The Devil’s Dream*, country music narratives reflect larger paternalist romantic depictions of the South; yet Smith creates country music memories that also challenge these depictions by revealing women and minority cultures’ participation and resistances through music. Smith employs multiple voices to blend historical depictions of country music’s stars and evolutionary story with newly created songs and stories in order to create a fictional musical memorial that represents the collective memory of the country music community (singers and musicians as well as listeners and industry professionals). This fictional collective memory explores how musical memories can be not only a site for voicing minority experiences and oppressions but also a site of manipulation by those in power. Though Smith writes fiction, she bases her account of the Bailey family on the real-life country music Carter family, remaining loyal to certain specific historical accounts of the Carters (particularly in the character of R.C. Bailey who mirrors A.P. Carter, his first meeting with wife Lucie as a variation on A.P.’s romance with Sarah, and their success with Ralph Peer during the famed Bristol Sessions).¹

¹ See Rebecca Smith’s “Country Music Battles Religion” for a careful tracing of each historical moment in the novel; Robert Cantwell’s “A Picture from Life’s Other Side” which offers criticism on Smith’s scattered use of country music history, deciding that her faithfulness to some sections (the Bristol sessions) often results in a duller narrative; Sharon Colley’s dissertation *‘Getting Above Your Raising’: The Role of Social Class and Status in the*

Smith's novel might be called historical fiction; she won a Lyndhurst Prize that allowed her to research the history of country music, especially women's roles therein, that contributed directly to the story-line in *The Devil's Dream* (Guralnick 149). One of her aims in writing the novel was "to show the roots of country music, thematic and actual, using it as a structure for the book" (Herion-Sarafidis 95). This chapter shifts the focus from a strict reading of Smith's use of music history to understand why Smith finds country music a fitting metaphor to explore the way gender performance underpins imagined (raced and classed) southern communities. While she contends that nearly all of her works are based on fact, Smith challenges her readers to distinguish between what is fact and fiction, suggesting that history itself is fabled. *The Devil's Dream* unfolds through the songs and stories of eight different voices—male and female, insider and outsider, first and third person, omniscient and limited—over the course of more than a century; in employing such a structure, Smith (like Malone) questions the historical accuracy of just one country music narrative, depicting the instabilities of its community in order to reveal master narratives of the South as constructed to perpetuate privileged white male patriarchy.

As one of the first and most prolific country music scholars, Malone has long dedicated his work to interrogating, debunking, and understanding the myth of country music and its community through an exploration of its historical and cultural significance. In the introduction to *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music*, Malone suggests that his previous research into the history of country music led him to understand its mythical components: "It was obvious that southern music did not develop in a cultural vacuum, or in a context that drew sustenance only from its own indigenous resources; the music in its various manifestations largely responded to widely held notions about the South

Fiction of Lee Smith which discusses country music history in *The Devil's Dream* as shaping a lower-class consciousness.

and of rural life, folk music, and the rural folk” (3). Malone shatters the notion that country music developed from the songs of the English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh hidden deep in the Appalachian Mountains and isolated from any outside influences. Rural (or what he terms “southern folk”) musicians often bought into and helped establish the country music myth of Appalachian purity—of “musical mountaineers and singing cowboys” (Musical Mountaineers 4). This narrative fed into larger stories about the mountain South that reinforced positive and negative stereotypes about “poor whites” and their music through either romantic histories of rural life or discriminatory narratives about Appalachian ignorance and backwardness. As Malone exposes in his studies, country music cannot be divorced from the intrusion of larger southern narratives and progress, and for Smith, who carefully shows the influence of the “outside” world on seemingly-isolated Appalachian music, the consequences are similar: Appalachia and its music emerge as just one of many narratives that reveal southern communities as not simply backward or romantic but instead as unstable and changing.

Malone and Smith’s interrogation of country music and its created community relate directly to on-going scholarly conversations about imagined narratives of southern community, wherein, as Malone’s research suggests, country music often becomes associated with a male-centered history based on stereotypes of southern poor whites. In tracing the history of country music from the importance of the Grand Ole Opry to recent representations in the film *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Barbara Ching convincingly argues that country music serves as a metaphor for the pastoral Old South: “Thus, country music, whether on record, in a novel, or on the screen, is now firmly associated with the South, and it can be consistently used to freeze the sunny South in its old ways, keeping it down and out of the mainstream” (205). Ching understands country music as associated with and resigned to re-creating depressing portraits of

rural southern life, but while Ching's arguments about country music and its sometimes "backwards" portrayals of southerners are valid, she (like Malone) focuses mainly on male country musicians, failing to recognize the important ways female country singers revised and reimagined roles for southern women in more positive ways. Where Ching basically ignores female country musicians, Smith foregrounds their musical participation in *The Devil's Dream*. Especially with a character like Katie Cocker (who writes and produces her own records), Smith shows how country music allows for an expression and empowerment often denied to underprivileged southern females in other public discourses; in fact most critics consider this to be the central argument of the novel.²

Smith's literary attention to women's roles in country music complements recent attention to women's literary roles in imagining the South.³ Michael Kreyling recognizes how southernness and southern communities are built on gender: "It is not that the prevailing literary historical and critical apparatus is or must be, in all instances, totally dismembered but rather that it must be seen as man-made, the product not only of a time and a social condition...but of gender too" (125). For Kreyling, Lee Smith is a key player in southern women writers' dismantling of a mythical patriarchal old South. In his brief reading of *Oral History* (a novel with a very similar structure to *The Devil's Dream* in its multiple voices, extensive family tree, and italicized framing), he argues, "Smith shifts the central focus of community experience from the isolated, tragic male to the community of the female" (115). Kreyling argues for Smith's ironic subversion of "History" as offered by Faulkner (and southern literary critics), suggesting

² See Rebecca Smith, "Country Music Battles Religion," and "Writing, Singing, and Hearing a New Voice;" Robert Cantwell's "A Picture from Life's Other Side;" Tanya Long Bennett's "It Was Like I Was Right There;" Jill Terry's *Black and White Conjunctions in Southern Literary Oralities*.

³ See for instance Hazel V. Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists*, Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow is Another Day*, Trudier Harris's *The Power of the Porch*, Elizabeth Harrison's *The Female Pastoral*, Carol S. Manning's edited collection *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*, Linda Tate's *A Southern Weave of Women*, Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire*.

that, in *Oral History*, “Memory dissolves over time. Place is replaced with virtual reality. Rites of identification are jolted off-center by the suggestion that their presumption of universality might be vulnerable” (116). Building from Kreyling, I argue that, in *The Devil’s Dream*, Smith instead creates musical collective memories that never “dissolve over time” but which must be recalled and reshaped in order to supplant country music’s (and the South’s) gender, race, class, and religious exclusions. In portraying these memories in place of History, Smith reveals that while women attempt to challenge “the presumption of universality”—of old South hierarchies—this universality continues to police resistant southern collective memories and service capitalism in the post-southern country music world.

This continued policing, exclusion, and discrimination relates to what Scott Romine calls literary deferral—a practice of creating a community through “opposition and difference” (by what and who it is not). In his exploration of how southern writers imagine community by deferral, Romine reviews three techniques: “drawing boundaries, imagining structures, and creating images” (5, 7). Romine considers how authors (perhaps unconsciously) disrupt these boundaries, structures, and images in what he terms “reflexive moments”—moments that I have earlier argued, for southern women writers, are often musical. Because the main goal of *The Devil’s Dream* is to recount the entire history of country music, the narrative is sustained not by one or two reflexive moments but a series of them. In these reflexive musical moments, Smith clearly represents the outside world’s intrusion upon and influence on Appalachian music which disrupts any notions of clearly-drawn southern boundaries (as Robert Cantwell has suggested). More importantly, in these moments, she foregrounds how southern race and class structures are ultimately supported by gender performances—through her varied representations of the female image (particularly the icon of southern womanhood) in country music history. Smith’s focus on

women's country music performances reveal that southern community has never been wholly patriarchal, and perhaps, even as Linda Wagner-Martin suggests in her reading of southern women's community, evinces matriarchal influence. Wagner-Martin uses Smith as one of her chief examples when she argues that "What has remained constant in a hundred years of the Southern novel by women is that women characters have been—and still are—drawing much of their sustenance and their wisdom from a female line of ancestry, and thereby creating a true community of women"(32). While Smith exposes the matriarchal influence in country music, she also exposes how an imagined patriarchal South uses constructions of religion and southern womanhood to hide and defer this influence.

Smith offers a complicated reading of southern community in the post-South—a community where southerners desire the imagined community components of home, tradition, and togetherness (as reflected in country music's themes), but these are unstable components that southerners can only continually and consciously *imagine* as stable. One such imagined community is sustained by an equally imagined myth of country music history as described by music scholar Robert Cantwell's astute reading of *The Devil's Dream*:

Country music is imagined not as an 'industry' or business but as a tradition, a central stream running out of Anglo-American dance and song, into which various cultural and commercial tributaries have poured their influence—gospel, blues, swing, Cajun, rock and soul, movies, radio, records, television—from time to time diverting country music from its predestined channel but persistently returning to its source, usually at those moments when its audience is also returning to what they think of as traditional values. (277)

Cantwell describes the very myth which Bill Malone has been exploring throughout his career, which is also one myth Smith interrogates and rewrites (as Cantwell correctly suggests). While Smith debunks the romantic "authentic" narrative of country (a narrative that both reflects and challenges the gender, race, and class hierarchies of southern culture), she also considers how that narrative is sustained, reframed, and re-employed for power in the post-South. Smith's

interrogation continues into another imagined country music story—the story of popular country music produced in a new mass-market-controlled South that empowers and oppresses women and minorities all at once. Just as Hurston uses the blues in *Seraph*, Smith uses country music to illuminate the imagined roles for women under a paternalist system (particularly the influence of iconic southern womanhood on its counterpart, the good country woman) and to reveal how this image underscores other interconnected southern constructions of class, race, and religion. After country music was made an industry, that industry invented a host of new roles for southern women from the honky tonk angel to the Nashville princess to the pop-country diva and the more traditional country folk singer. Smith traces women’s rise through their performance of these images to reveal the white patriarchal origins of an earlier country music narrative (resting on the image of the southern lady or the good country mother) and its commercialized residues in post-southern cultures, leaving readers to question the temporary empowerment music affords to contemporary women and minority cultures.

Smith’s novel challenges a static portrait of southern community, reflecting her own comments in an interview: “I don’t think there is *a* South. The South is several distinctly different things” (Bourne 51). Smith’s comments echo Richard Gray’s assessment that in the post-southern era, “...what emerges now with even more power is the fact that our perception of the South must now, more than ever before, acknowledge the various and often antagonistic influences and energies that go to make it up: we are faced, not so much with Southern culture, as with Southern cultures” (361). In using fictional memories to consider country music history and its antagonistic influences and opposing themes, Smith tackles southern narratives of white male dominance to reveal the many southern cultures that combine to engender country music, and more generally, the South—but she also shows how master narratives regulate these varied

cultures to hide (or defer effective challenges to) the gendered, raced, classed, and religious power dynamics.

While Smith uncovers resistance and matriarchal influences in women's early country music, she also views women's country music as commodified and exploited in the post-South economy. The novel's beginning—an italicized portion set in the postmodern glitter of the Opryland Hotel where fans snap photos of their favorite stars (reminiscent of *Oral History's* structure)—centers on Katie Cocker and points readers to country music's failures to offer sustained growth for women and minority cultures. Smith ironically portrays the dominant narratives of the Old South as neither forgotten nor remade when Katie tells reporters

It took me a long time to understand that not a one of us lives alone, outside of our family, or our time, and that who we are depends on who we were, and who our people were. There's a lot of folks in this business that don't believe that, of course. They think you can just make yourself up as you go along. The trick is to keep on moving. But I can't do this. I come from a singing family, we go way back. I know where we're from. I know who we are. The hard part has been figuring out who I am, because I'm not like any of them, and yet, they are bone of my bone... .(DD 14)

While Katie suggests that she cannot invent or deviate from her identity—who she is or where she comes from—during the course of the narrative (as will be discussed later), Smith depicts Katie as continually letting herself be remade to further her career. Katie remembers only select portions of her family history—those from which she can profit; as will be discussed later, Katie purposefully romanticizes her past, ignoring the sometimes violent and abusive tactics southern men used to oppress female musical talent. The biblical phrase “bone of my bone” also recalls the struggles the Bailey women faced with a patriarchal religion—one which Smith replaces with the oppressive power of materialism at novel's end.⁴ Even as Smith's portrayal of Katie echoes

⁴ This reference is to Genesis 2:23—the famous passage where woman is created from man's rib, and Adam names her “woman” and declares her “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” While the Bible intimates that husband and wife become one through marriage, Smith's novel interrogates this idea in her portrayals of how southern husbands manipulate religion to oppress their wives.

Walker's ideas that the memories of "our old ones" reveal much about the present South, Smith suggests that the method in which those memories are manipulated, interpreted, imagined, and recorded ultimately determines what our old ones tell readers about southern culture; she urges readers to re-evaluate nostalgic memories of the Old South in order to warn against a perpetuation of women's oppression (and related race and class discriminations) in the post-South.

After teaching readers to consider the post-southern consequences of interpreting memory, Smith turns back to the old imagined country music narrative—as described through varied voices—to reveal Katie's history, a history imbued with violent and exploitative oppression of female musicianship. Smith uses the memorial voice of Ira Keen to narrate the antebellum story of fiddler Kate Malone and her zealot husband, Moses Bailey—opening the novel with the tensions between a patriarchal southern religion and country female musical expression. Keen (an observant neighbor who worships Kate and bemoans Moses' treatment of her) narrates how Moses marries the adolescent Kate and takes her from her home when she is still playing with baby-dolls. While Rebecca Smith convincingly argues for Ira Keen's credibility as a sympathetic male narrator, readers also note that Kate is denied a voice—one of the first in a long line of Appalachian women forbidden to sing her song. Moses descends from Sid Bailey, a Baptist preacher belonging to a congregation that Keen describes as "folks that wants a doctrine they can't live with, that's a fact. Human beings is nothing if not contrary. They don't want nothing easy, and this is hard, hard" (DD 19). Rebecca Smith reads Bailey's religion as Primitive Baptist, suggesting that the conflict between country music and religion stems "from the Calvinist Doctrine of the Primitive Baptist church: God calls those who are predestined to election, and while humans cannot do anything to gain salvation, they nevertheless should try to

evidence their elect status by shunning the worldly and the human; music, song, and dance, of course, fall into this realm” (“CM Battles Religion” 59). Kate grows up dancing, frolicking, and fiddling until she marries Moses, who forbids her to ever see her family again because he believes them to be evil: “He said that the Devil walked in that house, and that fiddle music was the voice of the Devil laughing” (DD 23). Because southern religion influenced communal views of music, early incarnations of country music—much like its counterpart the blues—were characterized as the Devil’s music. Rebecca Smith recognizes the contradiction in such a religious designation: “It’s a hard doctrine, as Old Man Ira Keen declares, teaching that social bonds are of the fallen world and therefore enforcing, ironically, the social isolation and loneliness that early mountain fiddlers used their music to alleviate” (“CM Battles Religion” 59). After Moses forbids Kate to see her family or play her fiddle, he selfishly searches the mountains for a sign from God in order to fulfill his desire to become a preacher; his search leaves him jobless and absent. Although Moses perpetually leaves Kate and the children without food, protection, or family ties, she faithfully commits to him and takes on all of the household duties, much as a good country woman should.

As Keen tells readers, “Now iffen hit’s a woman yer old man is gone off after, at least you’ve got a shape to set yerself up against, and somebody to get mad at. But iffen hit’s God, well, yer hands is plumb tied, ain’t they?” (DD 22). Because Kate wants to be a good mother and wife, she must support Moses’s search for God. As Anne Goodwyn Jones suggests, the southern lady must submit to both God and husband, and here Smith reveals the loneliness that women like Kate (like Hurston’s Arvey or Walker’s Celie) faced when they followed these tenets. Just as Hurston, Walker and Allison do, Smith interrogates one of the best-known constructed images of southern literature, the southern lady/wife/mother, as it transforms to the good country woman in

rural Appalachia.⁵ As Jones describes, the image of the southern white woman perpetuates a privileged white male heterosexual dominance—an ideal which stretched to all races and classes of the South (10). In *The Devil's Dream*, Smith shows that mythical southern white womanhood extended even into the supposedly remote parts of Appalachia, particularly in a character like Kate Malone or Lucie Queen, where the ideal was transformed to that of the good country woman (as embodied in a country music woman like Maybelle Carter). In country music, Karen A. Saucier argues that “a woman’s personal status is often defined in terms of ‘her man’ since she evidently, according to country music lyrics, has little else to increase her status. She is portrayed as having virtually no status as related to property or economic structure in the community or work place...the only really acceptable role for women...is of housewife, mother, and lover”(249). Like her counterpart, the southern woman, the country woman was relegated to the role of serving wife and mother with no agency independent of her husband’s will.

The expectations of the southern woman were similar to the rural white woman’s plight, at least in the way that southern patriarchy, as Paula Gallant Eckard shows, “wielded a great deal of power over women’s lives” and “its construction of motherhood further enmeshed maternity into the fabric of southern culture” (14). Most southern men viewed child production as an important way to carry on their names, legacies, and power, so in general, southern families were large, and due to the lack of medicine, southern women’s childbirth experiences were unsanitary and uncomfortable (at the least). While the ideal of the southern woman filtered into Appalachia, the Appalachian woman’s lot was perhaps more difficult because, while remaining subservient to God and husband, the Appalachian wife also endured harder labor than her white upper-class

⁵ As discussed in previous chapters, Anne Goodwyn Jones describes the suggested role of the southern white woman of the upper and middle classes as three-fold: 1) “She embodies virtue, but her goodness depends directly on innocence—in fact, on ignorance of evil.” 2) “She is chaste because she has never been tempted; in some renditions she lacks sexual interest altogether.” 3) “Finally, she serves others—God, husband, family, society—showing in her submissiveness the perfection of pure sacrifice” (9).

counterpart. Without birth control and with limited access to modern medicine, Appalachian women continued to birth children in horrifying conditions and then were expected to resume their daily chores like cooking, sewing, cleaning, and washing. Smith reflects this role through Kate's character; Kate moves from playing with baby-dolls to rearing three babies and maintaining the household while Moses searches for his sign. Because women were expected to perform these duties and endure as wives and mothers, songs like "Single Girl, Married Girl" (which bemoaned married life) became popular household tunes—a cultural element Smith chooses to reflect in Kate's expressive role as a female fiddler.

Although Moses restricts Kate's time with her family, when Kate's mother falls ill, he permits her to visit. Once again in her fun-loving birthplace, Kate picks up her fiddle and plays all night, later putting it back on the wall and bursting into tears. Kate's oldest child Jeremiah is charmed by his mother's fiddle-playing. Her father Pink Malone tells her, "honey, you take this fiddle, it is yours, on home with you...and you teach the boy to play whenever his daddy is away. The boy has got a ear fer it. Besides hit's a sin to put your talent under a bushel" (DD 27). Her father transfers the sin Moses associates with fiddle music to the sin of hiding Kate's talent, suggesting a merging of country music and religion rather than a strict division between the two (a theme Smith later returns to when Katie Cocker meets the Reverend Billy Jack Reems). When Ira suggests that "a feller can quote Scripture to make it come out however suits him," readers see that southern religion as a creation of the southern patriarch is easily manipulated—from the wrath of Moses to the support of Pink Malone (DD 27). With her father's support, Kate doesn't deny herself or her children their love of the fiddle and brings it home with her. As soon as Moses leaves, Kate takes her children to the porch and fiddles, while they listen and sing along. Kate's fiddling talent not only allows for creative expression, but also sustains a strong

connection with her children—an element which asks readers to recall women’s participation in country music’s origins in order to recognize a resistant matriarchal power engendered by the genre.

Rural southern women, akin to rural southern blues women as discussed in chapter one, relied on the oral to express themselves, using song to both celebrate and despair over their roles as wives and mothers. Through their songs, they forged strong ties with their children that allowed for the preservation of family stories and traditions. As Appalachian singer Jim Garland notes, “Mothers handed the songs down much more than the fathers for they would stay at home with the children during the long winter months...” (Bufwack and Oermann 7). Malone agrees, “Because of the intimacy of their relationship, mothers inevitably influenced the songs that were learned and remembered by their children, the style and inflection of their singing, and the morality and aesthetic sense that may have shaped their future musical choices” (*Musical Mountaineers* 24). At times, mothers sang and taught songs to their children to entertain them, but at other times, mothers sang for their own reasons, to express, as Malone suggests, “their longings, joys, loneliness, and pain” (*Musical Mountaineers* 24).

Appalachian wives and mothers preserved and passed down their tradition through song, and these songs often revealed disappointment with marriage or a longing for the life of a single girl or even an old maid. As Malone shows, “Some of the songs may also have summoned up alternative, and even darker visions of present reality for women,” as women understood the songs about suffering in love and marriage as reflections of their own lives (*Musical Mountaineers* 24). In such popular tunes as “Single Girl, Married Girl” women mourned the fate of the ugly ragged wife and mother and cherished the independence of the single woman. In others like “The Cuckoo,” women warned of inconstant men and wondered if any man could be

trusted, while still in others like “Barbara Allen,” women described love as a powerful feeling that could kill. As they worked and tended to their children, Appalachian women created and sustained a musical tradition that allowed them to vent their frustrations. As Bufwack and Oermann argue, out of these Appalachian folk songs, country music was born and discovered. In fact, the first popular song that the Carter family recorded was “Single Girl, Married Girl” during the famed 1927 Bristol Sessions. As Wagner-Martin argues, this oral tradition is sustained by today’s women writers: “Knowledge, useful and life-giving knowledge, comes in much of this fiction from human sources rather than print—from people, living and dead, from their voices, from their accumulated experiences” (21); Wagner-Martin’s comments also recall Alice Walker’s reliance on the “voices of the old ones”—the blues singers that inspired *The Color Purple*. Similar to how Walker employs female blues characters, Smith uses Kate’s experiences to interject women’s musical performances into a patriarchally constructed southern community and to recall the history of female community of which Walker and Wagner-Martin speak. Yet Smith shows that Kate’s resistant matriarchal influence is checked and regulated in a South dominated by men and their God.

When Moses promises to be gone for nearly a week, Kate and her children bring the fiddle out and play until sun-up (DD 28). Moses returns early and catches Kate, and Ira narrates Moses’s violent reaction: “Who can say what drives a man to do the things he does? Fer what Moses done was awful. He come busting outen them woods like God Hissself, a-hollering, snatched that fiddle and broke it over the front porch rail, then beat all of them, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Mary and Kate, too, until the children run off in the woods to get away from him” (DD 29). Smith reveals how Moses usurps the authority of a vengeful and violent god when he assaults his family for playing the “devil’s music.” Although Kate’s eyes are swollen and black,

Ira describes how Moses selfishly feels tormented about his behavior and moans to God. Kate forgives him (perhaps as Ira says, loving him even more), but Jeremiah—remembering his father’s warning about the evil of the fiddle—never returns, and they find his dead body on the side of the mountain.

Afterwards, Moses wanders the mountains praying and finally comes home to die, with Kate by his side. Kate tells Ira, “He has bent hisself to the rule of God, which we cannot hope to fathom. He hopes he may hold out faithful to the end” (DD 31). Like a good southern woman, Kate’s own faith and love in Moses mirrors her faith in God, and the consequences are tragic when they both die young. After Moses dies, Kate loses her mind, has her children taken away from her, refuses to leave the cabin, and eventually dies—her spirit remaining in the cabin as a rumored fiddle song that drifts through the mountain air in haunting fashion. As Rebecca Smith describes, “Kate succumbs to an early death, a madwoman victimized by the tenets of the institutionalized church, by a man named Moses whose laws include no consideration for a woman’s loneliness that her musical talents help to assuage” (“Writing, Singing, and Hearing” 50). When Moses, led by his strict religious beliefs, transforms his wife and children’s fiddle-playing into the Devil’s laughter, Smith shows that women cannot hold expressive power under the rule of the southern (or his created holy) father. Through her fiddle-playing, Kate varies her performance as a good country woman by strengthening her motherly role through forbidden song. In Smith’s first story of the female country musician, she shows how women suffered for these variations from the norm—variations that continue in the post-South but are still exploited and controlled by a patriarchal social system. Yet readers note that Kate’s story lives on—through the haunting fiddle music that reminds the community of her plight.

The novel continues to trace the silencing and resistance of country music women through the story of Kate and Moses' son Zeke and his wife Nonnie Hulett. While Zeke remains a loyal father who accepts Nonnie and her illegitimate son, Smith still situates him as a (perhaps unconsciously) oppressive husband, who causes Nonnie to abandon her family life to travel with a medicine show. Smith continues to construct a fictional collective memory through voices and songs; this section weaves in and out of third-person narration and the memories of Nonnie's jealous sister, Zinnia. Nonnie, like Kate Malone, is also denied a voice, and like Kate, Nonnie instead expresses herself through song—songs that attest to a collective memory of rural southern women's struggles.

During Nonnie's birth, her father refuses to help her mother, calling the childbirth that takes her life "God's will," and as she faces death, Mamma Hulett also bends to her husband's will (DD 49). Rebecca Smith argues that Nonnie's beginnings mark the course of her life when her father later sends her out of town after she becomes pregnant: "Nonnie, not able to see her mother's plight, grows up ready and willing to enter the romance plot that led to her mother's ending in an early death, and as soon as she is old enough to become sexually active, she becomes involved with a man who leaves her as a 'ruin' bargaining object between the men who exchange her like a commodity" ("Writing, Singing, and Hearing" 52). While Nonnie's susceptibility to romance leaves her unwed and pregnant (which leads to her arranged marriage with Zeke), Nonnie also resists southern expectations of woman's place through songs that express her hopes, dreams, and later her frustrations. Through Zinnia's resentful voice, Smith describes Nonnie as a girl who chooses song and dance over her assigned chores, and when she marries and produces children with Zeke, she carries that song over into her family life. The third-person narrator describes:

Oh, Nonnie still sang, while she carded the wool or rocked the baby or shelled the beans, but now she mostly sang the hymns that Ezekiel loved, or the old bloody ballads like “Barbry Allen” and “Brown Girl” and “The Gypsy Laddie.” It gave Nonnie the strangest feeling to sing that one, all about a woman who left her house and baby to run away with a gypsy. For how could a woman do such as that? Men might wander, but women were meant to stay home, and during those years, when the house on Grassy Branch was brimming over with babies, Nonnie could not imagine anywhere else she might even *want* to be... (70)

Smith’s choice of songs reveals the continued opposition between country music and the oppressive religious rule of the southern husband. At times, Nonnie submissively sings the religious hymns that Zeke loves while she also sings and meditates on those popular folk tunes that bemoan a woman’s fate in love and marriage (while men are free to wander). Through Nonnie’s story, Smith also asks readers to remember country music women’s resistant roles as mothers *and* singers; like Arvay in *Seraph*, Nonnie disperses her talents and music among her children; as she works and tends to them, Nonnie sings and passes down her story through song (songs that later wholly affect her daughter Lizzie’s views of love as destructive and dangerous). However, Nonnie’s choice of songs symbolizes a desired variation on the performance of motherhood. While Nonnie purports to love her life as wife and mother, Smith reveals the pressure and boredom Nonnie feels when all she can hear is “*mamma mamma mamma*” (70).

When Nonnie finds her role as country wife and mother oppressive, she becomes the “gypsy lady” of whom she sings when she abandons her family for Dr. Harry and the medicine show. Through Nonnie’s story, Smith continues to depict women’s musical performances as in opposition to performances of the southern woman; Nonnie recognizes that her role as wife and mother deny her creative freedoms and the public praise she desires from them. When she escapes into the world of the medicine show, Smith reveals that her talents are still controlled and exploited. Where Nonnie’s music appeased her husband and children in her home, her songs are used for commercial gain in the medicine show. Harry charms Nonnie with his talk and

attention, and she travels with the medicine show as their star singer, recapturing the romance of her girlhood as her singing garners more attention from both the audience and Harry.⁶ Through Nonnie's brief run with Dr. Harry and his show, Smith shatters one myth of the country music community as an isolated Appalachian phenomenon by showing readers how country music was influenced by an outside urban and often Northern world; she also exposes how country music—particularly women's voices—was commodified in an early era, foreshadowing the post-southern exploitation of female participation in the genre. When Nonnie questions the ethics of selling the medicine show's false products, Harry tells her, "Since the public insists on being poisoned, we may as well give them a good time too" (77). Through Harry's words, Smith exposes how country music moves from an expressive matriarchal tradition to a commodity that is controlled by Dr. Harry; Nonnie becomes simply one of the promoted products. This changing and merging South offers no new opportunities for women as Nonnie so hoped when she joined Harry; Smith suggests that even in a progressive South, women remain as servants to men despite their attempted variations on the role of the good country woman.

While Zeke uses religion as the basis for his authority over Nonnie, Harry uses his salesmanship and gift for talk to convince her that selling the medicines is perfectly ethical. Smith equates Harry's talking with some of the most powerful (and often corrupt) performative positions in society: "Harry was *such* a talker! Why, it was plain to see he could have done *anything*, been *anybody*—politician, actor, lawyer, president. And he knew the biggest words,

⁶ Robert Cantwell argues that the medicine show scenes "are so richly imagined that they draw incidents conjectured or even reported in scholarly accounts out of history altogether and install them in truly luminous and fully achieved literary passages" (281). Smith's insertion of the traveling medicine show not only offers Nonnie freedom, but also reveals the lapsed boundaries of Appalachia and its music. As Malone illustrates, these early medicine shows brought patent medicines, as well as urban music, to rural areas and contributed to the rise of the country music community: "Not only were songs introduced to rural America in this manner, but the medicine shows also provided an early commercial outlet for country musicians, who were often employed by the traveling shows. On the physick wagons, country entertainers gained invaluable show business experience which would later serve them well when they set out for professional careers" (*Country Music USA* 6).

and he never used just one of them when six would do” (78). While Smith shows that Nonnie gains temporary confidence and support from Harry (“Nonnie became her own story”), she also shows Harry’s authority over Nonnie who never attempts to argue with or correct Harry’s contradictions. Although Nonnie escapes with freedom in mind, this “freedom” develops into a gender-based similar to that of Grassy Branch—again asking readers to consider how women are equally oppressed by southern narratives of progress.

While Nonnie might reimagine herself as a star, her role and relationship to men remains the same, suggesting that women’s power to remake themselves is perhaps fruitless—even in a rising South of new opportunities. Nonnie travels with Harry for three years and later catches him cheating on her with a younger singer. Carmen Rueda-Ramos argues that Nonnie’s “adulterous relationship gives her the illusion of having created her own story, her own self, but the medicine man betrays that belief in the same way he betrays her with the new girl who joins the show” (33). Nonnie tragically burns to death in a hotel fire, and in her last moments, she remembers Grassy Branch, Zeke Bailey, and their life together; she realizes that her success with the medicine show leaves her bereft of those idealized country music conceptions of family, love, and home. In Smith’s portrayal of Nonnie, she reveals that Nonnie romantically memorializes both communities (the Grassy Branch community and the opposing medicine show community), when in reality, both communities are imagined and upheld by southern gender codes that remain unchangeable. In both communities, Nonnie’s talents are exploited and underappreciated—much like those of the women and minority figures in the developing South in Hurston’s *Seraph*.

While Nonnie’s narrative continues depictions of how zealous men oppress women and how women use music to temporarily thwart this oppression, the less critically acknowledged

contribution Nonnie makes to the saga of country music is through R.C. Bailey, her illegitimate son by a Melungeon. Many of Smith's critics consider the book significant in the way she exposes women's plights as country music artists (especially in her creation of Katie Cocker, a fully independent singer), but most ignore the way race issues connect with the gender issues in the novel.⁷ R.C.'s character (although male) faces discrimination from the community because of his racial status, and he learns to voice his loneliness and alienation through country music. Just as Arvay and Joe Kelsey share similar plights under paternalism in *Seraph*, R.C. (in his outsider racial status) also shares similar struggles with the women in *The Devil's Dream*. Before marrying Zeke Bailey, Nonnie gets pregnant with R.C. after her childhood affair with Jake Toney, a Melungeon. As Nonnie's father tells her, the Melungeon is an outsider to Appalachian life: "Daddy told us about the Melungeons, that is a race of people which nobody knows where they came from, with real pale light eyes, and dark skin, and frizzy hair like sheep's wool... 'Niggers won't claim a Melungeon,' Daddy told us. 'Injuns won't claim them neither'... 'The Melungeon is alone in all the world'" (DD 57). Daddy Hulett succeeds in running Jake off, but Nonnie skips school to meet him and becomes pregnant with R.C. When Nonnie leaves her family to be with Jake, Jake abandons her, pregnant and alone. When Nonnie is later bartered away to Zeke Bailey, R.C.'s half-Melungeon heritage is forgotten and Zeke raises the child as his own. Then late one night at a dance R.C. makes a move on another man's girl, and the rival suitor laughs at him and calls him a Melungeon.

Through Daddy Hulett's description of the Melungeons, Smith recalls the conflicting histories of this ethnic group and defers the imagined notion of purity in Appalachian society and

⁷ Katherine Vande Brake's essay, "The grace to face tomorrow:" The Melungeon Line in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*," traces the characteristics and descriptions of Melungeon characters in the novel, but does not offer sufficient analysis of how R.C.'s racial origins influence his musician, and through his music, his connection to women.

country music. Scholars still debate the origins of the Melungeons, and theories range from explanations of part Native- or African-Americans to tracings of Moorish, Portuguese, Carthaginian, or Spanish Jewish migrations to the colonies to rumors of the descendants of the lost colony of Roanoke.⁸ Melungeon historians look to DNA evidence and elaborate analyses of family trees and surnames to determine the true heritage of the Melungeon, but separating fact from fiction proves to be a daunting and illusory task—an important fact for a novel concerned with debunking and understanding mythical Appalachia and its music. The idea that Appalachians constructed a “Melungeon” identity reflects how Smith dissolves the question of race as a construction through her debunking of country music as racially pure. While the Melungeon ethnicity was almost surely constructed, some critics argue that these outsiders faced very real punishments for their imagined racial heritage. Other critics like Elizabeth Hirschman and Pat Spurlock Elder argue that Melungeon communities led lives akin to their white counterparts, and Mattie Ruth Johnson’s memoir *My Melungeon Heritage: a Story of Life on Newman’s Ridge* also testifies to this.⁹ While scholars might debate the degree of discrimination against Melungeons, in Smith’s portrayal, the Melungeon identity remains unknown, ridiculed, and alienated by the larger white Appalachian population, resulting in an internalization of

⁸ For more information, see these thoroughly comprehensive (but contradictory) histories of the Melungeons: Elizabeth Hirschman, *Melungeons: The Last Lost Tribe in America*; Pat Spurlock Elder, *Melungeons: Examining an Appalachian Legend*; Wayne Winkler, *Walking Toward the Sunset: the Melungeons of Appalachia*; N. Brent Kennedy, *The Melungeons: the Resurrection of a Proud People: an Untold Story of the Ethnic Cleansing in America*.

⁹ As N. Brent Kennedy argues, “In order to pillage these dark-skinned, frustratingly European-looking people, who were often Christian to boot, a new heritage had to be invented . . . All that mattered was that these particular territories somehow be usurped from the people who had settled and worked them” (xiv). Wayne Winkler describes the mistrust that whites often felt for Melungeons and the ways that their liminal racial status affected them: “At various times, Melungeons were restricted in their educational opportunities and their choice of marriage partners. They caused confusion for military soldiers who were required to segregate black soldiers from white soldiers. Their right to vote was sometimes challenged and they faced hostility from their white neighbors” (2). Contrarily, most female scholars of Melungeon history believe that acts of discrimination have been overly dramatized by other—mainly male—scholars, again recalling Kreyling’s ideas about the male-centered South’s reliance on race, guilt, and violence and the female created South’s reliance on a cohesive community.

southern racial codes which force R.C. to view himself as an outsider—not unlike the females of the novel.

In endowing R.C. with a mixed racial heritage (a revision of the real-life A.P. Carter on which his character is based), Smith adds a new dimension to an imagined country music community, which she depicts as not only excluding women but also as excluding racial minorities. Malone explains the appeal of country music's imaginary cowboys and mountaineers over other popular local color characters like Cajuns, Creoles, or ex-slaves : "...Mountaineers and cowboys had the additional advantage of being "Anglo-Saxon," a deeply-satisfying attribute to many people who viewed with regret the inundation of the nation by 'new' and perhaps unassimilable immigrants" (*Musical Mountaineers* 73).¹⁰ Although black country musicians like Charley Pride experienced success in the 1960s, Malone suggests that fans bought his records before realizing that he was black, and country music still remains, as Malone suggests in my epigraph, emblematic of poor *white* America.¹¹ In *The Devil's Dream*, Smith uses R.C.'s Melungeon status to break down southern racial divides in country music and reveal the cultural confluences and similar struggles of southern women and minorities. Smith draws parallels between first southern women and racially-othered southerners, and later, in her description of the Bristol sessions, between southern blacks and poor whites. Just as Hurston brings together the talents of Arvey and Joe and shows how Kenny Meserve appropriates those talents, Smith shows that when country music grows into a profitable industry where southerners—marginalized by gender, race, and class status—can cross hierarchal boundaries to find

¹⁰ This is only an imagined narrative of country music—the myth that Smith works to disrupt. As Malone and other scholars like Charles Joyner have shown, country and blues draw heavily from each other, and southern music in general is an amalgamation of varying genres of music that cross racial boundaries.

¹¹ As Malone notes, "Disc jockeys played his records, and fans bought them for several weeks, without anyone knowing his racial identity. By the time Pride's face became known to people, his music had won them over for life" (*Country Music USA* 314). Even while this suggests a country music community that judges their musicians on the basis of talent and appeal, Malone notes that while "Charley Pride broke down some racial barriers in country music, few black people have followed him across them" (*Country Music USA* 316).

temporary empowerment, the white privileged class regulates this cross-cultural connection through exploitation.

Smith creates R.C. as a sympathetic character—one who can partially relate to the outsider status women feel in the novel—to show his sustained support of Lucie in love and marriage. When R.C. presents Lucie a “wedding” guitar instead of a ring, for the first time, Smith shows a husband’s respect and support for his wife’s talent. R.C.’s sister Lizzie describes Lucie’s reaction to the guitar: “It was a brand-new little Gibson guitar that he’d sent off for – she’d told R.C. she’d always wanted a guitar. As it turned out, this would be Lucie’s wedding present—no ring, but a new guitar, and it would be just fine with her, too” (DD 98). R.C. and Lucie seem bound not only by their love for each other but also by their love for music. When they accidentally discover they can earn money from their performances after their wagon breaks and leaves them stranded in town, they begin singing all over the area with R.C.’s brother Durwood as accompanist. While Lizzie doubts whether R.C.’s promotions of their shows as “morally good” is really an accurate description, she finds the music entertaining, especially the way Lucie’s voice captivates the audience. Lucie sings Nonnie’s old ballads that Lizzie teaches her, again recalling Appalachian women’s passing on of song:

How I thrilled to hear her sing Mamma’s favorites, which I had taught her!—“Barbry Allen,” the cuckoo song, “The Gypsy Laddie,” “Brown Girl,” and the riddle song I used to love so much as a child...I always experienced a deep satisfaction upon hearing Lucie sing this song. For I feel in general that the world is a mystery, I suppose, one vast riddle, and it is good to think that there are a few answers, even though they be fleeting—only the words of a song. (DD 103)

Through Lizzie (also an outsider figure who leaves the mountains to become a nurse during World War I), Smith shows how song provided a temporary answer to the problems of women and minority southerners. Through the repeated use of these traditional songs—songs that bemoan a woman’s fate in marriage and motherhood—Smith also testifies to the power of a

newly imagined sense of southern community—that of southern women battling the male-centered southern community that regulated women’s roles in marriage and religion. In Lucie’s rendition of these old songs, the voices of the old ones emerge in a moment of resistance that recalls Kate or Nonnie’s varied performances of the good country wife and the strong connections these variations engendered between mother and children.

Through the group’s performances, Smith relates R.C.’s struggles as an excluded racial minority with women’s struggles. R.C. sometimes accompanies Lucie and Durwood in singing or fiddling, and he is, as Lizzie describes, “the presiding genius of the group” who finds new styles in which to play old ballads, discovers new songs, and even writes his own (DD 104). As Lizzie describes, R.C.’s most important song speaks of his racial difference: “his own, ‘Melungeon Man,’ its title referring to a mysterious strain of folks scattered through the mountains, which some believe to be descendants of this country’s first Roanoke Island settlers. Regardless of the origin of the Melungeons, that ballad captures such a feeling of *otherness*, of being outside, cut off from the rest of humanity, that I never heard them sing it without feeling a chill” (DD 104). Even though Cantwell criticizes the anachronistic use of the word “otherness,” Smith inserts the Melungeon myth into her country music narrative to recall those larger imagined communities of the South, where race and gender status determined place in the community. While Lucie sings stirring renditions of the old ballads that bemoan a woman’s lot in love, R.C. creates new songs that bemoan the loneliness of racial difference in the mountains. The way the couple express themselves in music exposes their similar oppressions and creates a stronger bond between them and with their audiences. Just as Hurston creates a connection between Arvey and Joe, Smith uses Lucie and R.C.’s music to explore the interconnected similarities of the alienation and hardship created by race and gender hierarchies.

Smith continues to connect gender and racial oppression during the recording scenes with Ralph Peer in Bristol. The historical Peer, of whom Bill Malone writes, “affixed the term ‘hillbilly’ to some of the records he produced” and takes his place in a long line of producers interested in profiting from rural folk music (*Musical Mountaineers* 72). As Malone suggests, “If a potential market for grassroots music could be discerned, they would exploit it, without concern for its art, or the lack of it” (*Musical Mountaineers* 72). In Smith’s fictional account, Peer, driven by his condescending attitude toward the rural white folk, is surprised and impressed by R.C.’s knowledge of copyrighting and his ability to read through the contract that he ably signs. Peer represents another intrusion of modernity onto the country music scene (like Harry and the medicine show)—a need to exploit and profit from the music of the people he terms “hillbillies.” The third-person narrator tells us that Peer “has little regard for the ‘hillbillies’ he deals with. Nor does he like their music much, but a man has to make a living, and this hillbilly music is making him rich” (DD 121). Peer’s blatant disrespect for the people and the music they make recalls the exploitation that blues and jazz musicians also faced in the early 1900s. In fact, Smith’s faithfully drawn fictional Peer tells R.C. he had a hand in this abuse:

You know, I have been recording nigger music for many years,” Mr. Peer says and mentions some of the Okeh 8000 series of “race” records he’s made: Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues,” recorded in Memphis; Louis Armstrong’s “Gutbucket Blues”; minstrel acts such as Butterbeans and Susie, recorded in Negro vaudeville theaters throughout the South. But Mr. Peer is always looking for original material, he tells R.C., and “niggers can’t write.” So he’s turned to hillbilly now. (DD 122)

Smith spares no criticism in her depiction of the historical Peer who recorded such artists as the Carters, Jimmie Rodgers, and the singer who popularized the blues, Mamie Smith. Similar to Harry the medicine man, Peer views both the people and the music as commodities that he can

market for profit, instituting a post-southern system of slavery through capitalist exploitation.¹²

Smith again draws similarities between the discrimination and hardships of rural white southerners and black southerners, revealing the way powerful white southern society abused and appropriated their musical cultures for monetary gain. The music that once seemed so expressive for Lucie and R.C. now becomes a commercial product; Peer judges each song not as a memory and testament to collective Appalachian life (as Lizzie and Lucie do) but instead as a marketable item.

Notably, Smith shifts back to a female perspective when describing this exploitation, recalling Kreyling's argument that Smith often moves from the alienated male to a female community. While Peer's condescending comments don't fully register with R.C., Lucie loses something sacred when she records "The Cuckoo Song." Lucie feels as if she is selling something that belongs to her family—specifically the female members Lizzie and Sally who taught her the songs of their mother: "Tears come into her eyes then but do not fall, and her voice takes on a deeper shading of emotion, a tremor, that renders the simple old song almost unbearably poignant...Lucie cries softly. For it seems to her that they have just given up something precious by singing these songs, and she feels a sudden terrible sense of loss. She knows it's silly to feel this way, but somehow that doesn't help" (DD 124). For Lucie, the temporary empowerment provided by country music and its female community diminishes; she realizes that she sings for strangers that do not care about the woman's struggle that informs

¹² Bill Malone argues that "no real evidence suggests that either the Carter family or Ralph Peer, the talent scout that first recorded them, made any conscious attempt to exploit explicit mountain imagery," though Peer did encourage the family to sing older folk songs that perhaps portrayed a "rural Victorian South" (*Musical Mountaineers* 81).

“The Cuckoo Song.” Lucie sells something dear to her—the memories of women’s plights under love, which are mirrored in her love for and connection to R.C and his racial trauma.¹³

While Lucie remains unable to speak for herself (she never narrates in the novel), her role as a good country mother (as well as her voicelessness) strengthens her connection to the songs she sings about women’s heartbreak and servitude—a memorial to the earlier stories of Kate and Nonnie and the conflict between patriarchal expectations of women and creative expression through music. Smith shows that Lucie feels uncomfortable recording with Ralph Peer, recognizing the commodification of her song and its memorial power for women’s lives. As Tanya Long Bennett argues, “Though Lucie may not intellectualize over the transition, her response indicates a recognition that the music will not have the same meaning to an audience who does not relate to it directly but rather accepts it as a mediator to experience”(89). Peer dismisses Lucie’s maudlin behavior by reassuring R.C. that “artists are real tempermental...I’ve seen it a million times” (DD 124), which Rebecca Smith reads as “his condescension to what he sees as female weakness” (“Writing, Singing, and Hearing” 55). On the other hand, R.C., whose songs (especially “Melungeon Man”) also act as a means of resistant expression for him,

¹³ Yet, while Ralph Peer might use radio to commodify country music, Smith also shows the power of the medium to unite Appalachians and southerners with the rest of America—suggesting a temporary empowerment for radio listeners. With the invention and widespread use of the radio, country music became accessible to people throughout the nation. In Alice Bailey’s short segment, Smith points to the importance of radio in bringing the community together through music, again evincing a lapse of boundaries between the South and the world at large. In the evening, the Baileys trek to the top of the mountain to get a radio signal and listen to country music programs, most notably the Grand Ole Opry. Alice describes how she feels listening to the music on top of the mountain: “But listening to the radio in our house was *nothing* like listening to it on that grassy bald, laying out on a quilt looking up at the stars and eating biscuits. I felt like I was all alone in the world, and also like I was a part of something big, all at the same time. I felt like I was a part of my family too, and a part of that music they loved so” (115). Alice’s descriptions mirror some of Bone’s descriptions of gospel and country in *Bastard Out of Carolina*; the music empowers Alice in both an individual and communal sense. Smith shows that radio and the influx of country music programming collapsed the boundaries between tradition and modernity, between family community and world community, between the imagined structures of home and nation—allowing listeners a temporary feeling of inclusion and empowerment in a southern community divided by hierarchies.

becomes so excited about the money and ensuing success that he fails to realize he debases his own artistry by participating in Peer's emerging capitalist slave system.

R.C. makes few appearances after the Bristol Sessions section of the novel, and when he does appear, his role moves from a sympathetic Melungeon character to an oppressive father who sends his pregnant daughter Rose Annie away to a mental hospital (just as his grandfather sent his mother Nonnie away). R.C.'s final appearance comes at the end of the novel when Katie Cocker decides to produce a reunion album with the Bailey family, supposedly merging a new female independence with the old female tradition of country music. Because of Smith's ambivalent depiction of Katie (which will be discussed later), one might argue that R.C. finally recognizes the way he allowed himself to be exploited when, instead of attending the reunion, he blows his brains out while playing a record of "Melungeon Man." At the moment when Katie's female promoter leads the family through the glittering Opryland Hotel to celebrate the success of their new album, Smith flashes to the scene of R.C.'s suicide:

R.C. has been thinking about his mamma, whose love for the Melungeon marked his life and made him a man always outside the closed door, waiting there forever in the outer dark. Then R.C. thinks of the night he and his Lucie, lovely Lucie, spent at that fancy hotel in Cana so long ago, how they took a bath in the big white bathtub with claw feet, how Lucie giggled. (DD 309)

In these concluding moments of R.C.'s life, Smith ambivalently portrays R.C.'s feelings of alienation as connected to his time with Lucie on the first night they performed for an audience; like his mother Nonnie does earlier, R.C. nostalgically longs for an imagined past where his racial otherness is assuaged by love, family, and tradition. Again recalling Kreyling's astute analysis of Smith's move from the alienated male South of racial guilt, alienation, and violence to a strong female community, R.C.'s unsupportive actions are misplaced in the face of Katie Cocker's final success with a female-centered country music community. In her benevolent

comments about her father, Rose Annie Bailey suggests that R.C. might be threatened by the way women have taken control of country music: “I don’t know if he just can’t stand it [music] since Mamma died or if he got pitched off at Virgie going off like that without so much as a by-your-leave, not asking him no advice. Daddy ran the show when it was the Grassy Branch Girls, you know. It was him that thought of it being a sister act in the first place, and him that found the songs” (DD 130). Smith’s portrait of R.C. reveals how racial and gender oppression are related under paternalism, but perhaps through R.C.’s longing for an imagined traditional country music community, she also hints at how women (unlike Lucie and more like Ralph Peer) began to complicitly resign themselves to this oppression for profit. When female country musicians successfully entered the Nashville scene, male stars were forced to share some of their patriarchal power, but in Smith’s novel, female musicians simply usurp—rather than transform—this oppressive power, a realization that R.C. comes to in his last moments.

From the recording sessions to the end of the novel, the reader is thrown into a new South—the suburban post-South—that continually depends upon the Bailey family and its country music as a source of profit. Where the music once united families suffering under gender, class, and race discriminations, it now becomes a means of social status and wealth. The narrative of an old-time “pure” country music dissolves into the narrative of a popular country music tainted by postmodern American materialism; as Smith shows, the two narratives are interrelated in their oppressive gender tactics. In the last two sections of the novel, Smith presents a variety of industry-controlled roles for the Bailey females to continue her exposure of women as profitable tools. In this new post-South, Smith suggests that the southern system of patriarchy (as earlier witnessed in Kate and Nonnie’s stories) lives on in the shroud of capitalist

progress and industrial growth, where women are not only manipulated for their talents but also become willing and knowing participants in such a system.

Rose Annie, the only daughter of Lucie Queen and R.C., perhaps represents the best example of women's complicity in the ways men continue to oppress and abuse women in a post-South. While Smith allows Rose Annie her own voice, granting a certain amount of empowerment to women in a newly imagined South, Rose Annie's voice reveals that although times have changed, the old myths and hierarchies remain intact. Rose Annie lives in a suburban-style brick ranch built on her father's land, married with two children to a man who thinks her nervous breakdown makes her special (read "weak") and who treats her like a living baby-doll (DD 131). While Rose Annie's friends tell her that she's lucky to have such a life and she pretends to agree, she also tells us that it "Seems like I'm a walking memory, sometimes" (DD 134). Through Rose Annie's story, Smith shows how memory can be reduced to nostalgia for a non-existent imagined South, which can in turn be used to re-establish gender and class hierarchies. Rose Annie longs for old Appalachia, where everyone worked in the fields together, churches didn't have velvet seats and organs, where ghost stories and sugar-stirrings were the main sources of entertainment. She mourns that "folks are not the same anymore, *families* are not the same anymore" (DD 146). As Cantwell suggests, "Rose Annie has been reared in what becomes, in her memory, the idyllic twilight of traditional mountain life, a life she attempts to recover when her lost cousin and lover emerges from tawdry obscurity as a rockabilly singer with a hit song" (DD 282). In Rose Annie's memories of her past life with Johnny Rainette, Smith shows how transforming the memories of women's struggles under patriarchy (as in Kate and Nonnie's stories) to pure nostalgia produces dangerous consequences for the postmodern southern woman. Just as Hurston uses minstrelsy to call into question romantic visions of the

South, Smith uses Rose Annie's idyllic country music memories to reveal how this romance is based on gender and race oppression and class exploitation.

While Rose Annie's desire for the past seems genuine, Smith shows how that past rests firmly on structures of southern religion and gender. Rose Annie's old life centers on her adolescent affair with her cousin Johnny that resulted in pregnancy and, for Rose Annie, a dead child and a nervous breakdown. She not only suffers from an obsession with an imagined past, but also from an obsession with Johnny in particular: "I made a god out of Johnny Rainette, and I've been cut off from the other one ever since" (DD 143). Like Hurston's portraits of Arvay and her view of Jim, Smith shows how Rose Annie actually conflates Johnny and his hold over her with God; for Rose Annie, this man becomes God. Rose Annie trades her religion for the love of a man, and in its earliest phases, Smith represents this through music when the cousins—Rose Annie, Johnny, Georgia, and Katie Cocker—form a childhood gospel quartet together. When the group sings "Wondrous Love" on Easter Sunday at the Chicken Rise Baptist church, Smith intimates that the lyrics are emblematic of Rose Annie and Johnny's intense incestuous love for each other, not for God: "*What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul*" (DD 144). Having replaced man's God with an actual man, Smith shows Rose Annie to be a complicit victim in a constructed southern religion that imagines men to be as powerful (at least where women are concerned) as God. Unlike Walker's Celie or Allison's Bone, who eventually learn that men are not God, Rose Annie continues to suffer under her nostalgic dream of the god Johnny—the now long-forgotten mythic equation of a man and God that also killed Kate Malone.

Smith also shows the power of the southern father when R.C. runs Johnny out of town and places Rose Annie in a mental institution after discovering their affair and future child.

Afterwards, Rose Annie resigns herself to suburban southern life with her husband Buddy but dreams always of her romantic past with Johnny. While Smith shows Rose Annie's early years with Johnny wrapped in gospel music and southern religion, she uses a newly imagined country music and its commercial appeal to showcase the couple's reunion—revealing that romantic narratives of the Old South are simply reconstituted in the post-South. Rose Annie rediscovers Johnny and his whereabouts when she hears his hit-song, "Five-Card Stud," on the radio. Smith uses a third-person narrator to give Johnny a short section of the novel entitled "Blackjack Johnny Raines and the Pig-Brain Theory" in order to show how Rose Annie's sweet young god Johnny transformed into the chauvinist country singer Blackjack Johnny. As Rebecca Smith describes, Smith uses violent sexual language to characterize Johnny as "one who never grows beyond seeing women as objects to be groped" ("Writing, Singing, and Hearing" 58). Johnny's only concerns are drinking, making money from his music, and especially womanizing. As the narrator tells us, "A man turns into an animal at such times, his brain turns into a pig brain, he's nothing but a walking dick. He's not responsible for anything he says or does. And no pussy is bad pussy either" (DD 176). Johnny's despicable actions and theories translate to music like "Five-Card Stud" or the new song he composes after a sexual conquest, "I've got a need/ I've got to feed/The beast inside of me" (DD 182). While Smith creates Johnny as unsympathetic (to say the least)—a character in line with Walker's Pa or Albert—Smith, like Walker, also uses Johnny to represent how patriarchy affects men. Unlike Rose Annie, Johnny hates memories of his family and working on the farm, and this directly mutates to his need to manipulate and abuse women when Smith shows Johnny at once reminiscing about the darkness of the farm and then preying on a woman in a bar (DD 167). However, unlike Albert (who experiences change and

growth) in *The Color Purple*, Johnny does not overcome his role as violent oppressor; he instead takes ownership over Rose Annie through marriage.

The two take center-stage in the country music press and industry, quickly dubbed “The King and Queen of Country Music.” While Cantwell “detects a little something of Johnny Cash and June Carter” in their story (279), Rose Annie and Johnny’s story does not become emblematic of romantic love (as in the recent portrayals of Johnny and June in the film *Walk the Line*) but rather emblematic of the commercial success of country music and the power dynamics it exposes between southern men and women. In his tracings of how the industry and its fans have imagined the country music community, Malone suggests, “Commercialism, not ideology, has motivated many of country music’s bold experiments” (316). When they record a duet about Rose Annie’s flight from subdivision life, the two become instant stars, and Gladys (Rose Annie’s mother-in-law by Buddy) narrates a section detailing their story like a scrapbook, with pictures and write-ups from the *Enquirer* and *Parade* magazines. Gladys represents a postmodern country fan who, caught in the new narrative of a commercial country romance becomes more excited by Rose Annie and Johnny’s images and lifestyle as promoted and represented by the press than by the sounds of their music; where women’s country music once attested to the powers and failures of love and marriage, Smith shows how the music is now used as merely a secondary promotional tool for the tawdry life performances of its stars.

Gladys’s account of Rose Annie and Johnny’s new life—their glass-walled living room, swimming pool and pool attendant Ramon, blue velvet furniture, *Gone With the Wind*-style bedroom (again emblematic of Rose Annie’s romance with the past), the ponies bought for the children, and the neighborhood filled with country stars—exposes the way country music and its roots transformed into a commercial post-southern life, more materially based than life on

Grassy Branch. While Rose Annie's new life in Nashville appears different from her romantic memories of her rural home, Gladys reveals that Rose Annie's life with Johnny is similar to her life with Buddy or even her father R.C; she lives like a doll, used for play and given everything she wants. Her idyllic past with Johnny is occluded by his abusive behavior and his infidelities, all of which are printed in the newspapers and magazines for fans to enjoy as the new materialistic narrative of country music and the South. In Rose Annie's story, Smith suggests that there is no difference between women's oppression in the imagined structure of the Old South and that of the post-South. In such a South, where men continually abuse and oppress women, Rose Annie (just as Walker's blues women Sofia and Squeak temporarily internalize violent retribution) internalizes the violent patriarchal powers of an imagined South when she shoots and kills Johnny and goes to jail. While Smith shows how Rose Annie is materially successful in the post-South—a variation on Saucier's good country mother who has no economic power—Rose Annie also complicitously plays into her role as a servant and objectified play-toy—a role that neither money nor violence can undo.

Rebecca Smith argues that Rose Annie still gains voice and power from her cousin Katie Cocker, who dedicates songs to Rose Annie and names her first daughter Annie May as a tribute to her ("Writing, Hearing, and Singing" 59). Unlike Rose Annie, Katie takes a new course of action by attempting to cut herself off from the imagined traditions that consume her cousin. As nearly all critics of the novel agree, Katie Cocker is the most important character in *The Devil's Dream* because, through her, Smith shows that women can think and live independently.

Rebecca Smith argues that Katie "shows how far Smith has come in imagining a strong, sacred, sexual female" ("Writing, Singing, and Hearing" 48) and interviewer Claudia Lowenstein tells Lee Smith, "I'm glad Katie rids herself of the patriarchal shackles. I couldn't help but want to

cheer” (122). While Smith’s focus on Katie’s journey emerges as an exploration of the many images commercial country music invented for women, Katie’s journey also resumes the themes of religion and race that relate to the imagined southern construct of gender—showing that no matter how “free” Katie might appear, in the post-South, there is still little freedom for women unless they take on the role of their oppressors and exploit their art for profit.

Katie’s first barricade to independence through her art comes from the religious leanings of her mother, which underscores the dissolution of the country mother as musician; Smith’s other mothers speak to their children through song and encourage their musical talents. Although Katie wants to be a singer from childhood, her mother forbids it: “Mamma had already said flat-out that there was *no way* she was going to ever consent to me trying to be a singer, which was what I had really wanted to do. ‘They is enough singers in this family already,’ Mamma had said absolutely. ‘Too many to please God,’ she said, for she was convinced that most singing was a sin” (DD 211). Katie’s mother, Alice (who earlier praises the powers of country music radio), resumes the strict tenets that Moses and Zeke enforced in their homes, and while Katie longs to be a part of R.C.’s musically less-restricted family, Alice keeps Katie from spending too much time with them. Even though Katie forms a childhood gospel quartet with her cousins, her rebellion against her mother in the Miss Holly Springs High competition spurs her dream of being a country star. Instead of modeling dresses she sewed in home economics (as she told her mother she would), Katie plays guitar and sings Patsy Montana’s 1935 hit “I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart” (the first record by a country female to sell over one million copies).

Afterwards, Katie knows that she was meant to sing:

The audience loved it. People all over the auditorium jumped up and whistled and clapped and yelled when I finished. It went to my head, I guess. I felt hot and tingly all over, a feeling I *still* get, believe it or not, at the end of every show. And every time it’s just as exciting as the first time, honestly. It gets in your blood, you know. Finally you can’t live

without it. I was probably born with it in my blood, but I didn't know it until that night I was crowned Miss Holly Springs High ...I was hooked. (DD 212)

Katie's reactions recall Bone's needs for a gospel audience in *Bastard Out of Carolina*—to have the attention and love missing from her mother. While Katie finds empowerment in her connections with the audience, she (like Bone) still faces patriarchy's oppressive tactics to regulate underprivileged female performance in the music industry. Unlike Allison's Bone, Katie conforms to industry (and patriarchal southern) standards rather than reimagining them.

Once hooked on her musical power, Katie rebels against her religious upbringing and leaves town with her aunt Virgie to form a comedy group for the radio shows. Katie describes what follows her departure from Grassy Branch as a long line of others imagining her identity and her music for her: "I had been a dumb hick raindrop with Virgie, I had been a honky-tonk angel with Wayne Ricketts, I had been a California pop singer with Tom Barksdale, I had been a good country woman with Ralph" (DD 299). While these images seemingly offer women resistant variations on the expected performances of southern wife and mother, Smith reveals that these new images still grant men (and now women) the same controlling power. With Virgie, the girls purposefully portray themselves as hicks, playing into the stereotype of dumb poor whites by dressing country and telling degrading jokes. Katie describes, "We were as country as they come. At first, I didn't know any better. Later, I came to hate it, wearing those crazy getups she [Virgie] made us wear, straw hats and bloomers and big black clodhopper lace-up boots, our red-checkered dresses buttoned up wrong" (DD 225). Malone describes the earliest stereotypes of rural southern whites as "degenerate hayseeds (the kind of people who gaped and guffawed at the Scopes trial)" or as suffering "from a general stigma not far removed from" H.L. Mencken's characterizations of the South in "Sahara of the Bozart" (*Musical Mountaineers* 71). Smith recreates these stereotypes and female country musicians' willingness to play them (as

Virgie's Raindrop girls) to challenge previous imaginings of a strong female community; music becomes not a bonding agent for women and children (as in Kate, Nonnie, or Lucie's stories) but instead a profitable tool. With the Raindrops, Virgie simply takes the patriarchal position of control—a role readers later see Katie usurp. Unlike the female communities afforded by blues and country in Walker and Allison's texts, Smith suggests that commercialized country music affords its female performers power and stability through money and fame rather than love and tolerance.

When the Raindrops fall apart (partly because Katie's first pregnancy makes her unsuitable to perform), Katie moves to Louisiana where she meets Wayne Ricketts, another of Smith's males who holds the gift of gab and salesmanship and who also controls Katie's career while keeping her ignorant of his plans for her. He makes Katie into a country diva reminiscent of Loretta Lynn, while manipulating her professionally and sexually: ““You don't need to know, either. All you need to know is what to do with this,” Wayne said, unzipping his pants and taking it out” (DD 255). As Katie bows to his sexual desires, she realizes that she bows to all of his desires: “So I went down on him, right there on the interstate highway. I always did everything Wayne Ricketts wanted. Everything” (DD 255). When Katie finds out that Wayne is an abusive drunk, she starts drinking and taking pills, and when Wayne gets them both thrown in jail for fraud, Katie has a nervous breakdown and lands herself in a mental hospital. In her time with Wayne, Katie finds temporary power through her commercial appeal, but she is still subject to his control—a patriarchal control that no newly invented feminine performance can substantially challenge.

When Katie recovers, she moves her family to Nashville and meets Tom Barksdale, who turns her into a cross-over pop star. Unlike Wayne, Tom refuses to keep Katie in the dark about

anything, even his cheating. Tom sees Katie as needing an education: “I was not sophisticated enough for Tom, I guess...Tom got dead set on improving my mind and teaching me things such as history, which I have never been very crazy about. He also gave me a little book to improve my vocabulary, with a quiz at the end of each chapter” (DD 279). Through Katie and Tom’s relationship, Smith exposes the way men control women through education, making them question their own knowledge and their own significance. Smith’s mention of history specifically shows how men control women’s concept of history, instead of allowing for the collective feminine memories afforded through music. Even in her California pop days, where her image clearly defies that of the good country woman, Katie still serves men. Smith also exposes the way the Tom Barksdales of the world removed country from its rural roots and expanded its commercial appeal and profit margins; Katie produces a crossover album that gets her to *The Ed Sullivan Show*. When, during the show, Katie reconnects with the man she terms her soul mate, Ralph Handy (a man who restores her confidence and nostalgically reminds her of home), they form a band and live their lives on a tour bus. Even though Katie loves Ralph and again lands herself in a mental hospital after his death in a bus crash, she realizes that Ralph, too, created an image of her—that of the “good country woman.” During her stay at the hospital, after a religious experience with the Reverend Billy Jack Reems, Katie comes to full consciousness about her previous life in country music: “For the first time in my professional life, I didn’t have an image. I was alone again. And somehow because of my new faith, I felt stripped of all these past images, in a new and terrifying way” (DD 299). Through Katie’s journey, Smith smashes the invented country music icons that—like the icon of southern womanhood—suggested what women should be. While Smith allows Katie the independence to create her own image, Smith also shows that Katie cannot escape the gender oppression that informed her past images; instead

of remaking and reimagining herself, Katie simply becomes a part of the exploitative industry when she uses her musical talents and history to gain profit.

However, after she recognizes how she has been used and controlled by an oppressive, omni-present patriarchal system, Katie experiences growth before she is again regulated by that same oppressive system (disguised as material success). In the interaction between Katie and the Reverend Reems, Smith intimates a new kind of religious community—a structure that temporarily allows for female independence, for racial harmony, and perhaps most importantly, for a merging of religious ideals with country music ideals. Smith has hinted at this merging earlier in the book when Kate Malone’s father tells her that hiding her talent under a bushel would be a sin, and Smith furthers the idea with Katie Cocker’s first experience at the Grand Ole Opry. Katie describes the Opry in its earlier years:

There was something like a *church* about the Opry in those days when it was still at the Ryman Auditorium—why, shoot, the Ryman used to *be* a church, come to think of it. It’s got those pews, and the balcony, and the stained glass in the windows. There’s something solemn about the crowd, too—even now, over at the new Opry House—something worshipful, which has to do with how far the fans have driven to be there, and how long they’ve been listening to their favorites, which is years, in most cases. For you know, the country music fan is like no other, they’ll follow you for years, through good times and bad, and never tire hearing your old tunes one more time. They are the biggest-hearted, most devoted folks in the world, and they are the ones that have made the business what it is today. It is not the stars. It’s the fans. (DD 273)

Here, Smith engages the similarities between church and country concerts, recognizing that there is a sacred feeling which drives music that echoes religious worship. Mirroring the scenes where the blues audience holds the power to re-imagine the South in *The Color Purple*, Smith shows how the country music audience can temporarily transcend the oppressive environment afforded by southern religion. Here, in urban Nashville (part of the newly imagined post-South), Smith suggests that an accepting and faithful country music community replaces a less-tolerant southern religious community—at least temporarily. Certainly Katie (like Bone and Celie) finds

the community denied to her by her religious upbringing, which Smith shows in her descriptions of being on-stage for the Miss Holly Springs High competition. Smith's revelations also recall Allison's revisions of the female country music community through Bone, and Curtis W. Ellison's ideas that country music secularizes the religious world, replacing a worship of God with a worship of country stars—particularly country music women.¹⁴

Smith furthers her positive portrayal of the merging of country music and religion when Katie meets the Reverend Reems. At first, Katie, remembering her mother and hating God for taking her last husband Ralph, resists Reems when he tells her to put her faith in religion. When she decides to attend his Hallelujah Congregation, the surprised Katie finds people in blue jeans sitting in a circle and holding hands at the YMCA. Smith hints at Katie's internalization of oppressive values when she exposes Katie's conservative views on sexuality and race. At first, Katie resists holding hands with the women sitting beside her:

But now I had gone and gotten myself in a situation where I had to hold hands, and I had one woman on either side of me, and one of them a Negro! Plus I had just recently learned that my nanny Ramona was one of *those*, when she asked if she could let her 'friend' move in out at the farm and, to my surprise, this friend turned out to be a woman that Ramona Smoot went around holding hands with in public...So you can understand how I felt about holding hands. (DD 296)

However Katie relents and takes the women's hands as the congregation sings an old hymn together. In this reflexive moment, Smith temporarily impedes racial and sexual divides through a new construction of southern religion as merged with country music. Katie says, "the black woman reached over and hugged me, squeezing me into her huge soft bosom like I was a little baby. My own mamma had never hugged me at all, you know, and here I was, over forty years old before I realized how needy I was" (DD 296). Through the kindness of a strange African American woman, Katie feels more love than her mother ever offered her, and Smith forges a

¹⁴ See Ellison, "Keeping Faith: Evangelical Performance in Country Music."

resistant southern community—notably a mostly female community—that overcomes racial barriers through a new religion that preaches the search for love. While Katie’s experience is bolstered by the church’s tolerant religious views, the church is in turn bolstered by Katie’s monetary success, a connection Smith continues to underscore in her descriptions of the Hallelujah Congregation.

While Billy Jack Reems preaches that love cannot be found in “worldly success” or “earthly lovers” (reminiscent of Moses and Zeke Bailey’s intolerant religion), he also tells Katie, echoing Pink Malone’s encouragement of Kate Malone years ago, that “God does not want us to put ourselves under a bushel” (DD 297, 302). Smith shows that country music and religion come together when Katie declares:

What my God says to me is *Yes! Yes!* (which is what we have emblazoned on the hanging banners in the front of our new Building for Celebration) instead of the *No! No!* which is all God ever said to anybody up on Chicken Rise, if you ask me. God wants us to express His love in our lives through using our creative gifts to the fullest, he wants us to *use* this life which He has given us. He wants us to be artists for Him. Of course the Hallelujah Congregation has grown like crazy, a lot of us in the music business, so it is like a great big family in a way. (DD 298)

In this paragraph, Smith resolves the South’s religious gender issues when Katie rightfully claims “her” God over the patriarchal, intolerant God imagined up on Chicken Rise by Moses Bailey and his consequent male heirs (notably Katie’s God is still male). She also reveals a new southern community where country music and religion exist side-by-side just as white and black southerners exist side-by-side. Even while Smith presents Katie’s experience as positive and while the vision of an inclusive southern community perhaps transcends imposed barriers, Smith also notes the way religion in a postmodern South expands like and resembles a business, as Katie erects new buildings for and encourages other country music industry folk to join the congregation. The Hallelujah Congregation moves from the YMCA to its own building, decked

out in banners that pull in new (paying) members. Religion, like country music, becomes a materially-motivated industry of profit, and Smith asks readers to consider how materialism has replaced religion as an oppressive tool in the post-South.

While this intrusion of commercialization vaguely asks readers to consider Reems' church as exploiting country stars for their monetary contributions, Smith's ending asks readers to specifically meditate on how commercialization constructs, upholds, or disrupts an imagined narrative of southern community that defers gender oppression. When Katie sees her aunt Virgie on public television talking about the old days and the beginnings of the Grassy Branch Girls, her nanny Ramona and Ramona's lesbian partner Carol Bliss suggest that Katie put together a family recording of all the old songs. As Katie tells us, Virgie fudges many of the facts of her life: "She told him all about living up on Grassy Branch like she had invented it" (DD 299). In fact, Virgie does *invent* the Grassy Branch community (just as Nonnie and Rose Annie have earlier done), recounting the endless stereotypes about hard-working tobacco farmers with no access to medicine. Through Katie, Smith questions the concept of authenticity here. Katie knows that Virgie's stories are overly romanticized, but Ramona tells Katie that Virgie's performance on T.V. is "*authentic*, Katie. That's what they're looking for now. She was *there*, after all. She's the real thing" (DD 300). Carol then encourages Katie to put together a family reunion album. Although Katie balks at the idea because "it's not commercial," Carol encourages her to produce it herself, convincing Katie that "the time is right. People are really interested in that kind of thing"—whether the image is true or false (300). Smith exposes how the Grassy Branch community can be romantically imagined for profit. Readers remember Richard Gray (who mentions country music as an example): "The legends of the South are not necessarily dying, in other words, or being fiercely protected or even resurrected; in some cases

they are merely being turned into cash” (357). In this brief exchange, Smith exemplifies how “authenticity” determines the narrative of country music—an aspect that can be easily created by the industry and then exploited as it was during the Bristol sessions with Ralph Peer. Katie becomes a willing participant in exploiting an imagined community in a post-South country music slave economy; building from Gray’s astute observations, readers recognize that Katie chooses not to remember her female family members’ struggles for equality in an oppressive industry but instead profits from the old nostalgic myths of an idyllic Appalachia. Smith shows how music can not only be used to channel a collective memory that exposes oppressive hierarchies but also how collective memories can be manipulated for material power.

In Katie’s production of the reunion album, Smith’s text points readers to the folk revival in country music in the 1950s and 1960s and perhaps one particular moment in 1972 where country musicians, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, recorded an album of old country favorites, including special guests from the older generations like Roy Acuff, Maybelle Carter, Earl Scruggs, and Doc Watson among others (Malone *Country Music USA* 387). Barbara Ching argues that after this recording, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band became “serious artists and spokesmen for the country tradition, the Ralph Peers of the second half of the twentieth century;” she also notes that the album art (which featured confederate flags and a portrait of Robert E. Lee with the musicians’ names surrounding it) furthers the myth of an alienated South (212). While Smith might not specifically recall the Dirt Band’s reunion album, the album Katie decides to produce mirrors the Dirt Band’s efforts in the way it speaks to a market that desires “authentic” old-time country music coming from the folk that purportedly experienced it firsthand; Katie’s title even recalls that of the Dirt Band (*Shall We Gather at the River* v. *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*). Whether Smith intentionally signifies on the Dirt Band or not, Katie’s production and promotion

of the album sustain the myth of country music's mythical rural origins (ignoring the inherent gender, race, and class oppressions evidenced in Smith's earlier narratives), just as Ching suggests *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* did.

Just as in the beginning, Smith italicizes the last pages of the novel where Katie and her family (even Rose Annie who is temporarily released from prison) gather in the glamour of the Opryland Hotel to greet record executives and reporters to promote the new record. Surrounded by walkie-talkies and custom-ordered food, Katie's relatives appear like the stereotypes of poor country yokels when they "ooh" and "aah" over the Opryland's Christmas decorations. As Rose Annie appears and the family cries about being together again, the photographers snap pictures and Carol Bliss impatiently reminds them to hurry up, that "time is money" (DD 308). With Carol's comments, Smith eclipses this "authentic" family moment with the intrusion of the media and the commercial world. Carol ushers the family toward the recreated pickin' fireplace, and Smith gives us the vision of R.C. committing suicide, where the third person narrator tells readers that his grand-niece will later make R.C.'s barn into a museum showcasing family artifacts; the nostalgic past of country music is superimposed and made a virtual reality (recalling Kreyling's same statements about *Oral History*). The Bailey family's memories and histories are stored in sites that lure a paying public under a nostalgic guise. As the family sits around a simulated fireplace in the Opryland, Katie asks her grandmother, "Mamma Tampa, doesn't this remind you of how you all used to tell stories around the fire of a night in the wintertime?" (DD 309). Katie's comparison affirms the simulation of the imagined "old time" country music myth, which is as much a creation as the indoor fireplace in an urban Nashville hotel, and her remarks underscore how the romantic memories of an authentic country music history can be turned into

a marketable product that reveals the intertwining deferred oppressive structures of the old plantation South and the new capitalist South.

At this, Tampa narrates the story of Kate Malone and Moses Bailey to an interested young hippie girl, and Smith shows that the circle of this story has not been unbroken—that like Katie remarks, “It all comes full circle, don’t it? Like an album” (DD 301). Virgie and the others ignore Tampa, and Carol finally orders her put into her wheelchair and into the bus. The narrator relates that the last thing heard is Mamma Tampa “telling her crazy old stories one more time,” which are dismissed as simple invented memories of a pastoral sunny South instead of recognized as symbols of women’s (failed) musical resistance to oppression (DD 311). Smith depicts the music industry as trivializing the story of Kate Malone’s exertion for expression through music as simply one crazy old story that interests the audience as “authentic”—a narrative that her family does not learn from but instead profits from. The long line of country music women and their struggle that Smith asks readers to unearth appears suddenly lost in the commercial world of Carol Bliss and the Opryland. While Smith exposes the romantic invention of country music and its rural origins, she shows how the very female line that gives Katie the power to progress and recreate herself as an “authentic” country girl is ignored in the post-South. Still, no critic denies the benefits of Katie’s independence in producing her own record, no matter what her motives may be. Jill Terry writes, “Katie realises that being ‘authentic’ is what’s important, even if this image of authenticity is constructed, like Virgie’s, out of distortions” (138). Katie’s success also creates temporary moments of resistance within the female family, as Rebecca Smith notes when Kate’s mother Alice finally reaches out to hold her grandchild (“Writing, Singing, and Hearing” 60).

While Smith exposes the presence of an enduring female country music community that unites in resistance, she also shows how the oppressive roots of this community—like the story of Kate Malone—are easily dismissed, deferred (to remember Romine), and turned into cash (to recall Gray). While Bennett praises Katie in her refusal “to be held back by intellectual, religious, and ultimately, commercial mediators,” I argue that Katie instead becomes one of these mediators who substitutes (and exploits) a romantic country music myth for the violent and tragic history of country music’s women (91). Bennett believes that “Ultimately Katie achieves a kind of self-recognition because of her willingness not only to interface with life directly, but also to embrace her past” (91). From Smith’s depiction, Katie embraces her past as a construction and learns to profit from older (false) country music narratives of an idyllic home life. Similar to Arvay in *Seraph*, Katie complicitously participates in a paternalist system that gains her profit instead of a fruitful independence that could teach future generations to thwart gender oppression. Unlike the earlier women of the novel who use song to establish relationships with their children, Katie passes her children off to nannies and spends most of her life on a tour bus—suggesting that the traditional passing on of songs (and their stories of struggle) no longer continues. Lee Smith responds to interviewer Loewenstein’s cheers for Katie with, “There’s a price to pay, though, because I think the final image of her [Katie] is certainly problematic. Breaking the shackles is great, and that’s one thing, but the price of autonomy often is a certain kind of isolation from what nourished you” (107). Smith leaves readers questioning—what’s better or worse, the mythical Old South or the commercialized post-South that profits from (and so furthers imagined conceptions) of the Old? Is there any difference at all?

Returning briefly to Romine, and his ideas that southern communities often imagined as “cohesive” were, in fact, “coercive,” puts Smith’s work on women and country music into

perspective. The flaws Smith creates in Katie lead us to Smith's ideal vision of community—a community that reaches a kind of cohesion in the lessons learned by exposing a coercive community. Because Katie symbolizes a loss of the inherited memories of struggle through song, Smith recreates those collective memories in a literary song that reflects women's roles in country music. Smith exposes the history of country music as a myth founded on patriarchal hierarchies and divisions and asks readers to remember the women instrumental in resisting such a myth—so that, unlike Katie, readers learn from those imagined roots instead of exploiting and perhaps furthering them. Bill Malone echoes these sentiments in the final words of *Country Music, U.S.A.*:

The innovations presented by such singers may make country more commercial and more broadly appealing; they might also destroy it. Veteran country disc jockey Hugh Cherry is not alone when he warns of the music's loss of heritage and history: 'Let us remember what happens when you kill the roots of the tree—it dies.' Country musicians also should never forget the admonition that so many of them grew up with: 'What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?'(415).

This chapter suggests that, in the post-South, the circle remains unbroken; Malone and Smith end on the same note, believing that the conscious exploration, restoration, and also *preservation* of a variety of country music narratives and their lessons teach readers to finally break the enclosing southern circle of gender, race, and class hierarchies.

EPILOGUE

In this dissertation, I set out to show how southern women writers employed musical tropes in their fictions in order to sustain collective memories that portray southern communities as both divided because of and united in spite of dominant privileged white male historical and literary narratives that further gender, race, and class discriminations. Jill Terry has suggested that southern women writing about music are engaging in a political act, just like the singers and musicians before them. As this project has exposed, illuminating music history through literature teaches readers to interrogate not only song lyrics or representations of musical personas but also to look behind those remaining memorial traces to consider what power structures women performing popular music support and/ or contest. In some instances, southern women writers reveal how popular music can encourage healthy resistances to prescribed social roles; these writers have also revealed how, in some instances, music can be employed to police and regulate those same roles. Overall, these writers teach readers that popular music should be recognized as a powerful discourse that influences southern (and American) conceptions of identity and community—and thus also memory and history. While I have chosen to focus on female writers who invoke (resistant) gendered musical performances of southern blues, gospel, and country in their novels, I hope that future critical endeavors will expand on my discussions of these literary tropes to include additional genres—classical, jazz, rock, and hip hop for a start—to reveal how other diverse voices are speaking back to and/or reaffirming the residual oppressions of recently deconstructed master narratives.

Lee Smith, like Zora Neale Hurston, leaves readers questioning what will become of southern music as the region continues to progress. Will the female voices in blues and country music be again relegated to a minor key in future studies of southern culture? Will popular music

continue to be dismissed as a product intended to erase memories of oppression, even while its history exposes music's power to speak back to oppressive tactics? Perhaps this is why southern women's popular music (and literature) was marginalized in the first place—to silence those voices that speak back and ask their audiences to speak back as well. Like the depictions put forth by the authors discussed here, I believe in music's power to, as George Lipsitz suggests, “retain memories of the past and contain hopes for the future that rebuke the injustices and inequities of the present”—even while an abusive growing industry sometimes manipulates or misinterprets those memories and hopes, even while artists participate in these manipulations and misinterpretations. As with Alice Walker's vision of a utopian blues community or Dorothy Allison's imaginings of a salvational country music community, the responsibility belongs as much to the audience—whether reading or listening—as to the performer and industry. It is my hope that readers (as audience members) have learned their lesson—that they will play a part in carrying musical memories forward, passing those memories down, and interpreting musical protests so that diverse audiences can come together in a community that teaches (to recall Bessie Smith's “Preachin’ the Blues”) how tolerance, respect, and love can overcome oppression.

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VITA

Courtney George was born and raised in Greenville, South Carolina, where her parents instilled in her a love for literature, music, and Georgia Bulldogs football. She later received her undergraduate degree with honors in English from the University of Georgia in 1999 and was elected *Phi Beta Kappa*. In 2001, she migrated southwest to Louisiana State University to pursue a doctorate in the literature of the American South. Her previous essays on southern women's literature and music have been published in *Interdisciplinary Humanities* and *Studies in American Culture* with more work forthcoming in the *Southern Literary Journal*. She resides in Baton Rouge with her three dogs (Sam, Molly, and Craig) and plans to pursue a teaching career. Now that she has finished her dissertation, she also hopes to learn to play guitar.