

MANGLED BODIES, MANGLED SELVES:
HURSTON, A. WALKER AND MORRISON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One	
Hurston's Improvisational Healing	18
Chapter Two	
The Burden Bearers	45
Chapter Three	
Morrison's Broken Bodies, Broken Relationships	76
Chapter Four	
Community as Agent.....	100
Works Cited.....	109
Curriculum Vitae	

Introduction

Over the years your bodies become walking autobiographies, telling friends and strangers alike of the minor and major stresses of your lives. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 1980

Broken bodies litter the landscape of African American women's literature. Missing limbs and teeth, paralyzed appendages, lost hair, and deformities appear frequently in the works of authors like Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Dorothy West, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Pearl Cleage, and Octavia Butler. While many white authors also include broken bodies in their works, Hemingway's preoccupation with synecdoche in terms of body parts perhaps being the most notable example, the motif permeates the tradition of African American women's fiction like no other genre, appearing in the work of almost every major African American woman author. In the case of some authors, Morrison and Walker for example, broken bodies appear in every novel of their corpuses. In fact, every story in Walker's first collection of short stories, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, features a broken body. Several questions arise from the ubiquity of this motif in the texts of African American women authors: Where did the motif originate? Why does the motif persist? Do the authors use the motif in the same way? What does the trail of broken bodies reveal about how African American women authors interpret the relationship between body and self? Surprisingly, given the prevalence of the motif and the number of critical comments on one or another text, no critic has essayed a comprehensive examination of the motif in African American literature. While this paper does not have the scope to cover the African American canon as a whole,

it will discuss the motif across the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

A discussion of the relationship between self and body necessitates a definition of self. The texts I will be discussing, with the exception of *Jazz*, are considered modernist works. As a whole, modernist critics define self in one of four ways. First, the Freudian-Derridian-Lacanian¹ patriarchal definitions of self suggest that self, particularly the female self, is determined by an absence or a lack. The search for self in the patriarchal order, then, assumes a hierarchal order in which “he” supercedes “she”. This patriarchal order suggests that selfhood is harbored in the ego and that one needs to excavate the subconscious to find one true self. Second, other modernist critics such as Sanford Schwartz argue that Euro-American modernists explore self as the meeting place between interior (ego) and exterior (conscious) realities. Third, African-American modernist critics, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, looked at the self as a form of double-consciousness. Double-consciousness posits that an African American experiences self as both an American and as an African American. These two selves are often at war with each other, and only coalesce through personal will. This coalescence often occurs at the expense of one of the two warring selves. Finally, yet other modernist critics, particularly feminist critics like Lillian Robinson, suggest that the chaotic nature of a fragmented selfhood aids the coherence of the self in the face of a community constantly in flux. This fragmented selfhood never coalesces into a unified self; the coherence of this

¹ Freud wrote about self in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Derrida in *Of Grammatology, Writing and Difference*, Lacan in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II : The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*.

selfhood arrives from a coherence of the various social contexts of a person's environment. The novels of Hurston, Walker and Morrison, then, combine Du Bois' African American modernist view of self and the notion of a fragmented self put forth by critics like Lillian Robinson.

As the opening epigraph suggests, the inner trauma of a fragmented self manifests itself through the African American body. Elliot Butler-Evans suggests that Walker's and Morrison's texts serve as "sites of dissonance, ruptures, and...a kind of narrative violence" which results in "an attempted reconciliation of a fragmented self and a synthesis of racial and gender politics" (4). The characters who can regenerate their broken bodies (or never experience broken bodies) are able to take advantage of their fragmented selves to cohere within a community. Those who cannot regenerate never cohere within a community. As such, changes in the self often create changes in the body and vice versa. For Janie, the symbolic loss of her hair through Joe's insistence that she hide it under a scarf sparks a separation of mind and body. Walker's character Meridian's literal loss of her hair results from her inability to mother a young girl in need of care. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's murder of the dog changes her view of her self, which results in at least perceived changes in her body: her new perception of her changed eye color. Neola's jilting in *Jazz* results in the unexplained paralysis of her hand over her heart. Additionally, changes in the body sometimes create changes in the self. After her tooth falls out, Pauline recognizes that she can never compare to white ideals of beauty.

However, Hurston's, Walker's and Morrison's textual complexity necessitates that a critic use caution when analyzing fragmented selves. First, the causal relationship between changes in the self and the body must be examined carefully in each text, for one does not always necessitate the other. In the case of Golden's imagined amputated arm in *Jazz*, his musings do not result in a change in self; rather they result in a stagnation of self. Second, characters with whole bodies do not always represent a healthy self, witness both Jadine and Son. Even with these limitations, the paradigm offered in the final chapter of this thesis offers readers a way to consider the roles of body and self for the analysis of African American female texts.

Critics looking at broken bodies have focused most on Walker and Morrison, ignoring earlier examples in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Many critics have noted Walker's interest in physically fragmented female characters, as evidenced in her first published work, *In Love and Trouble*, in which each of the short stories contains at least one physically fragmented character. Critics such as Nagueyalti Warren suggest that Walker's own physical fragmentation, her blind eye, appears in several of her texts. Donna Winchell and Marc-A Christophe argue that fragmented female characters are fragmented because they let the male oppressors in their lives define them rather than defining themselves, while critics such as Keith Byerman and Alice Buckman suggest that Walker uses fragmented females to deconstruct patriarchal orders.

Additionally, Ikenna Dieke and others² believe that Walker focuses the regenerative self on a process of mystical birth, death and rebirth. Along with Dieke, Judy Elsley and Ruth Weston note that female characters must find a space in which to piece together their fragmented selves.

Edward Pavlić, in his study of Zora Neale Hurston and diasporic modernism, has defined such a space as a communal underground. Pavlić's paradigm, then suggests that to become culturally literate in the symbolic South, one must find communal guides who facilitate entrance into an underground community. Once in the underground community, one must then undergo a syndetic process in which West African traditions are rediscovered and then improvised on. Finally, these improvised West African traditions allow one to return to above-ground society as a healthy self. To date, no critics have applied Pavlić's paradigm to Walker's oeuvre nor have they studied the physical fragmentation motif across Walker's corpus. Using Pavlić's paradigm to study Walker's work reveals that characters who are able to regenerate their bodies and their selves do so because they are able to improvise on traditionally defined racial and gender roles.

While critics of Walker generally focus on promoting or negating her womanist³ world view, most critics of Morrison take either a feminist or a deconstructionist approach to Morrison's use of broken bodies. Most of the

² Michael Cook focuses on death as the major influence in Meridian's life, not as a final destination but rather as an opportunity for restorative reactions and Deborah McDowell reads *Meridian* as a *Bildungsroman* in which Meridian quests for her identity and in that quest undergoes several symbolic deaths and rebirths.

³ Throughout this paper, the term womanist will refer to Walker's definition, which suggests that womanism is African American feminism. See her definition in *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (xi).

critics who take a feminist approach⁴ study only one text and suggest that broken bodies, particularly those with missing body parts, signify both the literally and figuratively missing mother. Deconstructionists⁵ suggest that Morrison uses broken bodies to deconstruct Euro-centric notions of African American selfhood. These critics confine their arguments to one text from Morrison's oeuvre. A few of Morrison's critics, Cynthia Dobbs, Carolyn Jones et al.⁶, suggest that Morrison's characters regenerate their damaged selves only through some connection with their lost African American community. Again, they confine their explorations of Morrison's broken bodies to one text.

While many critics have discussed a particular broken body in a particular text, to date only one, Philip Page, follows this motif across multiple texts from a particular author. No critic has followed this motif across texts from multiple authors. The trail of broken bodies, when followed across texts and authors,

⁴ Karin Luisa Badt argues that the characters in Morrison's corpus continually return to the mother to repair the self. However, this repair ultimately fails because it is the mother herself who needs repair. Paula Galant Eckerd argues that Morrison's novels reflect a connection between the maternal and community which brings the cultural model of feminist criticism and the maternalistic model of feministic criticism together. Barbara Hill Rigney attempts to establish the maternal space that all of the female characters in *Beloved* inhabit. She characterizes the space as one that is filled with both danger and desire. Jean Wyatt uses a linguistic-based approach to apply the Lacanian schema, in which speaking subjectivity requires a break in the connection with the mother's body, to the text of *Beloved*.

⁵ Richard Hardack argues that Morrison uses the physical fragmentations in *Jazz* to first affirm double consciousness in her characters and then to remove the onus of double consciousness from them. Richard Heyman sharply criticizes the idea that *Song of Solomon* is an attempt by Morrison to create an essential black logos. Instead, Heyman argues, Morrison both empowers Milkman with a black logos and acknowledges the dangers of doing so. Timothy Powell's argument builds upon Houston Baker's idea of the black (w)hole, in which the whole black self can only be represented in the holes of language. Powell argues that it is the job of literature to bring the black whole out of the hole.

⁶ Carolyn Jones claims that black women become the objects on whom the violence of American culture is worked out. She argues that only religious women can survive this violence unarmed; the other unarmed women are either silent/crazy or dead. David Lawrence argues that the communal exorcism in *Beloved* opens the community up to a reinvigorated language which empowers its speakers to forge a more open and inclusive community. Betty Jane Powell argues that Baby Sugg's integration of body represents an integration of self. However, this integration disintegrates in the face of the community's rejection of her.

reveals critical information about the ways in which African American women authors interpret the African American self-through-body experience. A study of this motif will make clear that though every major author includes broken bodies in her oeuvre, these authors' use of the motif differs greatly, from each other and from the Euro-American tradition. This paper, then, will begin the study of this motif across both texts and authors by comparing the trail of broken bodies in selected works by Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

The texts for this study constitute the modernist books from each author's oeuvre, with the exception of *Jazz*, which moves toward postmodernism. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was selected for this study because Pavlič selects it as the generative text for his paradigm of diasporic modernism. However, more importantly, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* points to a lacuna in Pavlič's paradigm: the active role of communal power. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian*, and *The Color Purple* were selected because each text features the broken body motif in a central character. Additionally, the application of Pavlič's paradigm makes clear that improvisation is essential to the regenerative abilities of Walker's characters. Morrison's entire oeuvre, save two novels, has been selected for this study. *Love* is a post-modernist novel which does not fit within the scope of this modernist study while the bodies in *Beloved* have been amply analyzed by critics. Pavlič's paradigm usefully highlights bodily issues in the three writers' modernist novels. However, the novels also point to the paradigm's lacunae – the central importance of communal agency in an individual character's journey to wholeness.

A study of selected texts from three authors cannot exhaustively examine the meaning of the broken body motif throughout the growing African American women's canon, but it can deepen discussion of how African American women writers have presented journeys to healthy selves. These journeys, as represented by the literature, have traveled many different societal and cultural landscapes, each of which has affected how these women both bear the scars and heal the wounds of their bodies and their minds. Additionally, this study clearly shows the need for a paradigm that builds upon Pavlić's modernist model, one that includes communal agency in the journey to a whole African American self.

Pavlić's *Crossroads Modernism* offers a way to situate the works of these three authors in African American modernism. Pavlić argues that African Americans experienced and expressed modernism in a fundamentally different way than did Euro-Americans. African American modernism diverges from Euro-American modernism because the African American experience occurred in two places: the above-ground space in which African Americans interacted with and succumbed to the influences of the predominantly white society, and the underground African American social space to which African Americans could temporarily escape. The protagonist undergoes an excavation process. Pavlic defines this process as the "disruptive, depersonalized process of solitary perception and meditation" (xx). Critic Ed Bullins argues that meaningful excavations must connect with the languages and concerns of a social space. In the underground space, the protagonist either undergoes an excavation process

that resists the African American social space (Afro-modernism), or the protagonist undergoes an excavation process that works in tandem with the African American social space (diasporic modernism).

Pavlić suggests that Afro-modernism explores the vertical process of excavation, which revoices the Freudian concept of self-exploration. Thus, Afro-modernism has close affinities to the European and American modernist concerns, in particular T. S. Eliot's process of depersonalization. T. S. Eliot defined depersonalization as the process through which a writer gains access to a wider range of experiences and emotions than could be gained from his individual perspective. As a result, the writer is able to attach subjective experience to external objects.

Diasporic modernism, on the other hand, seeks alternatives to European and white American modernist concerns. Similar to European and white American modernist concerns, diasporic modernism explores vertical processes of self exploration. However, diasporic modernism suggests that racial and gender differences must be considered in these vertical processes. Additionally, diasporic modernism also develops horizontal process of social and ritual explorations that William James would recognize. James argued that identity is pluralistic and rests on a person's relationships to each particular, but sometimes overlapping, social context that he experiences. James's argument of self posits an irrational and variable overlapping self-awareness in constant flux. Thus, James argues, the coherence of the modern self "depends solely on one's intention, the confrontation of multiplicity with the personal will to cohere" (9).

While the Eliotic Afro-modernism and the Jamesian diasporic modernism have seemingly little in common, most literary works use both forms of modernism and are situated along a continuum of individual excavation and social interaction. Where Afro-modernism (vertical processes) and diasporic modernism (horizontal processes) intersect, they form the crossroads of Pavlić's *Crossroads Modernism*.

Euro-American modernism focuses on the experience of alienated individuals whose loss of faith in the traditional cultural values of the Victorian era has left them adrift. These individuals turn away from social and cultural values and instead turn inward for guidance, creating a center for the construction of meaning in individual judgment and lived experiences. The alienated Euro-American hero dives through the depths of his unconscious to create a viable self in the post-WWI era of industrialization and capitalism.

In *Crossroads Modernism*, Pavlić analyzes two African American heroes from canonical African American male writers to establish the outlying points on his continuum of African American modernism: Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Once he has established his outlying points, Pavlić argues that African American female authors and even more recent African American male authors have synthesized the outlying points to create various points along the continuum of Afro-modernism and diasporic modernism. Pavlić positions Hurston as the first African American author to truly synthesize the outlying points.

Pavlić, using Richard Wright's *The Man who Lived Underground*, argues that the African American hero excavates meaning from his unconscious, but that he

can do so only in an underground space free from the pressures of the above ground society. He ultimately argues that although Wright's hero does find the underground space necessary to begin personal excavation, the process of excavation resists any interaction with the African American social community residing in the underground space. As a result, the Afro-American modernist hero cannot translate his underground excavation into any above-ground meaning because he never learns the language necessary to traverse the boundary between above ground and underground. Wright's Daniels, recognizing that the underground offers no solutions for him, attempts to reenter the above-ground space, only to find "the distance between what he felt and what these men meant was vast. Something told him...that he would never be able to tell them, that they would never believe him even if he told them" (565). Daniels continues to try to use underground language to communicate with the police until they eventually execute him, leaving him to disappear into the underground space: the sewer.

Pavlić associates the movement between above-ground and underground spaces in Afro-modernism with critic Robert Stepto's paradigm of symbolic North and symbolic South. In *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Stepto argues that African Americans move between a free "symbolic North" (ascent) and an enslaved "symbolic South" (immersion). The journey of ascent leads to literacy in the dominant culture at the cost of estrangement, geographically, culturally and psychologically, while the journey of immersion leads to a lack of freedom but a reconnection with an African American

community. However, Pavlić associates diasporic modernism with Judilynn Ryan's paradigm. Ryan expands on Stepto's paradigm of ascent and immersion by connecting Stepto's symbolic South with African cultural processes, which she designates as the symbolic East. Thus, Ryan's paradigm involves a movement to the symbolic West, which symbolizes Africans' forced dispersion to America, and a movement to the symbolic East, which symbolizes the recuperation of African culture.

Pavlić positions Ellison's *Invisible Man* in a space between Afro-modernism and diasporic modernism. Pavlić argues that above-ground, the protagonist meets guides who help him access African American society in the underground. However, the protagonist continually mishears and misinterprets the interactions there and therefore, like Wright's protagonist, he cannot translate his underground excavations into anything meaningful in above-ground society. Thus, although Ellison moves closer to diasporic modernism, his protagonist's "visions and revisions depend upon seclusion and emphasize meditations whose cultural engagements are overwhelmingly personal and psychological" (Pavlić 175).

Pavlić suggests that while Hurston appreciates the Afro-modernist process of excavation, she combines the social and contemplative experiences to create a diasporic modernism. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston can maintain the flux between social and contemplative experiences because she believes that in call-and-response social and performative contexts, the overlapping intricacies of internal and social experiences can be negotiated. For Hurston,

diasporic modernism's fundamental function makes social interaction and personal meditation compatible (Pavlić 175). Pavlić argues that unlike Afro-modernist methods of depersonalization, Hurston's diasporic method of depersonalization is actually interpersonalization. Interpersonalization depends upon the connections between internal subjectivity and external objects as well as objective and subjective expressions. Thus, diasporic modernism both "resists the dissociation between romantic subject and modern object and draws black culture closer to its West African antecedent traditions" (196). As a result, Pavlić associates diasporic modernism with Judylyn Ryan's paradigmatic symbolic turn toward the East.

Pavlić argues that this symbolic turn can be seen most clearly in Hurston's use of a West African mythic method of Babylonia, Egypt and Greece⁷. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the muck harbors the forces of Esu/Elegba and thus represents the symbolic East. Tea Cake is an Afro-modernist hero, and Janie a diasporic modernist hero. Tea Cake dies because of his inability to relate his own excavation to the social spaces of the muck. Although Tea Cake appears at first to be successful on the muck, his greed for money in the above-ground space on the plantation causes him to ignore the dire warnings about the hurricane from the muck residents. Tea Cake's death makes clear that in diasporic modernism, interpersonal connections allow the transition between the disruptive forces of the symbolic South and the renewing forces of the symbolic East. Janie survives the hurricane because in the muck she not only excavates her consciousness but relates her excavation to it.

⁷ See Cyrena Pondrom's "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*".

Pavlić's argument about the places that Wright, Ellison and Hurston occupy in African American modernism repositions these three authors. He suggests that Wright's and Ellison's characters do not experience modernism from an integrated African American experience. Thus, he places Hurston as the nascent author of not only diasporic modernism, but also modernism born from the African American experience. His argument, then, invites us to explore the ensuing work of African American authors in the crossroads of Afro-modernism and diasporic modernism.

This study, then, begins with Hurston and her use of broken bodies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This first chapter will focus on how Janie's body reflects her sense of self in her three marriages and how Janie's body, through synecdoche, often parallels the complicated fragmentation of African American society of its time. Spatially, African Americans were fragmented by north and south, rural and urban. Additionally, they were fragmented by class divisions. Perhaps more importantly, though, the African American community was temporally fragmented. Although post-slavery African Americans all lived within the spatial confines of the United States, the spaces within the United States did not participate in Reconstruction uniformly. The change across southern and rural spaces occurred more slowly, and late modernity is fascinated with the capacity of modern societies, "with their own newness and speed [to] understand cultures in which change occurs more slowly as fundamentally different than their own" (Duck 266). This recognition exalted urbanism and its fast-paced society at the cost of the communal relationships found in folk communities. Not only did

the later modernists recognize a fundamental difference between urban and folk, Sterling Brown “complained that African American intellectuals avoided ‘folk’ topics” (Duck 268). In Hurston’s text, the broken bodies of Joe and Tea Cake represent the broken links between people. Janie’s tongue, figuratively separated from her body, creates hope for a unified truth through Pheoby, signaling that the fragmented body of African American society has hopes to become unified.

The second chapter examines Walker’s first three novels. The broken bodies in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple* give way in *Meridian* to regeneration. For Walker, those characters who access the communal underground regenerate and thrive; those who do not simply perish. Two of Walker’s characters, Mem and Meridian, undergo the process of losing their hair. Unable to access a communal underground, Mem lacks the ability to re-grow her hair or heal herself; Meridian, able to access the communal underground, accomplishes both.

The third chapter will focus on Morrison’s use of broken bodies in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby* and *Jazz* (of Toni Morrison’s first six books, only *Tar Baby* lacks a strong motif of broken bodies): Pauline’s tooth, Eva’s leg, Sula’s fingertip, Pilate’s navel, Sethe’s stolen milk and disfigured back, *Beloved*’s various body parts, and Golden’s imagined amputated arm - all exemplify the broken body motif. In *Jazz*, however, Morrison also explores a more metaphysical fragmentation: Violet/Violent and Joe’s different colored eyes that both see and are seen differently. A close exploration of the shift between physically broken bodies and metaphysically broken bodies among Morrison’s

texts reveals that Morrison uses the characters who exhibit physical fragmentations in her first three novels to limn failed attempts to achieve an integrated African American self based on the bipolarities of Western thought. These characters are unable to see any space between those oppositions. Thus, these early physically fragmented characters never achieve integration. In *Jazz*, Morrison explores the opportunities for an integrated self as characters fuse metaphysical fragments. The metaphysically fragmented characters in *Jazz* overcome the bipolarity of Western thought because they recognize a space between the opposed elements. They are then able to both recognize and integrate their fragmented identities.

Unlike Walker's and Hurston's presentations, Morrison's parallel between self and body does not rely on parallels between a broken body and a fragmented African American society. Instead, Morrison's examination relies on a lost African American history, which critic Cynthia Dobbs refers to as a history filled with inexpressible pain. Morrison signifies on this pain with her characters' broken bodies. Thus, Morrison's characters constantly search to heal their wounds of self through their communal interactions in the underground.

Pavlić's treatment of the underground space assumes that the community accepts those who seek it. However, Hurston's, Walker's, and Morrison's texts challenge that assumption. Instead, these authors depict a relationship between character and community that requires acceptance from both entities, not just the community seeker. The fourth chapter, then, will explore the role of communal agency in a character's journey for self. In particular, this chapter will explore

how Hurston offers an understanding of the communal underground different from Pavlić's paradigm of the communal underground in either Afro-Modernism or diasporic modernism. Finally, this last chapter will lay the groundwork for examining both Walker's and Morrison's oeuvres and for reexamining Pavlić's paradigm.

Chapter One: Hurston's Improvisational Healing

Be a craftsman in speech that thou mayest be strong, for the strength of one is the tongue, and speech is mightier than all fighting. Maxims of Ptahhotep (3400 B.C.)

Janie, Zora Neale Hurston's protagonist in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, constantly struggles to reach underground social spaces. Raised by her grandmother in the backyard of her white employer, Janie begins life isolated from the African American community. In fact, Janie doesn't recognize that she is African American until she is six years old: "Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old" (8). Raised alongside the white children, Janie's literacy in the dominant culture teaches her to wear nice clothes and a pretty ribbon in her hair, but those material adornments separate her from the African American children she goes to school with. Janie's early childhood, then, symbolizes the fragmentation of the African diaspora caused by slavery in the Americas.

However, what manifests in African American society as a break between folk/bourgeois manifests in the African American individual as a break between conscious/unconscious. Thus, Janie's inability to navigate between her folk yearnings and the bourgeois pressures from her grandmother, Logan and Joe result in Janie's conscious/unconscious struggle. This struggle results in Janie's physical synecdoche. Any return to wholeness for Janie must depend on healing the breach of the diaspora by returning to aspects of the original unity through improvisational uses of these aspects in new circumstances. Craig Werner suggests that

Ralph Ellison defines the jazz impulse as a constant process of redefinition. The jazz artists constantly reworks her identity on three levels: (1) as an individual; (2) as a member of a community; and (3) as a “link in the chain of tradition.” (132)

Janie’s improvisational process must also work on all of these three levels. Janie can only learn about those original aspects of unity in underground social spaces and she must improvise on them in the above ground spaces. For Janie, improvising means that she must recognize the power of the folk tradition and she must be able to translate that language into one that Pheoby can understand. Finally, by designating Pheoby as her storyteller, Janie situates herself as part of the call-and-response tradition of African American storytelling.

Hurston uses the underground space of the muck as a place where Janie can explore her individuality and her connections to community. Pavlić positions Zora Neale Hurston as a donative artist⁸ in both modernism and African American modernism because she redefined the underground space to include both personal meditation and simultaneous social interaction. Hurston, however, was not always viewed as a donative artist; indeed the early readings of Hurston’s works by authors like Richard Wright placed her disdainfully in the symptomatic artist category, claiming that her texts rely too heavily on folk tradition. Alice Walker revived interest in Hurston’s work in the 1970’s with “Looking for Zora”, noting that by that time, Hurston’s books had fallen so out of favor that Robert Hemenway, her first biographer, wrote “Zora Neale Hurston is

⁸ The term “donative artists” comes from Ezra Pound’s essay “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”, which defines art as either symptomatic (that which “mirrors obvious thought patterns”) or donative (“that which departs from obvious thought patterns”). Pound clearly advocates for more donative art.

one of the most significant unread authors in America, the author of two minor classics and four other major books” (12).

This revival inspired modernist critics to offer alternative readings of Hurston’s texts. Cyrena Pondrom’s “The Role of Myth in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” connects Hurston’s use of Greek, Babylonian and Egyptian myth to that of other modernists. However, Pondrom omits Hurston’s connections to West African diasporic mythologies, and thus categorizes Hurston as a symptomatic artist alongside H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf. However, Hurston’s examination of West African diasporic cultures and mythologies suggests that Hurston should be considered a donative artist rather than a symptomatic one. In *Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston*, Deborah Plant connects Hurston’s modernism with her place in a “liberated and androgynous line that can be traced to African warrior queens” (181). John Lowe connects Hurston’s humor in her texts to the comic spirit of West African mythological traditions.⁹ Pavlić argues that Hurston’s position as a donative artist lies in the saturation of her communal underground space by West African syndetic processes.

For Pavlić, syndesis relies on Robert Plant Armstrong’s¹⁰ notion of syndesis as an “attempt to account for the dynamic, multidirectional relationship between ‘ancestors’ and ‘antecedents’ in Yorùbá ritual aesthetics” (21). Armstrong suggests that this multidirectional relationship causes communication patterns in which voices or rhythms are aligned into multiple layers or repeating

⁹ *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston’s Cosmic Comedy*.

¹⁰ *The Power of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence in Yoruba Traditional Culture*.

cycles. In these cycles, new material is introduced through improvisation in existing patterns within and among the various cycles. This process of repetition and improvisation constitutes a syndetic process that underlies the call-and-response¹¹ dynamic of African American culture. John Callahan and Maria Johnson¹² both note the importance of Hurston's use of call-and-response to her modernist texts. Pavlić argues that Hurston's use of a Blues-influenced call-and-response tradition in her texts blurs the distinction between individual and communal experience. Thus, Pavlić argues, Hurston's modernism reflects and extends beyond DuBois' dialectical racial twoness by including black folk performances, world mythology and African diasporic spiritual systems. Hurston rejects DuBois' double consciousness in favor of a double consciousness in which the dialectical sides are not black/white but rather social/internal. Moreover, these two entities are not opposed, but together constitute the social space of the communal underground. Suffused with Western African traditions and myth, it can facilitate internal healing as well as a social/communal healing.

An examination of how the broken bodies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are either healed or destroyed extends Pavlić's arguments. Pavlić claims that Hurston's text is a "novel of transitions" (211), and this is especially true for Janie, who undergoes dramatic transformations in each of her marriages. However, Janie heals her self, her body, and the community because she

¹¹ Call-and-response refers to the African oral tradition of asking questions of an audience and then waiting for the audience to respond. For a full discussion of call-and-response as it relates to improvisation, see Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*.

¹² Johnson furthers Callahan's arguments made in *In the African-American Grain: The Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth Century Black Fiction* by arguing that the call-and-response techniques used by Hurston reflect a Blues influence that reveals a conflict between prescribed beliefs and what Janie knows her experience has taught her.

undergoes syndetic processes that allow her to improvise on the expected behavior in each of her marriages. The healing and destroying of bodies in *Their Eyes were Watching God* reveals that as a diasporic modernist, Hurston extends improvisation beyond the individual to the social/communal.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's individual transformations occur simultaneously with transformations in the social spaces of the novel: Eatonville transforms from a rural community to an urban town. These social transformations in the novel indicate the larger social transformations in the United States. As the world emerged from World War I and World War II, great shifts in the American work force exerted new forces on the African American community and family. Those who chose to move from the rural South moved away from their extended families to the urban North¹³. Often, they were forced to move not just once but several times in order to find sustainable work, causing the new communities to be unstable. The extended network of friends and family was a dwindling resource, and many African Americans found themselves without a community, adrift in a sea of loneliness and isolated both from their urban neighbors and the rural, Southern communities they migrated from. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston reflects this fragmentation with a focus on physical broken bodies. Pheoby, then, acts as Pavlić's communal guide in Janie's quest to heal the breach in African American society. In Hurston's text, the fragmentation of the body can create a hope for a unified truth through Pheoby, signaling that the fragmented body of African American society might

¹³ For more on the great migration, see Lillian Serece Williams' "Introduction: African Americans and the Urban Landscape.

become unified. Hurston's symbiosis of individual healing and communal healing separates her diasporic modernism from Euro-American modernism.

Mikhail Epstein's definition of modernity, while referring to the differences between modernism and postmodernism, underlines the Euro-centric notions of modernity. In discussing the central differences between modernism and postmodernism, Epstein writes:

Modernism can be defined as a revolution which strove to abolish the arbitrary character of culture and the relativity of signs in order to affirm the hidden absoluteness of being, regardless of how one defined this essential, authentic being ... Postmodernism, as is known, directs its sharpest criticism at Modernism for the latter's adherence to the illusion of an "ultimate truth," an "absolute language," a "new style," all of which were to lead to the "essential reality".

While modernism and diasporic modernism both explore the commodification and fragmentation of capitalistic societies, they differ fundamentally in their types of solutions. Euro-centric modernism offers a solution based on the exploration of a unified truth while diasporic modernism strives to offer a solution based in a process of suffusion. A Euro-centric unified truth can only come from a unified definition of belonging to a specific social construction like class or gender. For diasporic modernism, the unity comes not from belonging to a specific social construction of race, but from African American social spaces saturated with Western African traditions. For Pavlić, this unity occurs in the underground social space and for Hurston, the social interactions of the underground space occur on the front porches of Eatonville and the muck. Thus, while the Euro-centric modern self is divided between the often conflicting parts of the conscious and the unconscious, which create an internal other, the diasporic modern self

replaces the internalized other of the modern self with syndetic processes. The conscious/unconscious split of the diasporic modernist individual self reflects the folk/bourgeois split of the African American community.

The Euro-centric modern self, split by a binary relationship between unconscious and conscious, strives for the unification of the two parts. In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus' thoughts are suffused with food imagery when he is hungry, and that imagery disappears only when he is satiated. In every chapter, Joyce strives to show how the thought processes of Dedalus become inundated by his unconscious desires. Dedalus, however, struggles with implications of class rather than race because an affiliation with his white race is assumed. Thus, while the Euro-centric modern identity can be recognized as an affiliation with race, such as African American, and therefore assumes a foundational experience for such an identity, diasporic modern identity recognizes the differences between social experiences and individual experiences.

Thus, for diasporic modernism, the accepted reality of DuBois' African American experience is challenged by individual experiences, as happens with Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston's various broken bodies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are an allegory for the fragmentation of African American society, and this allegory offers hope for a solution in the mended body of Janie. The mending can be directly attributed to Pheoby and Janie's friendship and their shared tongue.

Their Eyes Were Watching God reflects the complex fragmentation of African American society after the great migration. Spatially, African Americans were fragmented by north and south, rural and urban, rich and poor. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston herself recognizes that “the Negro Race was not one band of heavenly love. There was stress and strain inside as well as out” (171). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mrs. Turner’s denigration of Tea Cake on the basis of his color, anatomy, and cultural practices is one obvious expression of class fragmentation. However, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also examines an important divide between folk African American culture and modern bourgeois African American culture. The Eatonville community suffuses the mule funeral with folk tradition that celebrates the mule’s freedom from slavery. Joe, however, thinks of the funeral as a chore that he must do to maintain his community status, completely denigrating the folk traditions of the community. Janie eventually represents a unification of the bourgeois and the folk, in which the folk is not absorbed but preserved. She returns to Eatonville from the underground space of the muck with both her fortune and a new understanding of folk traditions.

Philip Joseph contends that “contact with the folk supplies the self that Janie has been forced to give up, while she in turn makes the folk articulate in her narrative” (470). But what has Janie given up, and who has forced her to give it up? By bringing Janie up in the back yard of her white employer, Nanny strips Janie of an African American community. Both Nanny and Joe Starks represent the bourgeois, while Tea Cake and the muck community represent the

folk. Nanny's efforts to get Janie married represent the commodification of Janie and also a bourgeois ideology in which having the only piano in town means something. This commodification and Nanny's yearning to give Jane a bourgeois identity sacrifice Janie's own longing for a "far horizon" and for desire (29). We see this opposition again when Joe and Janie arrive in Eatonville. The first residents of Eatonville participate in the temporality of the south and the rural, a temporality that is sluggish and unconcerned with change. Lee Coker asks "Where y'all come from in sich uh big haste?" (35). The leisurely men sitting under the oak tree who represent the folk are no match for the rapidity of Joe's modernization of Eatonville. However, the bourgeois Joe recognizes his need to identify with the folk in order to secure their cooperation in the transformation of Eatonville.

Joe capitalizes on the syndetic process that the town creates through the mule's release and its funeral. Before Joe frees the mule Sam says, "he's de wind and we'se de grass" (49), imaging Joe's separation from the community. Joe is able to regain its affection by freeing the mule. Joe does not buy the mule for capitalist gain, although Matt does say "if dat mule is wuth somethin' tuh you, Brother Mayor, he's wuth mo' tuh me" (57). Joe's firm insistence on five dollars firmly ignores the capitalist laws of supply and demand; he insists that he has bought the mule so it can rest, not work. In this instance, Joe clearly initiates a syndetic process. When Joe buys the mule, Sam says "Dat's uh new idea 'bout varmints, Mayor Starks. But Ah laks it mah ownself. It's uh noble thing you done" (58). Sam articulates that in buying the mule, Joe improvises a new

consideration of the mule's role in the community. The mule goes from being a slave to being a community member, as evidenced by the whole community's creation of the fodder pile for the mule. Janie notes that in the process of improvising a role for the mule, Joe has also improvised on his role as a mayor:

Jody, dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. 'Taint everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought... You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power to free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something. (58)

Joe has simultaneously made himself closer to the community and elevated himself through his treatment of the mule. Joe solidifies the results of this syndetic process at the mule's funeral, where his eulogy on the mule "made him more solid than building the schoolhouse had done" (60). Joe uses the mule to bridge bourgeois ideology and the folk activities of the town. In doing so, he gains more power for himself and furthers his capitalist goals for Eatonville.

Because Joe represents a point of contact in which folk and bourgeois ideologies intersect, he is also central to the allegory of physical fragmentation. Margaret Marquis suggests that "[when] Joe becomes mayor, his ample figure further functions as a sign of his power and potency in the town" (81). Joe's figure reminds Janie of portly white folks, signifying that Joe is successful enough to be well fed. Marquis also points out that Hezekiah, in an attempt to emulate Joe's power, sits in Joe's chair every chance he gets and tries to thrust his lean belly into a paunch. Finally, Marquis suggests that it is no coincidence that "shortly after Janie publicly humiliates Joe and robs him of his perceived power, his health and physical appearance decline" (81). Joe's physical synecdoche of his sagging stomach suggests that his power comes from external, rather than

internal forces: the community participates in the creation of Joe's power. Thus, events that occur in the social/communal space affect Joe's self and these changes result in Joe's physical synecdoche.

During the course of his physical decline and death, the fragmentation of Joe's body becomes manifest: "His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins. It didn't seem to be a part of him anymore" (77). The sagging of his belly has obscured his penis, symbolically separating it from his body, signifying that the essence of his male power has been severed from his unconscious. This individual decline, symbolizing Joe's individual battle between his conscious/unconscious parallels a social/communal struggle between the folk/bourgeois. When Janie cuts a tobacco mark incorrectly, Mixon holds it up expecting Joe to tease Janie. Mixon's intention is to create communal humor "Looka heah, Brother Mayor, whut yo' wife done took and done.' It was cut comical, so everybody laughed at it" (78). However, Joe responds not as a member of the community, but as the store owner who has to chastise his employee for treating a customer poorly. The men clearly recognize that Joe has removed himself from the communal comedy: "A big laugh started off in the store, but people got to thinking and stopped. It was funny if you looked at it right quick, but it got pitiful if you thought about it awhile" (78). Joe's angry response surprises the men and interrupts the expected call-and-response humor.

The communal improvisation on Joe is exacerbated when Janie makes her individual knowledge of Joe's physical decline part of the communal

knowledge. Joe recognizes that his physical decline has become a mental decline only when Janie humiliates him at the store, saying “When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (79). To Joe, Janie has revealed his lack of physical strength, which for him translates into power in his marriage and in the community. For the community, the revelation of Joe’s lack of physical strength paired with their recognition of his bourgeois status forces them to revise how they see him: “that was something that hadn’t been done before” (78). In the face of what Joe sees as the ultimate betrayal from Janie, Joe sees the undeniable duality of his existence. For the first time, Joe acknowledges that his place in the community has always depended upon his power. He clearly recognizes that the community understands his decline in power, that “when he paraded his possessions hereafter, they would not consider the two together. They would look with envy at the things and pity the man that owned them” (80). Stripped of his masculinity and his social power, Joe’s recognition of the town’s improvisation on him spurs a further decline in his health. Janie, then, is perhaps the first to recognize that Joe’s loss of power manifests itself through his body: “Through the thin counterpane she could see what was left of his belly huddled before him on the bed like some helpless thing seeking shelter” (85). Joe’s stomach, a symbol of his power, becomes completely alienated from his being and becomes its own (deflated) being, stripped of power. Joe’s sense of self, too, has been deflated. In Joe, then, the attempt to unify the conscious self and unconscious self has failed. As a result, in Eatonville the folk and the bourgeois never become reconciled.

While there is no solution to the fragmentation of African American society in Joe, there is a clear warning. Joe tries to use the folk traditions of the community to solidify his position within the bourgeois society Eatonville would become with him leading. His superficial connection with the folk is revealed in his most triumphant community moment, the mule's funeral. When Janie pleads with Joe to go to the funeral, he responds "Why Janie! You wouldn't be seen at uh draggin' out, wouldja? Wid any and everybody in uh passle pushin' and shovin' wid they no-manners selves? Naw, naw!" (60). While he does attend the funeral, Joe clearly fails to see the meaning the community assigns to it. The community sees the mule as a freed slave. Thus, the funeral is an improvisation on the funerals denied to their slave ancestors; Joe does not recognize this. When he returns from the funeral, he tells Janie, "Ah had tuh laugh at de people out dere in de woods dis morning', Janie. You can't help but laugh at de capers they cuts. But all the same, Ah wish mah people would git mo' business in 'em and not spend so much time on foolishness" (62). For Joe, business always takes precedence over folk traditions and processes.

When Joe seemingly encourages the oral tradition of the folk by allowing the men to congregate on the porch of the store, he's really pursuing his aims of making the store the center of town. The men on the porch serve as a communal underground away from the burgeoning capitalism of the community. By having the communal underground on the porch of his store, Joe can position himself as a de facto member of the communal underground by attending the gatherings. However, his motivations for allowing the porch of the store to

become a communal underground are clearly capitalist. Joe values the men on the porch only because their gathering there would increase sales and give him “a place tuh be at when folks comes tuh buy land” (40). As can be seen by Joe’s physical and mental decline, the appropriation of folk traditions to further capitalist gains will not engender long-term gains.

However, while it is clear that folk traditions can’t be used for capitalist gains to rectify African American fragmentation, neither can adherence to folk traditions in a bourgeois society. Carol S. Manning notes that Hurston drew frequently and generously on the multi-faceted oral culture of the South (68). However, the oral tradition of the South that occurs in the talk of the men on the porch never reaches a collective agreement. Philip Joseph claims that for Hurston, “the content...matters less than the method” (470). What the porch talkers do, according to Joseph, is not to offer solutions to questions, but to offer premises for approaching those questions. These foundations can be applied to any number of inquiries. The men illustrate their disdain for answers as unified truth when Hicks complains about Joe: “Whut Ah don’t lak ‘bout de man is, he talks tuh unlettered folks wid books in his jaws” (49). Again, we see synecdoche, where Joe’s intellectual ability is assigned to his jaw rather than to his whole self. To the men on the porch, Joe shows off his scholarly education and disdains their folk education. That this folk knowledge can’t be transferred to Joe is apparent because Sam says, “he’s uh man dat changes everything, but nothin’ don’t change him” (49). Clearly the bourgeois ideology that Joe has brought to Eatonville is changing its residents, but it does not change Joe. The residents of

Eatonville are not infusing their own folklore into this ideology, they are not improvising, and so the fragmentation between bourgeois and folk persists; the folk always resisting the bourgeois.

The resistance of the folk places it in continual opposition to the bourgeois in Eatonville. The sitters on the porch are:

tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords or sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment. (1)

The sitters are physically fragmented through synecdoche, but they are united communally by their shared experiences in the field and their resistance to the bossman. Joel Pfister argues that the porch sitters use the oral traditions of the South to forget the amputations resulting from the labors and to regain some “elasticity, agency, power and wholeness” (610). However, just as the bourgeois does not completely conquer the folk, the community members do not gain a lasting wholeness; they will fragment again when they return to their labors the next day. Their communal underground experiences on the porch do not result in lasting changes in the above-ground society.

The tension between bourgeois and folk can be clearly seen in the way the women treat Janie when she returns. When Janie walks back into town, the women on the porch “seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and chewed with relish” (2). Even though the women are on the porch, in the communal underground space, they attack Janie as a member of

the Eatonville bourgeois, the memory held in the back of their minds. They chew up their envy by laughing at her coming up the road in her overalls instead of in the “blue satin dress she left here in” (2). Janie expects that the women, who are “Mouth-Almighty”, will have her “up in they mouth now” (5). The mouth, presented as synecdoche, becomes the voice of the community, and thus of the communal underground.

However, that voice is unconsciously using bourgeois ideals rather than the ideals of the communal underground. The syndetic process has been warped by the nascent bourgeois ideology of the town. The women on the porch wonder not about Janie’s underground experiences, but rather: “Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her?” (2). Janie knows, though, that the mouth will never come to a unified truth because the people “wastes up too much time puttin’ they mouf on things they don’t know nothin’ about” (6). The bourgeois society that Eatonville has become has little conscious recognition of folk traditions. Thus, the porch sitters rely on their expectations of Janie as a member of the bourgeois community, but they know nothing of Janie’s own fragmentation, improvisation and individual transformations.

All of Janie’s improvisational moments are preceded by fragmentations of her body and her self. When Logan threatens to kill her, she “stood still in the middle of the floor without knowing it. She turned wrongside out just standing there and feeling...A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her” (32). For Janie to leave Logan, she has to improvise on the roles her grandmother set out for her. Nanny taught her to value the safety and stability of

a man like Logan, who owns his own land. However, instead of making Janie feel safe and stable, her relationship with Logan destabilizes Janie. Her marriage also destabilizes her relationship with Nanny because Nanny insists on telling Janie what she should want: “Heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis’ Killicks and you come worryin’ me about love...If you don’t want him, you sho oughta...” (23). However, Janie’s lived experience under the pear tree does not cohere with her existence with Logan. Janie does not accept her role as a wife to be the “mule uh de world” (14). In leaving Logan for Joe Starks, Janie improvises on the role of a wife to match her lived experience, thinking:

From now until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them. (32)

Janie understands that her thoughts under the pear tree can be integrated into her new life. However, she also clearly understands that she will have to improvise on those old thoughts to express her new expectations. Her internal process requires a new language to complete Janie’s transformation within the community.

Janie’s next fragmentation occurs when Janie is once again forced to recognize that her role as Joe’s wife does not match her lived experience. As Joe moves on to accomplish his own expectations of being a big voice in Eatonville, Janie finds that Joe’s expectations and her own don’t cohere. When Joe denies Janie a voice in the town by refusing to let her give a speech that the community asked for, Janie “made her face laugh after a short pause, but it

wasn't too easy" (43). This marks the first time that Janie really perceives the difference between her expectations of her role as Joe's wife and Joe's expectations.

The tension between the two roles grows as Joe becomes a bigger voice in the town. When Joe makes fun of the community members' actions at the funeral for the mule, Janie avoids a fight even though "[s]he didn't change her mind but agreed with her mouth" (63). These tensions escalate as Joe's body begins to decline, and he takes out his frustrations on Janie. At this point, Janie seems to forget how to improvise: "She was a rut in the road" (76). As she did with Logan, Janie desperately tries to convince herself that her marriage is her lived experience and that her experience under the pear tree is the fantasy, thinking "Maybe he ain't nothin'...but he is something in my mouth. He's got tuh be else Ah ain't got nothin' tuh live for. Ah'll lie and say he is. If Ah don't, life won't be nothin' but uh store and uh house" (76). Janie clearly recognizes that in many ways, Joe and Logan are similar, with both marriages premised on the expectation that Janie should be happy with the stability that comes from being owned. In both marriages, Janie's expectations for her role as a wife are completely subsumed by the expectations of those around her. As she tells Joe on his deathbed, "Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (86).

To escape these expectations, Janie must completely sever her mind from her body. Her first experience occurs when she sits under a shady tree and "watched the shadow of herself going about tending the store and prostrating

itself before Jody” (77). However, this fragmentation doesn’t solve anything for Janie because it does not change the reality of her life in Eatonville. Even when Joe dies, Janie “sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world” (88). In both instances, her physical self goes about the duties of a middle-class African American wife while the fragmented part of her flees to a tree, which has roots that symbolize the folk traditions. In this place, she is free to explore the aspect of her that rails against the oppression of bourgeois definitions of a woman’s role.

The tree seems to function, for Janie, as an individual underground, rather than a communal underground. However, Daphne Lamonte suggests a way to reconcile that paradox. Lamonte argues that the goddess Ezili, implicitly present in the novel, is a signification of Janie’s opposing roles as an individual woman and as a middle-class African American wife. The two aspects of this goddess, Ezili Freda and Ezili Danto are opposing aspects. Freda is “of an elite class; she is mulatta, self-possessed and materialistic” while Danto is of the black working class (157). Lamonte observes that these contradictory elements not only reside in the one loa of Ezili, they also reside in the one body of Janie. To Lamonte, these tensions reflect the conditions and desires of African Americans. Pairing Pavlić’s paradigm with Lamonte’s arguments suggest that Janie’s underground is communal rather than individual because the goddess Ezili suggests a connection with the West African mythic tradition.

Janie’s connection with Ezili allows her to once again improvise her role as the mayor’s widow in order to allow Tea Cake into her life. Janie recognizes

that Tea Cake has different expectations for her role when he tells her “Who ever heard of uh teacake bein’ called Mister! If you wanta be real hightoned and call me Mr. Woods, dat’s de way you feel about it. If yuh wants tuh be uh lil friendly and call me Tea Cake, dat would be real nice” (98). Through her experiences with Tea Cake, Janie’s ideas about her role evolve over time. He convinces her to play checkers on the porch, which the community accepts. He takes her fishing at night, which Janie exults in because she felt “like a child breaking rules” (102). However, the community does not approve of Janie’s breaking the rules with Tea Cake, and Janie is once again faced with the tension between communal expectations and Tea Cake’s expectations. Hezekiah makes the community’s expectations clear when he tells her that Tea Cake “ain’t got no business makin’ hisself familiar wid nobody lak you” (103). Later, when he refers to telling other women they are beautiful, Janie almost succumbs to the town’s belief about Tea Cake, but he quickly confronts her, telling her, “Yo’ face jus’ left here and went off somewhere else. Naw, you aint’ mad wid me. Ah be glad if you was, ‘cause then Ah might do somethin’ tuh please yuh” (104). Tea Cake’s recognizes the tension between Janie’s expectations Joe’s expectations. More importantly, he recognizes that Janie is bothered by the town’s opinion of their relationship and that he cannot fix this. In the store the next day, under the watchful eyes of the town, Janie struggles with the tension. She alternatively casts him as the “pear tree in blossom in the spring” and a scoundrel (106). When she is with Tea Cake, she feels they can realize her lived experience

under the pear tree, but when she is with the community, she cannot seem to escape her bourgeois role.

Janie resolves this tension by releasing her individual experience with Tea Cake into the community. Symbolically, she releases the essence of Tea Cake's presence into the town after sleeping with him: "she got up and opened the window and let Tea Cake leap forth and mount the sky on a wind" (107). This action recalls the flying African myth, once again using the African mythos to connect Janie's individual experiences to communal experience. Releasing Tea Cake into the community via an African process communicates Janie's intentions to the town in a language that Janie cannot yet articulate: the language of a shared history. However, because the communal underground has been corrupted by bourgeois ideologies, the town cannot understand the language Janie uses.

As their relationship progresses, Janie's expectations for her role as a woman slowly cohere with her individual experience. Unlike Logan and Joe, who force their expectations on Janie, Tea Cake continually improvises his expectations of her. When he leaves her behind in the hotel room, he tells her "Dem wuzn't no high mucky muchks. Dem wuz railroad hands and day womenfolks. You ain't usetuh folks lak dat and Ah wuz skeered you might git mad and quit me for takin you 'mongst 'em" (124). He must adjust his individual expectations of Janie and his expectations for what type of social space Janie wants to inhabit. Janie tells him that if he ever leaves her behind again, she will kill him. When Tea Cake decides they should go to the Everglades, he tells

Janie, “When Ah ain’t got nothin’ you don’t git nothing” (128). For the first time, Janie believes that she is in a relationship as an equal partner and her “soul crawled out from its hiding place” (128). No longer does Janie need to separate her body from her mind. She learns to shoot and goes out into the fields with Tea Cake. Her body, which with Joe was unable to express her thoughts, is now used “to express the inexpressible” (137).

Yet, Tea Cake does not escape the pressures of bourgeois expectations unscathed. Although he successfully overcomes Eatonville’s disapproval of his relationship with Janie, he seems helpless in the face of Mrs. Turner. Although her idolatry of Caucasian features by itself doesn’t hurt Tea Cake, pushing her brother toward Janie arouses his latent fear that perhaps he isn’t good enough for Janie after all: “Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession” (147). His belief that he has possession of Janie indicates that Tea Cake, like Logan and Joe before him, succumbs to capitalist expectations of women’s roles. He tells Sop-de-Bottom, “Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be...*Ah* didn’t whup Janie ‘cause *she* done nothin’. *Ah* beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss...*Ah* jus’ let her [Mrs. Turner] see dat *Ah* got control” (148). Almost unknowingly, Tea Cake has relegated Janie to “the mule of the world”.

The mule-of-the-world role will haunt Janie throughout the rest of her time in the muck. Janie’s previous transformations and innovations allow her to believe the band of Seminoles and the Bahamian boys when they warn her about

the hurricanes. However, Tea Cake has stopped improvising, and has in fact regressed. Not only does he relegate Janie to a prescribed role, he also seems to take on Joe's role as a capitalist. He refuses to leave because "de money's too good on the muck" (156). His decision to stay is an individual decision that refuses to hear the communal voice of the Indians and the Bahamians. Lias leaves Tea Cake and Janie behind, saying, "[i]f Ah never see you no mo' on earth, Ah'll meet you in Africa" (156). Lias' parting words underline that his warnings come from a communal underground, which Tea Cake scorns when he says, "Dey don't always know. Indians don't know much uh nothin', tuh tell de truth. Else dey'd own dis country still. De white folks aint' gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous" (156). Tea Cake expects that the knowledge required for survival must come from the dominant society. The hurricane, then, a primal force rather than a capitalist force, leads to Tea Cake's death. Tea Cake's death eerily mimics Joe's death in that both suffer a rapid decline of both mind and body when they are faced with primal forces. Their capitalist literacy taught them how to survive in the dominant society, but not to survive within the social space of the African American community.

To understand the biggest crisis in her life, Tea Cake's imminent death, Janie must undertake a new improvisation. Tea Cake's declining mind recalls the threat Mrs. Turner's brother represents to his ownership of Janie. Janie sees a physical change in Tea Cake: "a changing look come in his face. Tea Cake was gone. Something else was looking out of his face" (181). Yet, Janie still cannot relinquish her expectations of Tea Cake. Two lived experiences collide in

the house where Tea Cake dies. Her lived experience with Joe's death collides with her lived experience with Tea Cake on the muck. She refuses to believe that Tea Cake would hurt her while simultaneously taking precautions against just that event. Only when Janie fully recognizes that the Tea Cake standing in front of her is completely subsumed by "the fiend in him" can she pull the trigger and kill him. Her improvisation occurs during the trial.

The trial represents a crucial element of Hurston's diasporic modernism because during the trial Janie must simultaneously navigate the underground and the above-ground spaces. Ironically, it is the dominant society, not the underground community, that sympathizes with Janie: "Eight or ten white women had come to look at her too...they didn't seem too mad" (185). Janie recognizes that she must convince the white court that she didn't kill Tea Cake out of malice, but to maintain her standing in the African American community, she must also preserve its dignity: "She was in the courthouse fighting something and it wasn't death. It was worse than death. It was lying thoughts" (187). Janie fears that in trying to convince both the underground and the above-ground communities she will ultimately be misunderstood by both. She cannot vilify Tea Cake to save herself; to do so would alienate the underground community. Janie then, must rely on one language to communicate to both communities. However, Janie improvises because she recognizes that one language will never suffice; instead she relies on spoken language in the courtroom to convince the above-ground community, and she uses syndetic processes to convince the underground community. Tea Cake's funeral combines the pomp of the bourgeois,

represented by the white silken coffin, the humor of the muck represented by the new guitar that is buried with Tea Cake, and the West African mythos represented by the Pharaoh-like tomb Janie has built.

Janie's return to Eatonville signifies her wish to use the things she learned in the communal underground of the Everglades to improvise a new life in Eatonville. Symbolically, she does by bringing Tea Cake's spirit back with her:

Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. (193)

Tea Cakes' performative spirit dances and signs, signaling that Janie too must undergo a performative process. Janie released Tea Cake's spirit earlier during their courtship, and upon her return to Eatonville, she does so again. This Tea Cake brings along with him all of the lessons she had learned in the Everglades. She must transfer her knowledge to Pheoby, who can then perform Janie's story for the porch sitters.

The porch sitters in Eatonville and their fragmented mouths represent an underground community warped by bourgeois society; the tongues of the Everglades community, cocked and loaded in the courtroom, represent the voice of the "folk" that is silenced in above-ground society. Janie's fragmented tongue provides a way to unite these two voices, these two fragments, that when united could become a unified African American society. That Hurston had a hope for a unified truth is evident from her own words. She wrote in "The 'Pet' Negro" that she endeavors to provide "proof that this race situation in America is not entirely

hopeless and may even be worked out eventually” (Pabst 212). Through Janie’s journey to wholeness, Hurston demonstrates, just as the men on the store porch do, the fundamental process to unity.

This approach lies in the notion of Janie’s fragmented tongue, which the text famously says is in Pheoby’s mouth. Janie’s tongue, when fragmented from herself, becomes exchangeable, and thus her experiences become transferable. Janie entrusts her story to Pheoby, and more importantly stresses that Pheoby needs to also pass the understanding of the syndetic processes that construct the story. Furthermore, critic Lamonte argues that Janie’s story creates a West African mythos and that the mythos will underscore the potential of all black women. Janie’s experience and her story, when given to Pheoby to retell, functions in the mythical process of revision and call and response and thus gives the listener (in oral tradition) a fundamental approach for answering the question of how to unify African-American truth, selves and community.

Leigh Anne Duck’s argument that Janie offers only an individual truth rather than a unified truth fails to learn the lesson of the store’s front porch. While it is true that the porch sitters of Eatonville probably will not learn much from Janie’s story and that Janie herself “might not recognize her voice and agency within the time frame of the narrative”, Janie’s tale will be retold and revised in the oral tradition (Lamonte 175). This retelling and revising offers hope for a unified truth. The search for a unified truth, with concentration on process, makes *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a powerful diasporic modernist novel.

Their Eyes Were Watching God postulates a unified foundation upon which the healing of fragmented communities and individuals depends. That unified foundation is the experience shared by African Americans in a nation to which they were brought as commodities and then “freed” from slavery but still oppressed. From this foundational experience comes the folk tradition of African Americans. Hurston invokes this foundation in her quest to unify the fragments of African American society into a continually improvised community.

Chapter Two

The Burden-Bearers:

Broken Bodies in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*

*...Young, and so thin, and so straight.
So straight! as if nothing could ever bend her.
But poor men would bend her, and doing things with poor men,
Being much in bed, and babies would bend her over,
And the rest of things in life that were for poor women,
Coming to them grinning and pretty with intent to bend and to kill.*
Gwendolyn Brooks, "Jessie Mitchell's Mother" (1963)

Alice Walker extends Hurston's examination of process throughout her oeuvre. In the *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker carries on Hurston's examination of inscribed roles of womanhood: Madonna/whore overlaid with the more specific African American roles of Southern mother/Northern wife. In *Meridian*, Walker analyzes women's internal/psychological processes through Meridian's continual resistance to prescribed motherhood roles. *The Color Purple* then expands Walker's concerns with prescribed roles for women in two significant ways. First, Walker shows how several women, rather than one individual woman strategically employ different processes. Second, Walker expands from individual processes to communal process. Walker's response to Hurston's call extends diasporic modernism.

Alice Walker makes clear her connection to Zora Neale Hurston in her article "Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View" when she states of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "There is no book more important to me than this one" (86). While Walker readily acknowledges that Hurston's work

has influenced her own, Walker rarely discusses her response to Hurston's call in detail. Her most specific statement about Hurston's influence, that Hurston's work is concerned with "racial health; a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings" (85) reveals much about Walker's own work. Several critics have taken up the task of delineating Hurston's specific influences on Walker's oeuvre.

Many critics agree that Hurston's and Walker's oeuvres indicate a keen interest in folk culture. Rudolph Byrd notes that Hurston's and Walker's Southern heritages and interest in folk culture influence their fiction, pointing out that Walker believed "folklore is at the heart of self-expression and therefore at the heart of self-acceptance" (44).¹⁴ Lillie Howard argues that while there are distinct similarities between Hurston's and Walker's treatment of folk culture, Hurston's interest concerns the whole of African American culture while Walker confines her interest to the spiritual survival of African American women. Also noting a difference in Hurston's and Walker's treatments of folk culture, Trudier Harris argues that Hurston presents folk culture as an insider with intimate knowledge of the subject, while Walker presents folk culture as an outsider with an acquaintance with folk culture rather than intimate knowledge. As a result, Harris argues, Walker's treatment of folk culture can seem inauthentic at times, especially where she uses folk culture in inappropriate settings.

¹⁴ Other critics such as Lillie Howard, Alice Fannin, Ayana Karanja and Emma J. Waters Dawson, also discuss the influence of the South and folk culture on the works of Hurston and Walker. Howard adds to Byrd's observation by noting that Hurston and Walker experienced similar childhood traumas and mothering style and attended traditionally African American colleges.

Mary L. Navarro and Mary H. Sims build on the connection between the works of Hurston and Walker. They note that Walker's interest in voodoo parallels Hurston's; both authors associate voodoo with African American resilience. They also note that Walker liberally borrows from Hurston's life and work. Navarro and Sims argue, for example, that Walker's "The Revenge of Hannah Kerhuff" parallels Zora Neale Hurston's actual experiences during the 1920s. Excerpts of Hurston's *Of Mules and Men* appear verbatim in that story also. Additionally, Navarro and Sims argue that in *The Color Purple*, Celie's description of Shug Avery's picture closely resembles a picture of Hurston in Robert Hemenway's biography.

Many critics suggest that Hurston and Walker share views on African American women's searches for selfhood. Alice Fannin notes that Celie's and Janie's search for selfhood follows a quest motif in which the quest becomes "an exploration of self as part of the universe and the universe as part of the self" (46). JoAnne Cornwell argues that successful quests for selfhood in Hurston's and Walker's texts depend upon African mythic processes, while Mary Ann Wilson argues that successful quests depend upon creativity. Ayana Karanja suggests that successful quests rely on a movement from vulnerability to ancient African female power. Valerie Babb notes that the search for voice in their texts mimics the search for selfhood. However, Babb suggests that for Hurston, the search for voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an oral quest while the search for voice in *The Color Purple* is a written quest. While all of the critics noted here agree that the texts of Walker and Hurston explore quests for

selfhood, they virtually ignore that a quest for selfhood must begin with a functional physical body; in order to have a voice, a character must first have a mouth.

Several critics note that Hurston's and Walker's fiction works toward destabilizing patriarchal ideologies. Molly Hite notes that both writers were castigated by critics for not conforming to the realist aesthetic. However, Hite suggests that instead, the works of both authors can be read as Shakespearean Romance that both exposes and subverts racist and patriarchal ideologies. Byrd argues that the imprint of Hurston's views on marriage and the sexuality of African American women can be most clearly seen in Walker's *Meridian*. Walker signifies on Hurston's views on sexuality by suggesting that for African American women, sexual experience is rooted in violence and exploitation and that the exploration of sexuality need not occur solely in the institution of marriage. Emma J. Waters Dawson suggests that both Hurston and Walker feature protagonists faced with loveless, dull marriages, stifled creativity, and sexual/racial victimization. These protagonists meet their challenges in two ways. First, circumventing traditionally prescribed feminine roles and second, believing that surviving the legacy of maternal suffering is an effective revenge against their male oppressors. Ann Folwell Stanford additionally argues that while both authors work toward the destruction of phallogocentric power, Hurston privileges compassion and human attachments over detachment and domination while Walker alters the definition of maleness. Applying Pavlić's paradigm to

Walker's work suggests that subversion of male power occurs in a female communal underground.

This chapter, then, deepens the discussion of the connections between Walker and Hurston through the exploration of Walker's characters' journeys on their quests for selfhood. Many of Walker's female characters struggle with traditionally defined female roles. Although the characters do resist definitions provided by other female characters, particularly their mothers and other female community members, they specifically struggle with the definitions forced on them by the male characters. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Grandma tells Janie "So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (14). Like Hurston, Walker focuses on the definitions that assign African American women positions as burden-bearers. Like Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, who constantly improvises to escape the pressures of these imposed definitions, the female characters who exhibit broken bodies in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian*, and *The Color Purple* try to improvise on themselves. While Meridian and Celie are successful in their improvisation, Mem and Sofia are not. The rigidity of the male characters, Brownfield in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Harpo in *The Color Purple*, limits the ability of both Mem and Sofia to improvise.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Brownfield at a very early age reveals his conflicted views about women. In his daydreams about his life in the

North as a successful businessman, he sees himself living easily in white society. At the same time, he sees his wife as “first black and glistening from cooking and then white and powdery to his touch; his dreaming self could not make up its mind” (22). This early conflict defines Brownfield’s relationships with the women in his life, particularly Mem. For Brownfield, the black and glistening woman exemplifies the traditional black Southern mother figure¹⁵ he wishes his own mother had been, while the white and powdery woman exemplifies the educated Northern wife he sees in his Aunt Marilyn. Brownfield also envisions at least one other African American woman role which he calls “nigger and whore” (72). This role defines culturally literate Southern women who reject their burden-bearing roles. His imaginary wife, then, oscillates between the Southern mother/Northern wife roles. However, Stepto’s paradigm reveals that these figures are incompatible because the Northern wife would be literate only in the dominant culture while the southern mother would be only communally literate. Few 20th-century literary characters are able to become literate in both cultures, and Brownfield oscillates between the two dream women; he cannot merge them because they are fundamentally incompatible. Unlike his own mother, who left him on the porch with a sugar tit, his construction of the Southern mother nourishes her children with her own ample breasts. Additionally, she nourishes them socially by becoming an exemplary member of the Southern community.

¹⁵ The term Southern mother throughout will refer to the idea that African American Southern women were expected to successfully navigate the pressures of racism from the white community, gender inequality from the African American male community and their powerlessness as African American mothers in protecting their children from the ravages of racial, gender, and class violence. See Joyce Meier’s “The Refusal of Motherhood in African American Women’s Theater”.

The wife he envisions, however, nourishes her husband not with breast milk but with mint juleps, and like his Aunt Marilyn, she does not find it necessary to communicate with the women of the underground Southern community.

When Mem returns to Georgia after being educated in the North, Brownfield sees her as embodying these two incompatible figures: her cherry brown complexion and plump figure emblemize the Southern mother while her mystifying proper talk and proper walk, which neither Brownfield nor Josie can understand, emblemize the Northern wife. Brownfield, then, places Mem at the center of his childhood daydream and tries to make her both his idealized Southern mother and his Northern wife. He makes love to his wife and appreciates her education, but also, “as the babies...sucked and nursed at her bosom, so did he” (66). In both suckling and making love to Mem, Brownfield has temporarily achieved coherence in his conflicting images of women. For her part, Mem accepts this incongruent vision of herself by both acting as a Southern mother in allowing Brownfield to suckle her breasts and acting as a Northern wife in attempting to teach him to read. In doing so, Mem attempts to combine above-ground skills with underground tools in an isolated space, separate from both communities.

However, as Brownfield’s childhood daydream begins to disintegrate under the harsh reality of the sharecropping system, Brownfield begins to systematically destroy the seeming coherence of Mem’s role as Northern wife/Southern mother. His hatred of the white sharecropping system soon becomes a hatred of Mem’s literacy in the dominant culture. As Brownfield

becomes mired in debt and his hope dwindles, he turns his self-loathing outward toward Mem, who willingly accepts that self-loathing as her own. First he attacks her as his Northern wife and then as his Southern mother. As his hope of becoming more literate in the dominant culture dwindles, Brownfield “could not forgive her the greater knowledge. It put her closer, in power, to *them*, than he could ever be” (73). Brownfield ridicules Mem’s speech and forces her to quit her job as a schoolteacher, destroying her status as an educated wife and her links to the underground community. He then moves on to destroy Mem’s image as his Southern mother.

When Brownfield sees his oldest daughter amidst the fumes of arsenic in the cotton fields, he recognizes that he cannot protect his children from the body-and-soul-destroying nature of the sharecropping system and again turns on Mem. On Christmas Eve, Mem tries to protect her children from a raging, drunk Brownfield rather than protect Brownfield from his dashed dreams (as his imagined mother would), he beats her senseless and knocks out her tooth, “determined to treat her like a nigger and a whore” (72). Unable to reconcile his conflicting images, Brownfield resorts to his only remaining image of African American womanhood. Mem’s ensuing downfall is swift. Her missing tooth causes her formerly educated speech to deteriorate even further; her once life-giving bosom turns into breasts that “dried up and shrank” (77), and her once luxuriant hair begins to fall out. In his destruction of Mem, Brownfield preserves his incongruent and imaginary vision of a Southern mother/Northern wife. To

Brownfield, Mem is no longer a Northern wife or his idealized Southern mother, but a nigger/whore (72).

That Mem initially acquiesces to Brownfield's destruction of her self is clear. When he takes her last, battered magazines to burn, she "relinquished all that she had been to all that she would become now" (76). Clearly, Mem cannot improvise on either the person she had been (Northern wife/Southern mother) or the person she would become (nigger/whore). However, like Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*, Mem breaks psychologically from Brownfield's constant physical and verbal abuse. She has little strength to change her circumstances. Just as Pauline, who is also missing a tooth, takes on Cholly's burdens "like a crown of thorns" (*Bluest Eye* 127), Mem "accepted all his burdens along with her own and dealt with them from her own greater heart and greater knowledge" (73). Mem seems to accept Brownfield's vision in part because she has no vision of her own; however, she vastly overestimates her own strength to bear his burdens.

In accepting Brownfield's burdens, Mem makes any escape nearly impossible. Ruth Weston agrees that Mem becomes even more trapped by her communal effacement¹⁶, which she defines as Mem's loss of voice in the community. For Weston, Mem's lack of community results in the communal effacement under which Brownfield is able to isolate her. The loss of her communal voice results in a loss of underground social space for Mem. While

¹⁶ For Weston, communal effacement occurs when African American men exclude women from communal processes. In doing so, the men circumscribe any African American woman as a substitute for any other African American woman, stripping all African American women of individuality. She notes that in Walker's afterword, Walker writes that the name Mem comes from the French *la même*, meaning "the same". Thus, Mem represents the universal cultural effacement of African American women.

Pauline retreats to the church and the house of her white employer to escape her burden, even if only temporarily, Mem understands that she will find no such community in her current situation. Josie has never offered any type of family community, and as a former whore, outside the community herself, Josie has never offered Mem any connection to the community of women in the town. Stranded on constantly shifting plantation properties, Mem does not have access to a church community either. All access to the underground community, especially the female underground community, has been stripped from Mem.

Ironically, the constant shifting her children undergo as they move from house to house makes Mem aware that she does not just bear Brownfield's burdens; she also bears the burdens of her children. Her vision of motherhood includes gaining entrance into the community for her children. The burden of motherhood temporarily provides Mem with a strong vision of her self as mother, one which she uses to defy Brownfield. Mem wishes for a stable house to live in, through which she believes she can begin to construct a community for her daughters to grow up in. This wish allows Mem to recognize her own need to "give every man in sight and that I ever met up with a beating, maybe even chop up a few with my knife" (111) and gives her the courage to defy Brownfield's wishes and sign a lease for a house. Even Brownfield's threats to cut off her fingers and slit her throat lack potency in the face of Mem's determination to escape. Instead, her threats to physically fragment Brownfield, by blowing his balls off and cutting out his tongue, temporarily reverse their roles so that for a short time Mem gains power over Brownfield. However, Mem's power is not

sustainable. Although Mem obtains a house in the community, her need to work to afford the house prevents her from truly forging relationships in the communal underground. As a result, when Mem falls sick, she cannot turn to the underground community for help and she must once again rely only on Brownfield.

Mem fatally believes that she can change Brownfield as easily as he had changed her. Mem believes that because Brownfield *acts* good, he *is* good. She is unable to recognize Brownfield's masking: "she was not evil and he would profit from it" (136). Mem's body irredeemably breaks down under the strain of two pregnancies, intentionally designed by Brownfield to destroy her health. Her temporary refusal to bear Brownfield's burdens results in pregnancies which her body cannot physically bear. Unable to work and no longer able to afford the house, Mem lacks the strength to fight back when Brownfield triumphantly reveals his true intentions and moves the family back to a shack on the plantation. In taking away her house, Brownfield removes her from any possibility of true community and ensures her cultural effacement. Not quite broken, Mem continues to work and save money to move back to town. Her dream, however, is obliterated when Brownfield shoots her point-blank in the face. Mem's quest for a whole self has ultimately failed. Her cultural and literal effacement is complete.

Mem's quest ends this way because of her inability to improvise on the roles Brownfield constructs for her. Mem's lack of an underground community or any other social structures that would encourage syndetic processes does not

allow for her empowerment. As a result, Mem becomes a powerless victim of Brownfield's destruction. In *Meridian*, Walker moves away from the powerless victim to a partially empowered woman, Meridian, who realizes that she must improvise on the burden-bearing role ascribed to her because she has responsibilities to/for the self.

While Mem's constructed roles are continually reinforced by Brownfield, Meridian's roles have been internalized. As a result, Meridian must improvise on her definition of traditional motherhood as an act of burden-bearing. While rejecting traditional motherhood by giving away her child, Meridian nevertheless embraces her role as a burden-bearer for the revolution. Her interactions with Wild Child, the drowned boy and the children who want to see the freak show indicate her obsession motherhood. She cannot recognize any other form of motherhood than the traditionally defined roles. Thus, while both Mem and Meridian act as burden-bearers, to heal herself, Meridian must first resolve her role as burden-bearer and then resolve her personal ambivalence about her future role in the revolution. In resolving these issues, Meridian is able to improvise on her definition of motherhood by becoming a memory-bearer rather than a burden-bearer.

Meridian's position as a burden-bearer is foreshadowed when she visits the center of the Serpent's coiled tail in the Indian burial ground. Here, she experiences a crucifixion: "From a spot on the back of her left leg there began a stinging sensation...then her right palm, and her left, began to feel as if someone had slapped them" (52). This first crucifixion brings Meridian's first burden: she is

the bearer of her great-grandmother's peculiar madness. This great-grandmother eschewed membership in the religious community in favor of a solitary sun-worshipping existence. Like her grandmother, Meridian eventually rejects the religious community and instead accepts a solitary spiritual existence. In accepting this spirituality, Meridian must accept her mother's withdrawal and a loss of communal underground because Meridian can't be saved. This too, adds to Meridian's burdens. Until Meridian reconciles her role as a burden-bearer, her solitary spiritual existence remains tenuous. To reject/temper the role of motherhood, Meridian must first experience the torture of the crushing burdens.

Meridian is born of a long line of burden bearers. Meridian's great-great-grand grandmother was a slave who bore not only two children, but the whippings and financial responsibility for the care of those children. Meridian's great-great grandmother bore the responsibility of buying the freedom of her children and husband from slavery by painting barns. Her grandmother washed other people's laundry after working in the fields to send her twelve children to school. Meridian continues the tradition of bearing the burdens of her maternal line when she accepts the blame for stealing "her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self ... Meridian felt guilty from the very first, though she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault" (43). Like her maternal ancestors, Meridian is born from her mother's sacrifice of self, a sacrifice that was not willingly surrendered.

Meridian cannot understand the nature of her mother's self-sacrifice because her mother withholds the knowledge that, like Morrison's Sula, Mrs. Hill

was lured into believing in the mystique of marriage. Bored with Medallion and the “clichés of other peoples’ lives” (Sula 127), Sula meets Ajax and begins to believe that perhaps marriage is the secret that has been withheld from her all along. Similarly, Mrs. Hill, as a teacher, has independence, money and respect but becomes dissatisfied with her life when she sees in her pupils’ mothers a “mysterious inner life, secret from her, that made them willing, even happy, to endure” (41). However, unlike Sula, who never succeeds in capturing Ajax and thus realizing that the lure of marriage was a ruse, Mrs. Hill sacrifices her self to marriage and children. Eventually, she recognizes that the mysterious inner life of her pupils’ mothers was really their knowledge that mothers are dead women, living only for their children. Mrs. Hill is unable to forgive the women for not imparting this knowledge to her, but instead of passing this vital knowledge down to her own daughter, she willfully withholds it as it was withheld from her. By withholding this information, Mrs. Hill refuses to make her individual knowledge communal knowledge, thereby refusing to give Meridian access to an authentic form of maternal history. Meridian, therefore, lacking knowledge of her mother’s history, is unable to understand her mother’s constant question “have you stolen anything?” Meridian’s guilt consequently causes her first paralysis. After that point, when Meridian acts as a burden-bearer, she undergoes a temporary paralysis.

Mrs. Hill’s unwillingness to impart her knowledge results in Meridian’s ambivalence about her sexuality and her ensuing motherhood. Her choice of partner is ambivalent in that she does not choose the boys for any concrete

qualities; rather she chooses them so that she won't be pursued by other boys. Like Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, who advises Janie that it's better to answer to one man than a whole community of men, Meridian's rationale for both sex and marriage reify hierarchal structures of African American gender roles. However, Meridian subverts those hierarchal structures because she can envision her boyfriends only as boys, never as men. Even when she is married and has a child, she cannot envision her future: "she was grateful he [Eddie] was willing to work so hard for their future, while she could not even recognize it" (59). Meridian's ambivalence about motherhood and her sexuality prevent her, like Mem, from having a clear vision of self. In her confusion, Meridian accepts a burden-bearing role.

For Meridian, her role as a burden-bearer is bound in motherhood. Her first attempt at the communally recognized forms of motherhood fails because her child is conceived from illicit sex. When Meridian's subsequent decision to give up her child to attend Saxon college again transgresses traditional motherhood roles, her mother attempts to stop her, saying "[e]verybody else that slips up like you did *bears* it" (85, added emphasis), obviously meaning that she herself has borne it even though she wishes she did not have to. However, when Mrs. Hill attempts to sway Meridian by saying that Nelda would never give her children away, Walker, through Nelda, reveals what Meridian's life would be like if she stayed. Not offered a chance at an education, Nelda has no choice but to accept her family's burdens and follow in her mother's footsteps. Perhaps more importantly, Nelda recognizes that Mrs. Hill could have saved her from that life by

imparting her knowledge about motherhood. Meridian, however, does not recognize this betrayal. Instead, she believes that her mother – along with Eddie’s mother, who is missing a breast, and Nelda’s mother, who loses her hair in the bearing of her children – are all worthy of a heroic maternal history and that she is not only unworthy, but unique in her unworthiness. As a result, Meridian continually attempts and fails to mother those around her by bearing their burdens.

Meridian fails at mothering sometimes because the burdens she bears are not ones that are willingly given to her. Meridian tries motherhood again when she encounters Wild Child, a parentless and community-less pregnant thirteen-year-old. After meeting Wild Child, Meridian lies on the floor by her bed, paralyzed and unresponsive for an entire day. When she recovers, she accepts the burden of Wild Child and captures her. However, she cannot integrate Wild Child into the Saxon community. Wild Child has no desire to enter the community of the honors dorm, and the community has no desire to accept her. Unable to recognize this, when Wild Child is killed after Meridian is unable to help her, Meridian perceives the death as her second maternal failure. After her death, no longer with any agency to resist Meridian’s burden bearing, Wild Child becomes a passive recipient of Meridian’s burden bearing when Meridian acts as a pall bearer for Wild Child’s aborted funeral.

After Wild Child’s death, Meridian’s hair begins to fall out, and she begins to “value her body less, attended to it less” (97). Mrs. Hill even jokes that she will turn out bald, like Nelda’s mother. However, unlike Nelda’s mother’s

conventionalized motherhood, Meridian's communal motherhood is not recognized or valued by the community or even by her. As a result, just before graduation, Meridian succumbs to her most serious bout of paralysis when she realizes that "Mrs. Hill had persisted in bringing them all ... to a point far beyond where she, in her mother's place, her grandmother's place, her great-grandmother's place, would have stopped" (128). At the brink of death, Meridian accepts forgiveness for her failed mothering attempts from Miss Winter in the guise of her mother. Although this forgiveness cures a particular bout of paralysis, later intermittent paralysis symbolizes Meridian's continued ambivalence about her future and her worth.

This ambivalence resolves only because Meridian replaces her individual motherhood with racial motherhood. When a bombing occurs in her town, Meridian realizes "she had lived in this town all her life, but could not have foreseen that the house would be bombed...And so...Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world" (70). Only at this point can Meridian begin to envision a future: the life of a revolutionary in the Civil Rights movement. However, her future as a revolutionary is later mired in ambivalence when she cannot positively answer the question, "Would you kill for the revolution?" (14). Moreover, her role in the revolution does not resolve the complications of her role as a burden-bearer. Indeed, her role changes from that of a mother of one child to that of a mother-figure for African Americans as a whole. Her new role is accompanied by the burdens of not just the health of one child, but the burdens of the health of her entire race. Meridian's improvisation

on motherhood occurs on two levels: (1) on an individual level, Meridian has improvised on motherhood, a tradition that she has so far failed at, to take on a heroic role in which she thinks she can succeed and (2) Meridian believes that this newly defined heroic role will socially redefine her failure to mother her biological child. However, Meridian's work in the Civil Rights movement introduces her to yet another ambivalence in her life, Truman Held, the first boy she can envision as a man.

Before truly becoming a mother to her race, Meridian must resolve her ambiguity about Truman. Unfortunately, instead of fulfilling Meridian's visions of him as a man, Truman remains a boy who reinscribes Brownfield's conflicted expectations for women. Like Brownfield, who wants the incompatible qualities of the Southern mother and the Northern wife, Truman wants the incompatible qualities of Lynne, a "virgin who was eager for sex and well-to-do enough to have worldly experiences" (150) and Meridian, whom he thinks of as the embodiment of the African women he reads about in *The Souls of Black Folk*. However, unlike Brownfield, who projects his incompatible images onto Mem, Truman vacillates, alternatively pursuing and rejecting both Meridian and Lynne. Thus, Meridian escapes the violent destruction that Mem suffers at the hand of Brownfield because Truman need not destroy a woman to reconcile his incongruent vision. While Truman destroys neither Meridian nor Lynne, he damages both. Meridian must still suffer, alone, through the abortion of their child, after which she refuses to see any connection between herself and Truman.

Lynne, however, refuses to let Meridian deny the connection: “There’ll *always* be something between you...Maybe you *don’t* know what it is...it must be deep” (155). When Lynne confronts Truman in the back yard (159), instead of becoming paralyzed, which would indicate that Meridian was again bearing their burdens, Meridian reacts with physical activity, first exercising in her living room, and then, to solidify her resolve not to act as burden-bearer, Meridian locks the door to her house. Locking both Truman and Lynne out reflects Meridian’s new resolve to no longer accept those who wish her to bear their burdens. To solidify this resolve, Meridian leaves the house and goes for a walk, during which she is finally able to foresee her future.

While her role as burden-bearer originates with a crucifixion in the *Serpent’s Tail*, her future solidifies in refusing another crucifixion: “The only new thing now...would be the refusal of Christ to accept the crucifixion...All those characters in all those novels that require death to end the book should refuse. All saints should walk away. Do their bit, then—just walk away” (162). She recognizes that she no longer needs to be a burden-bearer. Clearly, Meridian begins to understand her complicity in her role as burden-bearer and just as clearly, she is ready to reject that role. This rejection begins Meridian’s healing. Her mother’s withdrawal after Meridian refuses to accept Jesus as her savior is healed in Meridian’s recognition that Jesus should not have to *be* her savior. Meridian expands this insight to the political and social world: she should not have to be the sole savior of the revolution.

Once Meridian rejects her role as burden-bearer, she can reenter the church community. Because she no longer has to accept Jesus Christ as her savior or her own role as a Christ figure, the church community no longer holds power over her in the form of shame or guilt. After her revelation about the crucifixion, Meridian visits a church where:

There was in Meridian's chest a breaking as if a tight string binding her lungs had given way, allowing her to breathe freely. For she understood, finally, that the respect she owed her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably *not* her own. And that this existence, extended beyond herself to those around her because, in fact, the years in America had created them One Life. (219)

The release allows Meridian to eschew the responsibility to carry her burdens alone and to refuse also her shame and guilt for not being a traditional mother. In turn, this allows Meridian to accept her ambivalence about killing for the revolution. She recognizes that even if she cannot kill for the revolution, she does not have to carry the guilt for her ambivalence, nor does she have to carry the burden of the future of the revolution. In this new conception of the revolutionists as "One Life", the sustainability of the revolution does not depend upon burden-bearing roles. Thus, Meridian is able to identify her role in the revolution as a memory-bearer rather than a burden-bearer. She believes that "it is the song of the people, transformed by experiences of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul. If I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all" (221). Meridian defines her new role as a responsibility to remember the song of the people and pass it on to future generations. Although this realization does

not immediately stop her bouts of paralysis, Meridian recognizes that she is beginning to heal.

While Mem's cultural effacement symbolizes the cultural effacement of all African American women, Walker positions Meridian in a new social role that empowers women. Part of Meridian's healing lies in her ability to change future revolutionaries' roles from burden-bearers to memory-bearers. When Truman catches up with Meridian in Chicokema, he finds her staring down the barrel of a tank while leading the local poor children to an exhibit. Deborah McDowell recognizes the obvious parallels in Meridian's leading the children to a wagon adorned with the words "Obedient Daughter", "Devoted Wife", "Adoring Mother", and "Gone Wrong", as in her life Meridian has "been a daughter, though not obedient; a wife, though not devoted; and a mother, though not adoring" (170). And yet, in successfully challenging the privileged, white, above-ground community, Meridian, for the first time, successfully mothers a group of children from the underground community. In that success, she shows the children that the woman in the wagon is no more than a plastic mannequin on show to rob them of their hard-earned money. The plastic woman is a false memory-bearer, and Meridian does not allow the children to fall prey to the false memory. The impoverished, underground community recognizes her form of motherhood by bringing her food that they can ill afford to give. When Meridian wakes from her paralytic state, she tells Truman "[t]hey're grateful people...they *appreciate* it when someone volunteers to suffer" (11). In this last act of burden-bearing,

Meridian tells Truman “What you see before you is a woman in the process of changing her mind” (12).

In changing her mind, Meridian changes the social perceptions of burden-bearing. Critic Emma J. Waters Dawson argues that a source of strength for the African American women in the texts of Hurston and Walker is the knowledge that suffering is the maternal legacy. Additionally, Dawson suggests that surviving is an effective revenge for that suffering. For Meridian, the best revenge is not simply surviving. The best revenge is teaching the children of the revolution to reject burden-bearing in favor of memory-bearing. In teaching the children, Meridian improvises on her own mother’s refusal to share individual knowledge. Meridian’s individual knowledge about memory-bearing is passed on to the communal underground through the children.

However, even in her transformed role, Meridian’s guilt for her own mothering failures of her biological child linger. Meridian’s resolve to become a memory-bearer is tested when she tries to recruit a young mother who has killed her child. Meridian clearly feels an affinity with this young mother, who comes close to the person Meridian was when she entertained thoughts of killing her own son because “he did not feel like anything to her but a ball and chain” (65). Her guilty past is brought to the present when the girl spits out “If you all can’t give me back my heart...go the fuck away” (235). Unable to help the girl, Meridian recognizes that her former self must stay in the past. Still, Meridian’s poem “i want to put an end to guilt/i want to put an end to shame” (235) shows that Meridian is now unwilling to carry the burden of this young woman or that of

her former self. Her last poem “and we, cast out alone/to heal/ and re-create/ourselves” clearly indicates that she is finally ready to heal.

At this point, her body and hair regenerate. Truman recognizes that, like the new branch growing from the trunk of the Soujourner tree, this new Meridian is not entirely new, that she had “grown out of the old” (241). Thus, it’s clear that Meridian has incorporated the resolution of both her maternal history of burden-bearing and her ambivalence about her future into her new self, her “song of the people” (221). Unlike her mother, who withheld information, she can carry the inherited and now improvised song on to new generations. In accepting her value as one who is alone, neither a traditionalist nor a revolutionist, Meridian begins her journey to seek out a new community of others who are solitary as she is: “And in the darkness maybe we will know the truth” (242). She begins her journey with only the soft wool of her regenerated hair and the courage of her regenerated self.

Meridian focuses solely on one woman’s improvisational experiences. However, in *The Color Purple*, Walker presents an array of women’s strategies that range from deadly, to individually successful, to communally successful. Additionally, Walker depicts two underground communities; a gendered one and one that is wholly female. Meridian’s wholeness contrasts with Sofia’s brokenness. Sofia appears whole at the beginning of *The Color Purple* and then breaks. Sofia’s body and mind are broken when she is beaten for slapping the white mayor’s wife and subsequently forced to become her maid. Sofia’s degeneration results from her inability to recognize the limitations of her abilities

to effect change in those around her. Additionally, unlike Meridian, whose body heals when she redefines her role from burden-bearer to memory-bearer, Sofia fails to heal because she rejects the role of burden-bearer outright rather than redefining it. Celie, however, while unable to heal her body of the ravages of her step-father's sexual abuse, does find wholeness in the end because she redefines Albert's role from burden-giver to burden-sharer. In so doing, she redefines her own role as a burden-bearer in regards not just to Albert, but to the wider community around her.

Sofia continually rejects the burdens that the African American males in her life try to place on her. When her father tries to burden Sofia with classist notions of whom she should marry, she flouts female convention by intentionally getting pregnant outside of marriage. Sofia believes getting pregnant was an escape from her family, where she tells Celie that she had to fight her whole life because "[a] girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (42). Sofia takes action to save herself from bearing the burdens of the men in her family. When she appears, big-bellied, in front of Albert (Celie's husband and Harpo's father), who tries to shame her by saying "Look like you done got yourself in trouble", Sofia boldly proclaims "Naw suh...I ain't in no trouble. Big, though" (32). Sofia's refuses to accept that her child is a burden, and she generalizes to reject the burden-bearer role. Additionally, she refuses to accept Harpo's burden of Albert's relentless abuse, telling Harpo "When you free, me and the baby be waiting" (33). Clearly, Sofia does not intend to become the mule of the world.

Harpo beats Sofia because of his insecurity about his maleness, just as Brownfield beats Mem. Both Brownfield and Harpo suffer from missing mothers and cruel fathers. However, Grange's absence from Brownfield's life leads to Brownfield's insecurities, while Albert's presence in Harpo's life reinforces Harpo's insecurities. Albert suggests that Harpo should beat Sofia, suggesting "Sofia think too much of herself anyway...She need to be taken down a peg" (38). Despite Harpo's misgivings, in the face of Albert's continued invective on how to make women "mind", Harpo asks Celie what to do. Celie advises that Harpo beat Sofia. Like Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Mrs. Hill in *Meridian*, Celie reifies the roles constructed by African American men.

Sofia rejects all burdens – those from women as well as those from men. She refuses to accept Harpo's beatings, and her reaction to Harpo's beatings starkly contrasts with Celie's meek acceptance of Albert's abuse. Sofia fights back like a man. With each rejection of traditional female roles, Sofia's body seems to grow stronger, with Celie noting "...[s]he still a big strong girl. Arms got muscle" (36). When Sofia finds out that Celie told Harpo to beat her, she returns the curtains she and Celie had made, clearly communicating her feeling of betrayal.

Sofia's and Celie's individual experiences within their separate female communities (Sofia with her sisters and Celie with Nettie) prepare them to create their own female underground community within the larger community. For Sofia, Celie's duplicitous instructions to Harpo are a complete surprise. In her family, she and her six sisters formed an underground female community that

protected each other from the ravages of the male community. Celie's early underground female community with Nettie, however, cannot withstand Pa's ravages. Sofia's return of the curtains, then, symbolizes both Sofia's rejection of burden-bearing and her recognition of Celie's betrayal of the community sisterhood. Her honesty in her anger and sense of betrayal results in honesty from Celie; when she tells Sofia that she is jealous of her, they begin to rebuild their bond and their own underground community. Celie's laughter when Sofia tells her "You ought to bash Mr. _____ head open...Think about heaven later" (44) strengthens their bond and the growth of their underground community begins to subvert Albert's power.

However, Sofia's directions to bash Albert underline her belief, like Mem, that she can transform those around her. Sofia believes that if Celie were to fight back, Albert would change, and that, similarly, if she fights back, Harpo will change. She does not recognize the damage that Albert's invective against women has done to Harpo. Just as Brownfield's happiness with Mem doesn't change the psychic damage done by the loss of his mother and the abandonment by his father, Harpo's happiness with Sofia cannot overcome the damage of Albert's parenting. When Celie tells Harpo that Sofia is a woman who can't be beat and that he shouldn't beat her because Sofia loves him, Harpo echoes his father's words by responding "But you his wife...just like Sofia mine. The wife spose to mind" (66). Harpo cannot reconcile his father's view of women's roles with his own feelings of love for Sofia.

The sisterhood between Celia and Sofia doesn't help Sofia improvise on the burden-bearing role because Celie has not yet redefined her role either. When Sofia, recognizing that even the sexual act between her and Harpo has become a burden, vacillates between leaving Harpo and staying, Celie advises her to stay. Celie has not yet experienced sexual enjoyment, and she does not understand that sexual acts with Albert, wholly unenjoyable to her, constitute another burden. However, Sofia, who enjoyed sex with Harpo, clearly recognizes that sex has become a burden: "He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I feel. It just him. Heartfeeling don't even seem to enter into it...The fact he can do it like that make me want to kill him" (69). This burden finally causes Sofia to leave Harpo. Walker's use of sexuality as a transformative agent extends the diasporic modernist framework. While Hurston's diasporic modernism relies on processes engendered in racial, class and gender roles, Walker specifies in *The Color Purple* that gender roles must include elements of sexuality.

Denied the pleasure of sexual experiences, Sofia is no longer willing to bear Harpo's abuse. Sofia's sisters allow her an underground community within the larger black community to retreat to. This smaller, insular community does not demand that Sofia improvise on her role as a burden-bearer. She can exist in this underground community even though she has rejected the burden-bearing role because her sisters have a shared experience of fighting against the males in their lives. However, when she enters into the above-ground community of the town, which includes the white mayor and his wife, Sofia's rejection of the

burden-bearing role destroys her. Blind to important social realities of the above-ground community, Sofia fails to recognize the limits of her self-assertion. The tools she uses to survive in the underground community fail her in the above-ground social space. When Sofia rejects the maid position that the mayor's wife offers her, she rejects becoming a burden-bearer for the white family. However, in doing so, she rejects the maid position from the position of a fighter, saying "Hell no" (90). When the mayor slaps her, she fights back, just as she would against an African American man who beat her. However, Sofia clearly does not recognize that this time, she will have no recourse, she will not be allowed to retreat to a community where she can reject the burden-bearing role. Because she returns the mayor's violence, Sofia's body is devastated. White men crack her skull and ribs, disfigure her nose and blind her in one eye. In prison, Sofia tries to adopt a burden-bearing role, saying "Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do just what they say" (93). However, Sofia doesn't actually accept this role. Like Meridian, whose unconscious rejection of the burdens of motherhood causes her to have violent thoughts, when Sofia rejects her role in prison and her later role as a maid in the mayor's house, she fantasizes about murder.

No longer physically or mentally strong enough to improvise on burden-bearing roles, Sofia flounders without a clear role in the household community. When Sofia tells Albert that Celie speaks the truth about Harpo's role in Sofia's destruction, "Everybody look at her like they surprise she there. It like a voice speaking from the grave" (207). With no defined role in the household

community, Sofia's voice almost disappears. Her own children call Mary Agnes mother, releasing Sofia from the burdens of motherhood. She has no male figure to fight against either. When Shug announces that one more person is going to leave the house with her and Grady "Everybody sort of cut they eyes at Sofia. She the one they can't quite find a place for. She the stranger" (209). Even though Sofia has escaped from many of the burdens she once rejected, she now finds that she needs to return to those prescribed roles to reenter the household community. Surprisingly, Mary Agnes sets her on the road to peace. When Mary Agnes leaves to sing professionally, she asks Sofia to take care of her children and Harpo. In accepting a role as a burden bearer for both Harpo and her daughter, Henrietta, Sofia reestablishes her place within the home.

However, only when Sofia discovers that the burdens she most rejected, Harpo and Eleanor Jane, have become burden-sharers does she truly begins to heal. When Sofia discovers Harpo performing a mothering act, she starts to feel love for him again. Harpo's caretaking activities while Albert suffers under Celie's curse make Sofia recognize that burden-bearing can be an act of love if it is not forced. Additionally, she sees a woman volunteer to bear a burden: only Eleanor Jane's can coax Henrietta to eat. Seeing this, Sofia releases her anger about her treatment as a maid. By sharing the burden of Henrietta's care, Eleanor Jane allows Sofia to work at Celie's store, regaining some freedom from the traditionally defined female roles which suggest that Sofia should stay at home to care for the children and Harpo. Finally, Sofia is able to lay down the burden of care for Eleanor Jane herself. Sofia suggests "Let her quit...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" (288). Clearly, Sofia has taken on the burdens she wishes to and rejected all others. Harpo's kiss where her nose had been stitched back to her face both recognizes the trauma that Sofia has gone through and underlines the importance of Harpo's sharing of burdens.

While Sofia doesn't take a direct role in reshaping Harpo's role from burden-bearer to burden-sharer, Celie does guide Albert in transforming his role. When Celie returns to Harpo and Sofia's house, she notices that Albert has changed. Many critics have noted the inauthenticity of this change in Albert (Vincent Canby, William Willamon, Courtland Milloy). However, Ann Folwell Stanford notes that Celie's curse feminizes Albert. Moreover, I would suggest that her curse "what ye reap, so shall ye sow" shifts the burden-bearing role from Celie to Albert. Additionally, in Celie's and Albert's recognition that they have lost Shug, they forge a common bond. Celie's letter to Nettie says:

I don't hate him for two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself... I don't mean just that he work and he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience. (267)

While Celie clearly empathizes with Albert's struggles to redefine his role, Albert's new role opens the way for him to empathize with Celie. Albert improvises on his new role when he asks Celie to teach him to sew. In doing so, he redefines his male role; by asking instead of telling, Albert removes himself from patriarchal hegemony in the household community. In teaching Albert to

sew, Celie not only involves him in a form of burden-bearing through the creation of wealth, she also initiates Albert into a creative act of womanhood. Albert and Celie can now “sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes” (279). Their shared recognition of the importance of this communication moves them from a relationship of burden-giver and burden-bearer to that of burden-sharers.

Celie’s final line, “I think this is the youngest us ever felt” (295), covers the entire family: Nettie, Shug, Albert, Samuel, Mary Agnes, Harpo, Sofia, Jack, Odessa, and, obviously, herself. Each person in the family has shifted roles to become a burden-sharer rather than a burden-bearer. This communal act of burden bearing is the culmination of Walker’s views on the exploration of the “oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women” (Howard 7). For Walker, the shifting roles of burden-bearing reveal the path to African American female wholeness. In *Meridian*, one woman shifts from burden-bearing to memory-bearing; in *The Color Purple* a whole community learns to share its burdens as they become the underground.

Chapter Three: Morrison's Broken Bodies, Broken Relationships

*Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Aint's got nobody by ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf.*
Langston Hughes' *The Weary Blues* 1926

While some critics have connected Hurston and Morrison¹⁷ and many critics have connected Walker and Morrison¹⁸, few critics have attempted to connect all three authors. Of those critics who discuss all three authors, Elizabeth Hayes traces images of Persephone, Eva Boesenburg provides a gender-voice-vernacular paradigm for the formation of female subjectivity and Michael Awkward outlines the call-and-response between the three authors. All of these critics describe the intertextualities among the texts. One important intertextuality that has received no critical attention to date is the broken bodies.

¹⁷ Marjorie Podolsky, Ashe Bertram, Glenda Weathers, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, and Diane Matza compare Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* to a Morrison text. Podolsky discusses the call-and-response she sees Morrison using in *Song of Solomon*. Bertram discusses the construction of white beauty and black ugliness in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Weathers compares the imagery of biblical trees in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Morrison's *Beloved*. Paquet suggests that characters must find their ancestors to heal their selves in *Tar Baby*. Matza suggests that both Hurston and Morrison (in *Sula*) write about the conflict between the African American woman's desire to explore her individuality and the African American community's need to stifle individuality to maintain order and stability.

¹⁸ Lillian Serillano offers a feminist reading of *Song of Solomon* and *The Color Purple*, In their comparisons of *Sula* and *Meridian*, Margaret Homans discusses the ambiguities of female representation and Arunisma Ray discusses the Afro American quest for home. In their discussion of *Sula* and *The Color Purple*, Kevin Quashie discusses the role of girlfriends in the creation of selfhood and Kathryn Lee Seidel traces images of the Lilith figure. Charles Fishman compares *Tar Baby* and *Meridian* and discusses the importance of naming rituals. In their discussions of *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple* Cheryl Lynn Johnson offers a womanist reading and Mary Jane Lupton suggests that clothes and costume play an important role in the creation of a woman's self. Margot Anne Kelley compares quilting aesthetics in *Beloved* and "Everyday Use". In their comparisons of *Beloved* and *The Temple of My Familiar*, Madelyn Jablon discusses rememory and revision and Gina Wisker discusses the characters that are disremembered and unaccounted for. In his comparison of *Beloved* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Reginald Watson offers a deconstructionist reading.

Like Hurston's and Walker's characters, Morrison's characters often exhibit broken bodies that reflect broken selves.

In contrast to Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Meridian in Walker's *Meridian*, in Morrison's early texts, broken-bodied characters are unable to improvise, stagnant. However, in *Jazz*, Morrison explores regeneration of self through characters who do not have broken bodies, but instead suffer broken minds and selves. The shift from broken bodies to broken minds in Morrison's texts reveals that Morrison uses the characters who exhibit broken bodies in her first three novels to limn failed attempts to achieve an integrated African-American self based on the bipolarities of Western thought.

Morrison's broken bodies parallel Walker's in that her early texts are littered with missing body parts: Pauline's tooth, Eva's leg, Sula's fingertip, Pilate's navel, Milkman's limp, Sethe's stolen milk and Golden's imagined amputated arm. However, while Walker and Hurston use broken bodies to show the devastation to African American women's selfhood resulting from the burden-bearing roles forced upon them, Morrison's broken bodies reveal the damage done to African Americans by the bipolarities of Western thought.

Western thought uses language that is based on oppositions. Morrison's characters are often trapped by these oppositions, unable to define a self because those oppositions cannot express the complexities of class, race and gender. For Morrison, any failure to recognize the dangers of bipolar opposition for African Americans results in broken bodies and stagnation. Unlike Walker's

Meridian, who regenerates both her hair and her self, Morrison's broken-bodied characters regenerate neither.

The characters of Morrison's early novels are unable to see any space between the opposed elements created by the bipolarity of Western thought. In *Jazz*, Morrison explores the opportunities for an integrated self through the fusion of metaphysical fragmentation. The metaphysically fragmented characters in *Jazz* overcome the bipolarity of Western thought because they recognize a space between the opposed elements. This space ultimately allows them to both recognize and integrate their fragmented identities.

The earlier, physically fragmented characters, like Eva, never achieve integration. Critic Barbara Rigney suggests that in *Sula* Morrison writes "what the French call *différence*, that feminine style that opens the closure of binary oppositions and thus subverts many of the basic assumptions of Western humanistic thought" (3). Phillip Page suggests that the characters in *Sula* attempt to heal themselves through their relationships with others. For Eva, her most important relationships are her mothering relationships, and her quest for wholeness is doomed by her over-reliance on self. The empty space where Eva's leg used to be symbolizes Eva's inability to see the space between the bipolarity of her choices. Eva's agency in creating that empty space reflects her agency in constructing the bipolarity of her choices. Phillip Page suggests that Eva privileges her self over others (70). I would suggest that as a consequence of her over-reliance on self, her choices ultimately become bipolar. Eva's

maintenance of her self privileges physical viability, and she constructs all of her life choices as dichotomies that either maintain or endanger physical viability.

Eva defines good mothering as the children's physical survival. When Hannah asks Eva if she loved her, Eva says "You setting there with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you" (70). Hannah suggests that there must have been time for both survival and play, but Eva cannot accept that there was time for both. Eva does not question that play is a form of love. However, Eva constructs motherly love as an either/or opportunity: either she could play or she could ensure her children's survival. Eva does not recognize any space between these two choices because the realities of a rural African American woman who has to work for survival do not allow her to. While Eva's love does not parallel the Dick-and-Jane myth of familial love that Morrison explodes in *The Bluest Eye*, to Eva, survival is a valid form of love and the only construction she can see. Similarly, Eva can see only one true choice between Plum's life and death. Eva constructs a bipolar choice by refusing to recognize other options. She believes that Plum has either to die with what dignity he has left, or live and crawl back into her womb. Further, she believes that she is murdering him out of love because the alternative of putting him outdoors to fend for himself, where he could prey on the community, is for Eva worse than death. Faced with the bipolar nature of her choice, Eva privileges her own viability, her family, and community viability over Plum's viability and murders him.

Eva's construction of self privileges the survival of her family. However, rarely do we see Eva reach out to the underground community for help in her

quest for familial survival. This construction ultimately fails to sustain her identity at the novel's end. The once carefully shod and stockinged leg is left bare and stuffed into a shapeless slipper. In the novel's beginning, the proud maintenance of her single leg parallels the proud maintenance of her over-reliant self. With the remains of her family after Boy Boy's departure gathered around her but starting to unravel, Eva's isolation and poverty force her to make choices, like sacrificing her leg and Plum, because she only has her self to rely on to save her family. This over-reliance on self ultimately breaks Eva. Although Nel tries, nobody stops Sula from sending Eva to the retirement home, and nobody visits her regularly once she is there. Eva cannot even accept that she can finally rest and that the home's employees will take care of her. Instead, she stands and irons clothes that aren't there with an iron that is not in her hand. Even at the end of the novel, Eva cannot accept anything but an illusory self-reliance.

Sula, too, suffers from an exaggerated self-reliance. Critic Barbara Christian suggests that "the search for self [is]...continually thwarted by the society from which Sula Peace comes" (153). Sula's definition of self continually struggles against the confines of the dichotomies of Western thought. Nowhere is this concept more expressly evident than when Sula uses the corner of her school slate to cut off the tip of her finger. Symbolically, the slate represents the authorial knowledge of the Western history taught in school and the more subtle lessons Sula learns about herself in school. Additionally, by carrying the slate home, Sula carries the knowledge from the above-ground community into the communal underground. However, Just as Eva understands that she had to rely

on herself for survival, Sula understands that all of the knowledge and authority that the slate represents from both the above-ground society and the communal underground doesn't help her when the Irish boys corner her and Nel. Cutting off the tip of her finger on the edge of the slate and washing the slate with blood simultaneously washes away Sula's confidence in the community's security. She recognizes that the knowledge and authority of the community cannot protect her self. In fact, the community, like the slate, will not absorb Sula. Like her blood, Sula will always be on the margins. Additionally, Sula recognizes in Nel's reaction that Nel aligns herself with the community. Nel's disgust and refusal to recognize Sula's sacrifice help Sula to define what she does not want her self to be: "From then on she had let her emotions dictate her behavior" (141). To construct a dichotomy opposed to Nel's opinion of her, Sula pits her self against the community's definition of self.

Sula constructs her battle for her self as a bipolar battle between her and all personal relationships. When Sula returns to Medallion, she again rejects the community's definition of self when Eva encourages her to get married and have children to settle down, Sula tells her "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Sula clarifies her position even further when she says, "Whatever's burning in me is mine! I'll split this whole town in two and everything in it before I'll let you put it out!" (93). Sula challenges and rejects not only the community, but also her connections to her remaining family. She has no center to build a self around because she cannot see a center; she can see only extremes. She can see her self only as an isolated individual or as passive

prey for the ravaging community. Unable to accept herself as prey, Sula chooses to privilege her individuality.

However, Sula does try to enter into at least one more relationship within the underground community. Instead of finding a space between individuality and relationship, with her spotless kitchen and hair ribbon, Sula abandons individuality and fully privileges the simulacra of a functioning relationship that she attempts to create with Ajax. Critic Maureen Reddy suggests that in Ajax, Sula is really looking for another Nel. In her search to replace Nel, Sula assigns herself the role of gardener to Ajax's soil and wonders how much of her own water will be needed to keep his loam moist and how much loam she will need to keep her own water still. In her desperate need to create mud, she miscalculates. Displacing her own needs, she recognizes the external forces that pressure Ajax, but she fails to recognize the external forces behind the ribbon in her hair. She privileges her role in the relationship as a nurturer/gardener over her role as an individual. In doing so, Sula has succumbed to the pressures, Nel-like, to the opposite of individuality: social domestication. In doing so, she dooms their relationship and her last chance for a meaningful connection to the underground community. After she finds Ajax's driver's license, she sings "There aren't any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are" (137). Sula recognizes that all of her attempts to create a self have failed and that, for her, there are no more chances. Sula will have no swan song.

Just before her death, Sula clearly recognizes what she has sacrificed for her self. She tells Nel, "I got me...my lonely is mine" (143). Sula clearly recognizes that in privileging her independence, she has lost any meaningful relationships. Just as clearly, however, Sula cannot see the space between alienation and enmeshment. Her question to Nel about who was good still relies on the dichotomy between good and bad, between a self defined by individuality or community. The question recognizes no space between the bipolar choices of that dichotomy. The reader, too, struggles with Sula's choices. Critic Hortense Spillers argues that in the end, "[w]e would like to love Sula, or damn her, inasmuch as the myth of the black American woman allows only Manichean responses, but it is impossible to do either. We can only behold in an absolute suspension of final judgment" (202). In her struggles with self, Sula resists the narrow definitions of self imposed on her by the community and in doing so, resists the confines of Western thought. Spillers argues that Sula "overthrows received moralities in a heedless quest for her own irreducible self" (185). Sula's exaggerated over-reliance on self leaves her isolated and at her death, her question about good and evil shows that even in her relentless quest to escape the pressures of opposition, without any other systems of thought available to her, Sula yields to those pressures.

Nel yields to those pressures also, however, because she accepts the same bipolar construction that Sula yields to. Nel exaggerates her definition of self as part of the underground community rather than individuality. While both Eva and Sula privilege self-reliance over community and exhibit physical

fragmentations, Nel privileges community over self-reliance and exhibits a metaphysical fragmentation. Unlike the metaphysically fragmented characters in *Jazz*, however, Nel's cannot see the space between Western dichotomies. Nel's over-privileging of community reverses Sula and Eva's over-privileging of self-reliance. Thus, Nel constructs her self in opposition to self-reliance. First, however, she examines and discards self-reliance.

After her trip to New Orleans, Nel whispers "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (28). Although this recognition allows Nel to define herself as something different from a daughter, when Nel met Sula they were both still "unshaped, formless things" (53). The relationship between Nel and Sula grows until "they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (83). Jude's entrance into Nel's life reveals a need that Nel had not recognized. Unlike Ajax, who rejected Sula's offer to garden his loam, Jude yearns for a gardener. Nel discovers a complementary need to become that gardener. Her decision to become Jude's caretaker immediately subsumes her need for individuality and obviates the need for self-reliance. Critic Reddy suggests that Jude is denied a self by the white system's refusal of satisfying work and by a lack of a mothering figure (34). Jude, then, chooses Nel because "The two of them together would make one Jude" (83). In accepting Jude, Nel accepts her social role as a nurturing wife and mother. In doing so, however, Nel's self is unfulfilled, which is reflected in her inability to love her children, or anyone else for that matter. Although at this point Nel does not recognize her over-privileging of community, in Sula's absence, her love for Jude has spun a

“steady gray web around her heart” (95). This web symbolizes Nel’s process of succumbing to the pressures of social conformity.

When Sula returns, Nel defines the distance between her self and Sula: “The closed place in the water spread before them...the situation was clear to [Nel] now” (101). In defining Sula as a person who acts emotionally, irresponsibly and who can make only the most trivial decisions, Nel defines herself in opposition to Sula. For Nel, acting responsibly is acting in accord with the underground community norms. Nel, who is married and has children, has acted responsibly. By sleeping with Jude, Sula threatens Nel’s role of a good wife and careful caretaker and, thus, her ties to the community. Nel constructs her decision to respond as an either/or proposition: either she can grieve for Jude and hate Sula, or she can grieve for Sula and hate Jude. Nel’s over-privileging of community forces her choice to grieve for Jude. Her self, however, rebels against this choice. She cannot produce the “why me” howl. In denying her pain at losing her relationship with Sula, Nel subsumes her self acceptance and her self knowledge into a ball of imaginative fluff. The gray web that her love for Jude had spun around her heart manifests itself externally as a gray fluff, just outside her vision.

Nel’s awareness of the gray ball of fluff indicates, like Sula’s mud, that Nel is at least aware of her selfhood. However, Nel never actually looks at the ball of fluff. Just as she claims she didn’t watch Chicken Little drown, Nel pretends not to see the ball of fluff. Yet she is aware of what it looks like and where it hovers. Her refusal to admit that she sees it preserves Nel’s privileging of community. To

recognize that the gray web around her heart was originally a longing for individuality and that the newer ball of fluff is really her grief for her friendship with Sula would challenge Nel's concept of her place within the community. Although puzzled by Nel's rejection, Sula immediately recognizes that Nel has truly become "one of *them*" (120). Nel's rejection of Sula reaffirms her own place within the community.

Nel retreats into virtue, and for her, virtue means being a good citizen of the community. Nel's virtuous shield, however, fails her when she's walking to town to visit Eva. She realizes that The Bottom and the underground community it contained have collapsed. Further, she recognizes that The Bottom may never have been a community, it may have been only a place, and a place that has now deteriorated into separate houses at that: "Maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place. Now there weren't any places left, just separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephone lines and less dropping by" (166). These lines at the end of the novel, recall the opening lines of the novel: "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and the blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood. It is called the suburbs now, but when black people lived there it was called the Bottom" (1).

Just as Sula recognized that not knowing Ajax's real name meant that there was "nothing she did know", Nel recognizes that not knowing if there really was a community to begin with means that there was nothing she did know. This recognition allows her encounter with Shadrack to unveil her hidden feelings.

Shadrack, who is outside of the underground community, and Nel who now doubts her connection to the underground community, move independently in separate directions. In the space between the two characters, the space between individuality and community, Nel is finally able to recognize her grief for Sula. Her eye twitches, reminding her of Sula's ever-changing birthmark above her eye, and the ball of fur dissipates. The long-repressed scream is finally let loose. Critic Phillip Page points out that this howl comes much too late for Nel (83). With Sula dead, Jude gone, and the community collapsed, Nel has no opportunity to continue her self-development. Even though Nel now recognizes the space between individual and community, she has no options for exploring that space. However, critic Keith Byerman sees hope in Nel's cry in that her cry is a signal of her self-acceptance and places her as a potential spokeswoman for the dangers of the pressures of bipolar oppositions (201). The dissipation of the ball of fur and Nel's twitchy eye that allows her to remember Sula without bitterness signal hope that while Nel might not have a community to share her new-found self with, she no longer necessarily needs that community to validate her self.

All the other characters in Morrison's novels who exhibit physical fragmentations suffer from over-privileging a bipolar opposition that disallows any recognition of an in-between space. Pauline cannot recognize the space between the perceptions of "white beauty" and "black ugliness". Golden cannot recognize the space between his white mother and his black father. Sethe cannot recognize the space between motherhood and self. Pilate cannot find a space

for Hagar between her empiricism and her brother's prosperous conventionality. Page argues that "the violence of *Sula* is necessary to loosen the rigidity of the bipolar structures [of Western thought]" (83). Although I agree with Page, I don't think Morrison's work is done with *Sula*. The continuation of the strong physical fragmentation motif in *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *Jazz* indicates that Morrison wishes to further explore the dichotomies of Western thought.

It is ironic, then, that in *Tar Baby* Morrison does not create any physically or metaphysically fragmented characters. Her exploration of the dichotomies of Western thought through physical and metaphysical fragmentation is so strongly represented in all of her other novels up to *Jazz*, that the absence of such fragmentation in *Tar Baby* should not go unremarked. Both Jadine and Son suffer from an exaggeration of one pole of a bipolar opposition. Jadine sees only the future while Son sees only the past. Page argues that "Son represents the mythical black past and Jadine represents one version of an idealized black future in the white world, but neither can become a place for the other and they cannot find sufficient ground" (125). Jadine tells Son that she was "learning how to make it in *this* world" (264) and Son responds, "What the hell kind of education is it that didn't teach you about Gideon and Old Man and me. Nothing about me!" (265). Each believes that the other, with the proper education, will embrace a new view. Jadine wants to bring Son into the future of *this* world while Son is simultaneously trying to drag Jadine back into the past. As the implacability of their situation becomes more apparent, Jadine and Son are blinded by their need to convince the other of the superiority of their vision.

The battle of wills results in the age-old dominating force of rape. Unsuccessful in his attempt to enter Jadine's dreams when he hid in the Streets' house, Son is also unable to convince Jadine of his version of self. As a result, Son tries to literally fill her up with his vision when he rapes her. Son's equation of Valerian with the white farmer and the farmer's "making it" by making a tar baby is paralleled by Jadine's need for Son to "make it" in New York with the tar baby. For Son, Jadine is not the tar baby. The tar baby is the illusion that a black man needs to "make it" in the city. For Jadine, the tar baby is not Son, but the savage danger of his romanticized past and its oppressive female roles.

Jadine and Son do not just reject one another's views of self, they actively seek to annihilate the other's view of self, Son through rape and Jadine through shame. Although they both suffer from over-privileging one term of a binary, they differ from the other Morrison characters who are fragmented. Jadine's and Son's needs to annihilate the other's view of self are more exaggerated than other Morrison characters. Sula does not try to annihilate the community, and the community does not try to exterminate Sula. Likewise, the community needs her to know itself:

In spite of their fear, they reacted to an oppressive oddity, or what they called evil days, with an acceptance that bordered on welcome. Such evil must be avoided, they felt, and precautions must naturally be taken to protect themselves from it. But they let it run its course, fulfill itself, and never invented ways either to alter it, to annihilate it or to prevent its happening again. So also were they with people. (89)

Golden does not kill his father. These characters are fragmented because although they cannot see the space between dichotomies, they recognize the

inherent necessity of the opposing force to define themselves. Sula returns to Medallion because any other place, without a community, is useless in defining herself as separate from that community. Golden seeks his father because he wants to know what the amputated arm feels like.

Jadine and Son lack this fundamental understanding, which effectively halts the development of their selves. They do not recognize the opposing forces that they use to create their selves and, thus, they cannot be fragmented like the other characters. Their whole self is determined by either the future without recognition of the past or by the past without recognition of the future. At the end of the novel, Son plunges wholly into the past when he joins the men in the hills and becomes frozen in the past with no hope for growth. Critic James Coleman sees Son as a “folk character unable to connect to the modern world” (71). Son chooses stagnation and a retreat to a mythological past over an untenable life in the modern world. Jadine refuses to examine the sixteen answers to what went wrong and so refuses to learn and grow.

After *Tar Baby* has limned the dangers of bipolarities to her characters' creation of a sustainable self, Morrison revisits characters who are locked in dichotomies. Carolyn Jones suggests that the theme of *Jazz* is the improvisational reconstruction of identity (481). Morrison improvises by re-imagining physical fragmentations through both Neola's and Golden's broken bodies while at the same time introducing us to characters like Joe and Violet, who can see the space between dichotomies. Golden Gray and Neola are initially both locked into dichotomies, and both follow Morrison's pattern of

exhibiting physical fragmentations to signify their construction of either/or choices. Then, however, Morrison changes this pattern. Unsuccessful at building any significant male relationships after she is jilted, Neola turns to virtue, like many of the female Morrison characters we have met before. She streams stories of wickedness to the children and turns those people who do not live up to her definition of virtue out of her life. Although Neola's arm is not truly amputated, like Eva's or Sula's body parts, her frozen arm with the curled hand over her heart functions in a similar way. Just as Eva's one leg both underscores her over-privileging of self and her inability to truly stand on her own two psychic legs, Neola's arm underscores her over-privileging of her self and her inability to mend her broken heart. Neola's arm, frozen in time, can only clutch the broken pieces of her heart, and like Jadine, Neola has halted the growth of her self.

Golden's amputated arm reconfigures Eva's amputated leg. This time, however, it is not Golden's own arm that is amputated; the missing arm that should have supported him is his father's arm. Although Golden has come with the intent to kill Hunter's Hunter, before their meeting he begins to imagine what the amputated arm would be like if only it could be healed. Golden would willingly exchange his missing part with his father's missing part for both to be free and whole. Brought up in a world sharply divided between black/white roles defined by the white hegemony, Hunter's Hunter is not willing to exchange. For Hunter's Hunter, Golden has to choose between black and white: "If you choose black, you got to act black" (173). Golden cannot make that choice because he knows that he will never be black or white. Society will never allow him to be

both. Golden Gray's name solidifies this point: Golden's skin may appear golden, but his racial heritage dictates that his golden skin color cannot overcome his gray, twilight, unacknowledged position in society. Faced with a choice that he cannot make and an intended murder he cannot commit, Golden simply disappears from both the above-ground and underground social spaces of the novel. Only his clothes remain, hidden in Wild's cave – the only place in the novel free from the social constraints that define black/white roles: it is the novel's only gray space.

In *Jazz*, both Joe and Violet are fragmented at the novel's start. Joe inhabits a space within the underground community, Violet a space outside the underground community and both feel isolated in their marriage. The journeys these two characters undertake to find each other again require them to find a space that they can both inhabit, in the community and together in their marriage. This journey requires that both characters reconnect in some way with the community and with each other while still maintaining their individuality. Joe and Violet create that space by pushing through their metaphysical fragmentations.

At the start of the novel, Joe undeniably has a place in the underground community. His job as a waiter establishes him as part of the working community, and his side job gains him access to the confidences of the community women. Joe's isolation in his marriage is also apparent when Malvonne tells him, "Violet don't want no part of you" (46). Joe understands that all too well as Violet has restricted Joe's access to both her grief over their inability to have a child and her bed. However, Violet's implacable refusal to

share her mind with him is the true betrayal for Joe. In his mind, the betrayal justifies his affair with Dorcas, and he believes that the affair won't hurt anybody. However, his affair places his status in the underground community in danger: "What kind of person you think I am? Okay there's no love lost between Violet and me, but I take her part, not yours, you old dog...Don't you take up with no woman if her kids is little, Joe" (49). Malvonne clearly shows Joe the line he cannot step over and still maintain his status in the underground community. While he can see the line, Joe's inability to see how his affair will hurt Violet alarms Malvonne, even though she herself clearly does not consider Violet a friend.

Joe's metaphysical fragmentation is images in his different-colored eyes. These eyes metaphorically allow Joe to see around the either/or proposition of binaries. He can see that he has changed seven times and that he will change again. Joe recognizes that his self is context-and time-specific, not created by or in opposition to any core ideology. The shifting center of Joe's self allows him to thrive both in the rural past and the urban present because one eye can look to the future while one can look to the past. Perhaps more importantly, Felice notices that one sad eye looks in while one clear eye looks out (206). Joe can simultaneously see outside of himself toward the community and inside of himself toward his individuality. Felice confirms this when she says "I think he likes women...but I really believe he likes his wife" (206). At the end of the novel, Joe is triangulated between the community women, his new speakeasy night job that fulfills his need for creativity, and his wife. With triangulation, Joe can

access the various facets of his self: his communal self, his individual self, and his self-in-relationship.

However, to negotiate the triangle, Joe first must resolve his position with his past: his unresolved issues with his mother. Thus, Joe's journey to that triangulated center is not easy. Violet tries to "claim" his eyes along with the rest of him (105). Dorcas, though, succeeds in claiming them. Kissing each eye, she says "one for me and one for you" (39). Dorcas's possession of Joe's eye temporarily shrouds his double-vision, so that Joe loses his self in his relationship with her. When Dorcas draws on Joe's body with lipstick in places that Joe has to use a mirror to see, Joe's agency in the temporary loss of his double-vision is revealed. By allowing Dorcas to draw on him with lipstick where he can't see with his own eyes, Joe gives up his right not only to look at Dorcas with his double-vision, but also to look at his self with double-vision. Allowing himself to be feminized with lipstick erases his ability to remember the past in which he trained to be a man, "to live independently and feed myself no matter what...made me more comfortable in the woods than in a town" (126). Joe can no longer see his earlier lives; he can see only Dorcas. Like Sula's relationship with Ajax, Joe's relationship with Dorcas cannot sustain itself. Dorcas recognizes that Joe no longer sees her as an individual woman. Although she does not have a formed self yet, Dorcas is able to recognize, like the narrator, that something has "gone rogue" (228). Although unable to recognize exactly what has gone rogue, Dorcas does recognize that "something about the way Joe didn't care what she looked like or even what she was made her mad" (191). Unlike

Violet, Dorcas never fully understands that she is a substitute for Wild, that Wild is what has gone rogue, but she clearly understands that their relationship is not sustainable: “This is not the place for old men; this is the place for romance” (192).

With Dorcas’ death, Joe retreats from the underground community. The windowpane he looks out of offers no double-vision, and Joe seems stuck in his grief. Felice finally restores his double-vision by giving him an outlet to talk about Dorcas. She remembers Dorcas as cold, but Joe is able to remember Dorcas as soft. He once again sees what is rogue: in his recognition that he substituted Dorcas for Wild, he can see that he was drawn to Dorcas because her softness offered him an opportunity to mother her, healing the mothering that he never received: “Dorcas. Soft. The girl I knew. Just cause she had scales doesn’t mean she wasn’t fry” (213). Describing Dorcas as having scales connects her to the wild, natural affinity of Wild. Critic Denise Heinze argues that for Joe, “the separation from the past is figured by his loss of and need for a mother...Joe, haunted by his inability to verify his mother’s existence, reconstructs her in Dorcas” (34). Joe’s release of his grief for Dorcas simultaneously releases his grief for his lost mother. Soon after Joe begins to talk about Dorcas, he is able to triangulate himself once again between his wife, the community women and his new job. He dances with Violet, gets a job at a speakeasy and reconnects with his side job. Joe is able to dance with Violet because she, too, has learned to center herself between her spouse and the community. The dancing and the way in which Joe touches Violet in front of Felice publicly confirms Joe and

Violet's private recommitment to each other. Once they have danced together, they fall into a new rhythm, one that involves conversations in a previously silent bed.

Unlike Joe, Violet enters the book as a character outside both the underground community and her marriage. Violet is outside the conventional working community because she doesn't have a beautician's license. As a result, Violet's clients are primarily whores who are also outside of the underground community. Thus, Violet's work offers her no access into the underground community. Her less lucid moments, sitting down in the street and attempting to steal a baby are public, community knowledge. Her public acts of craziness further solidify her position outside the underground community. These acts are driven by Violet's alienation from her marriage and her self. Unwilling to share her body or her mind with Joe long before his affair with Dorcas, Violet obsesses on her inability to become a mother and thus fills the space where any other relationships might grow. The longing for a baby became "heavier than sex...unmanageable" (108). Violet's unfulfilled need to become a mother sends her into darkness where she is unaware of Joe and Dorcas' affair.

When Malvonne tells Violet of Joe's affair and Dorcas' murder, Violet has a different reaction than Nel did to Sula's affair with Jude. To keep her position within the community, Nel was forced to choose Jude over Sula. As a result, Nel's construction of an either/or choice results in the loss of both her marriage and her friendship. Violet, however, does not have the external pressures of the community to force her into an either/or decision. Violet, a metaphysical

fragmentation, is born and ultimately allows Violet to work past the either/or decision of leaving or staying with Joe.

It is ironic that the fusion of Violet and Violent results directly from Violet's reentry into the underground community. Violet's community guide is Alice Manfred, who hosts the Civic Daughters at her house. Alice, like Helene Wright, exemplifies community virtue and tries to pass on communal knowledge to Dorcas. Felice confirms Alice's role in the community when she decides to visit Joe and Violet, saying "if Violent was good enough for [Alice] to let in, she was good enough for me to not be afraid of" (205). Alice Manfred provides a safe harbor for Violet, and more importantly, Alice starts Violet talking within a meaningful relationship again. Critic Richard Hardack suggests that Joe can tell Dorcas things he doesn't know about himself because he has to tell it to find out (4). Alice functions in this same way for Violet. After Violet talks with Alice, she can recenter herself. Her obsession with Dorcas gives way to an obsession with her self. She recognizes that *that* Violet's strength comes from her pride in herself, a pride she felt most when she was strong enough to stand and work beside a full-grown man. However, Violet also recognizes the weakness in *that* Violet when she thinks "*That* Violet should not have let the parrot go" (92). Violet fully recognizes the similarity between her self and *that* Violent when she thinks that neither of them could bear the parrot's "I love you". Violet realizes "*that* Violet is me!" (96).

Recognizing the other Violet is not enough, however. Violet must find the space between Violet/Violent. Alice Manfred's command "Nobody's asking you

to take it. I'm saying make it, make it! (113)" spurs the first step. *Jazz* reconfigures both Jadine's command to Son to "make it" and Son's attempt to "make it" by raping Jadine. In this reconfiguration, "making it" is associated with the agency to find the space between Violet/Violent rather than the reckless annihilation of the past and the future that Jadine and Son attempt. However, Alice Manfred is not the final catalyst to Violet's fusion of Violet/Violent. First, Violet has to resolve her feelings about both Dorcas and her own unfulfilled need for motherhood.

Violet's reconfiguration of her self begins with her recognition that both the old Violet and Violent must be re-imagined into a new Violet. When Felice climbs the stairs to Joe and Violet's apartment, she makes Violet doubt her own self. Felice climbs up towards Violent. However, Violet, not Violent, passes on knowledge to Felice. Like Alice, Felice is a connection to the underground community, and again, through conversation with a member of the community, Violet is finally able to find the space between Violet/Violent. In passing on information to Felice, Violet is able to release her feelings about both Dorcas and motherhood. Like Joe speaking to Dorcas, she discovers information about herself. Telling Felice to "make" the world the way she "wants it" creates an opening for Violet. Will she choose to "make it" an annihilation of Violent and follow in Jadine and Son's footsteps? Or will she choose to search for the space between Violet/Violent? Violet kills both Violent and the "me" that killed her. What is left in the space between Violet/Violent is her self. When Joe and Violet

dance, they dance in harmony once again. Both have found a space between their individual dichotomies.

Violet and Joe, via their final recognition that their own metaphysical fragmentation resulted from a lack of unity, could see a space *between* their bipolar choices. Thus, their metaphysical fragmentation was temporary and reparable. Golden glimpses a space, but the choice his father gives him disallows that space, as does the larger society. The amputated arm that Golden wishes for can never be restored. The physical fragmentation of these characters signifies that over-reliance on one pole of a bipolar opposition cannot create a viable self.

A close examination of the nature of physical and metaphysical fragmentation in *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, and *Jazz* reveals a shift in Morrison's work. Her earlier work explores how Western thought fails to provide solutions for the fragmented identity of African-Americans; the later work shows how to find the space between the oppositions created by Western thought. *Jazz's* prologue, from *The Nag Hamadi*, supports the idea that Morrison is looking outside of the Western canon for solutions. *Love's* circular storyline, which begins with humming and ends with humming, further extends Morrison's arc, which is both outside and in between the Western canon. Morrison is clearly not finished exploring the fragmented nature of African American identities, but it is clear that for her, the solutions are not to be found in the bipolarities of Western thought.

Chapter Four: Community as Agent

*What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,*
T. S. Eliot "Choruses from 'The Rock'"

While critics have paid little attention to similarities between Hurston's, Walker's and Morrison's works, they have given none at all to diasporic modernism since the 2002 release of Pavlić's *Crossroads Modernism*. This thesis, then, has worked to establish a connection among the three authors through the broken body motif. Exploring the motif of broken bodies in Hurston, Walker and Morrison's texts has located a lacuna in Pavlić's framework. Pavlić assumes that a character who seeks to enter a community will be accepted. Pavlić's framework assumes entrance into the community, perhaps because Pavlić's diasporic modernism uses Judilynn Ryan's 1991 paradigm of exile, turn to a symbolic East and recuperation. Ryan's paradigm, in turn, extends Robert Stepto's 1979 framework, which also assumes that entrance to a community is determined by the agency of the character who wishes to enter, not by the community. Stepto's framework suggests that if a character becomes culturally literate, he will automatically become a member of the community. Pavlić extends this idea by suggesting that community guides are often necessary to facilitate communal literacy, but Pavlić also assumes that once the character becomes culturally literate, that character will be accepted into the community. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* serves as the beginning point for his discussion.

While Pavlić spends much time establishing Tea Cake as Janie's guide to cultural literacy in the immersion process, he virtually ignores another important guide for Janie: Pheoby. In privileging Tea Cake, Pavlić suggests:

Tea Cake appears in the novel to help Janie "reckon" her way out of her withdrawal amid the ruins of Starks's design...[his] willingness to break abstract social customs, brilliance as a performer, and skillful and loving insight into Janie's state of mind accompany Janie out of her sequestered place as the late mayor's incidental wife and into a renewed and vibrant encounter with social and personal experience. (229)

Tea Cake's arrival in Eatonville, however, does little to reconcile Janie's isolation from the Eatonville community. Indeed, it magnifies the isolation when the community members' disapproval of the relationship becomes apparent. Thus, while the immersion process in the Everglades relies on Tea Cake guidance, upon Janie's return to Eatonville, she needs another guide to facilitate her reentry into the communal space there. Pavlić does not acknowledge the reason that Janie has been sequestered from Eatonville in the first place.

Joe Starks sequesters Janie in the community of Eatonville by both direct and symbolic actions. When the community, by their applause, encourages Janie to give a speech at the lamp-lighting ceremony, Joe says "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'...She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (43). Joe also bans Janie from participating in the talk on the porch. However, Joe also isolates Janie from the community of women on the night the store opens through a symbolic action:

...he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang. So she put on one of her bought dresses and went up the new-cut road all dressed in wine-colored red. Her silken ruffles rustled and

muttered about her. The other women had on percale and calico with here and there a headrag among the older ones. (41)

Janie stands out among the other women dressed in their percale and calico. In turn, the women both admire and resent her difference. Pavlić suggests that Joe represents the master of a symbolic plantation (223). In setting up Janie as the bell-cow and the women as the gang, Joe constructs Janie as a symbolic plantation mistress, severing any chances Janie might have had to become a member of the female community in Eatonville while he maintained his master status.

Joe's death does not remedy Janie's isolation, for the community replaces Joe. Just before Joe's death, Pheoby tells Janie that "It's been singin' round here ever since de big fuss in de store dat Joe was 'fixed' and you wuz de one dat did it" (82). Although Pheoby assures Janie that nobody in the community truly believed Janie was poisoning Joe, as Joe gets weaker:

This one and that one came into her house...without taking the least notice of her as Joe's wife...People who had never known what it was to enter the gate of the Mayor's yard...now paraded in and out as his confidants...Said things like 'Mr. Starks needs *somebody* tuh sorta look out for 'im till he kin git on his feet again and look for hisself.' (83)

Those in the community, whether they truly believe tales of Janie's poisoning Joe or not, clearly choose Joe's side. Just as clearly, they choose Joe's side because of the economic benefits their help might assure them if Joe recovers. When Joe dies, the town temporarily rallies around Janie. She sits on the porch with the men instead of standing in the store, and even laughs with the men in the store. However, Janie also recognizes that the men accept her on the porch

for economic reasons, not because they accept her as a true member of the community. She tells Pheoby, "All dese ole men dat's settin' round me is after de same thing. They's three mo' widder women in town, how come dey don't break dey neck after dem? 'Cause dey ain't got nothin', dat's why" (112). Janie's recognition that the men don't court the other widowed women in town clearly establishes that Janie understands her economic significance, and her bourgeois role in the town.

The economic ramifications of Janie's position prevent Janie from becoming a member of the Eatonville community. Janie's position as a symbolic plantation mistress becomes unmistakable when it is she who has to collect the rents of tenants. Additionally, the town recognizes the economic consequences of Janie's possible remarriage. Ike Green tells Janie, "What yuh needs is uh man dat yuh done lived uhround and know all about tuh sort of manage yo' things fuh yuh and generally do round" (91). Ike never mentions Janie's own happiness or passion; rather his speech focuses on the need for a man to manage Janie's properties. Ike recognizes, when he says "generally do round", that by becoming a manager of Janie's properties, the new husband will become a de facto manager of the town, the heir to Joe's plantation system that the town has relied on for economic growth.

Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, then, represents a danger to the town's bourgeois ideologies. Although the men of the town had started courting Janie shortly after Joe's death, when her relationship with Tea Cake becomes public knowledge, they lay a heavy judgment on Janie: "Joe Starks hadn't been

dead but nine months and here she goes sashaying off to a picnic in pink linen” (110). The fight for Janie’s hand and Joe’s legacy reveals a duality in the community, which critic William Ramsey states as

At the very least there is ambivalence here, if not a latent contradiction. On the positive side, the Eatonville folk are fiercely equalitarian, assuming that since the lowest individual has worth equal to the socially privileged, anyone may stand on Jody Starks's store porch to speak his mind in lies, jokes, and verbal contests. This is indeed a significant element in the novel's antibourgeois argument. But more negatively, that individual aspiring to go too far above or beyond the communal circle is suspect. (40)

For the community, then, Janie’s remarriage presents a problem. Any man in the community who wishes to marry Janie must aspire to move beyond the communal circle and enter into the symbolic role of plantation master that Joe occupied. Tea Cake, then, by his pursuit of Janie, arouses the community’s suspicion. Tea Cake’s position as an outsider, as one not from Eatonville, deepens the community’s suspicion. Janie, too, in her suspicions of Tea Cake’s motives, shows that she has not escaped this communal vision of Tea Cake. His age and his willingness to break social customs exacerbate the town’s fear of him. However, their condemnation of Tea Cake falls squarely on Janie. Sam Watson tells Pheoby, “De men wuz talking’ bout it in de grove tuhday and givin’ her and Tea Cake both de devil...but they talk it and make it sound real bad on her part” (111). Sam Watson’s words reveal that the condemnation comes from communal agency; the men talking in the grove represent the communal underground of Eatonville that has been warped by bourgeois ideologies.

Once the town begins to take the relationship between Tea Cake and Janie seriously, Pheoby fails miserably in her attempts to mediate between the community and Janie because she focuses on what the community wants and does not account for Janie's wants or needs. In fact, Pheoby confronts Janie not with the intent to mediate, but with the intent to dissuade Janie from her relationship with Tea Cake. Pheoby acknowledges the town's need for Janie to continue her role as the plantation mistress:

Janie, everbody's talkin' 'bout how dat Tea Cake is draggin' you round tuh places you ain't used tuh...he don't know you'se useter uh more high time crowd than dat. You always did class off...Ah'd feel uh whole heap better 'bout yuh if you wuz marryin' dat man up dere in Sanford. He got somethin' tuh put long side uh whut you got and dat make it more better. He's endurable... (112)

Pheoby reifies the community's expectations of Janie and their expectations that she will support bourgeois ideologies. In suggesting that Janie should marry the man in Sanford, Pheoby actually suggests that Janie continue in the role the community has come to expect of her. When Janie tries to explain to Pheoby that she nearly languished to death in her role as plantation mistress, Pheoby's response is "Maybe so, Janie. Still and all Ah'd love tuh experience it for just one year. It look lak heben tuh me from where Ah'm at" (114). Pheoby's response demonstrates that at this point, she cannot be an effective community guide for Janie because she has only communal knowledge, and one that has been warped at that. Her limited knowledge of what it is like to be in Janie's position, a position outside of the community, limits her ability to effectively communicate Janie's needs and wants to the community because Pheoby herself doesn't completely understand them. The mediation is in fact a one-way communication

in which the town's needs are communicated to Janie. Additionally, while Janie clearly understands that in order to enter into Tea Cake's community, "new thoughts had tuh be thought and new words said...he done taught me de maiden language all over" (115), Janie has not yet learned a language she can speak to enter the Eatonville community with. Thus, at the start of Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, Pheoby is unable to guide Janie to becoming a member of the community.

Janie learns to communicate communally in the Everglades. When she first arrives on the muck, Tea Cake insists that she stay in the cabin while he goes out to pick beans. Janie resists staying in the cabin and eventually joins Tea Cake in the fields. However, in the fields she faces the same resistance she faced in Eatonville. The everglades community "assumed that she thought herself too good to work like the rest of the women and that Tea Cake 'pumped her up tuh dat'" (133). In the fields, faced with the women's disdain, Janie finally understands how to win over the women, and thus the community as a whole. She makes her antics with Tea Cake dramatic and noticeable: "But all day long the romping and playing they carried on behind the boss's back made her popular right away" (133). Critic Mary Ann Wilson notes that Hurston recognizes that the dramatic quality in African American culture demands public expression and community validation. In publicly playing with Tea Cake, Janie makes explicit her public expression of her identity as part of a community pitted against the plantation master. In return, Janie finally receives communal validation.

The muck's communal validation does not automatically extend to Eatonville. However, upon her return to Eatonville, Janie's new communal language helps her to express her experiences in a way that Pheoby can understand. Additionally, Janie empowers Pheoby to act as a guide for her: "Ah know all dem sitters-and-talkers goin tuh worry they guts into fiddle strings till day find out whut we been talkin' bout. Dat's all right, Pheoby, tell 'em" (191). In return, Pheoby begins to understand that in her role as a community guide, her responsibility is not only to communicate for the town, but also to communicate for Janie: "Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin'" (192). Only through the give-and-take act of mediation can Pheoby truly act as a communal guide. Thus, Pavlić's paradigm vastly underestimates the importance of Pheoby's guidance and the agency of the community to Janie's quest for wholeness.

This oversight in Pavlić's paradigm poses problems for interpreting both Walker's and Morrison's oeuvres. Of Walker's works, *The Color Purple* most clearly diverges from Pavlić's paradigm, particularly in the examination of Nettie's interactions with the Olinkas. For Morrison, *Song of Solomon* makes the clearest case for an adjustment to Pavlić's paradigm. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman makes several attempts to enter the community. In a particularly notable scene, Guitar, obviously attempting to act as a communal guide, brings Milkman into a communal bar only to be told that Milkman isn't welcome there. In both Walker's and Morrison's novels, some characters who attempt to access communities through communal guides are not initially successful. Additionally, in both oeuvres, the authors include false communal guides, Guitar being

perhaps the most notable. Guitar's access to the community relies on his own lived experience, with little or no understanding of his deeper communal roots. However, the reader understands Guitar's falsity as a communal guide only through the revelation of the significance of the flying African song and through Pilate's sacrifice for Milkman.

Obviously, a thorough study of the community's agency in the texts of Walker and Morrison is warranted. While the parameters of this thesis do not allow for a full examination of Walker's and Morrison's treatment of the communal entrance process, its preliminary findings clearly demonstrate a lacuna in Pavlić's paradigm: entering an underground community involves the agency not only of an individual, but of a community that either accepts or rejects.

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