FRAMING STANDARD AND DIALECT IN BLACK WOMEN'S NOVELS

ESHE MERCER-JAMES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

October 2021

abstract

Framing Standard and Dialect in Black Women's Novels explores how Black women writers engage with their image in the dominant Western discourse. Deliberately objectified, their discursive identities have been underwritten and overlooked. Using Sylvia Wynter's argument that the emergence of Black women writers presents a parallax view that reorients humanist discourse, my project argues that Black women novelists reorient Black women's images through heteroglossia. Mikhail Bakhtin reads the novel as an interaction between languages as socio-ideological bodies. Challenging a dominant hegemony, the novel dialogic underscores Black women's resistant writing; however, Bakhtin's fusion of language and body restricts the dynamic between the two, repeating the erasures of dominant discourse. Translanguage constructs Bakhtin's heteroglossic dialogic as a slippage between language and body that demonstrates diversity. Translanguaging proposes named languages as a posteriori group categorizations, while language use approaches language features without regard for these boundaries. In this reorientation of language, Bakhtin's heteroglossia becomes Édouard Glissant's creolization, a specifically racialized expression of movement and change. The translanguaging of Black women's novels plays with dominant discourses to rescript their images as complex and mutable.

Reading four novels, I demonstrate how narrative historicizes, theorizes, diasporizes, and incorporates this strategy. Pauline E. Hopkins displays a daguerreotype that reflects the oppressive history of Black womanhood to project an expressive excess in *Contending Forces* (1900). Zora Neale Hurston performs her "Characteristics of Negro Expression" as a moving image in the discursive play between main character and community in *Their Eyes Were*

Watching God (1937). With double exposure in *Louisiana* (1994), Erna Brodber uses Hurston as the inspiration for her fictional main character to ground her theories in the Black diaspora. Toni Morrison invests in Black women's discursive erasure as the material of reorientation, presenting a photonegative in *Sula* (1973). Raciolinguistics is explicitly anti-oppressive in its attention to power dynamics. The novelists' synaesthesic presentations of Black women's consciously embodied language use emphasizes the power of language on their material conditions but plays with the individual's power over language. These novels demonstrate the flexibility of the designations Black and woman, names that inform but do not fix expression, to destabilize hegemonies.

dedication

For my mother, Erica Mercer, my first irrepressible Black woman.

acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor, Leslie Sanders, for her unflagging support and unwavering belief in my ideas and capabilities. I would not have even begun the doctoral program, never mind completed it, without her faith and encouragement. I also thank my committee members, Tom Loebel and Eve Haque, for their fruitful suggestions and inspiring comments. This committee waited patiently while I took time off to have children and I am so grateful that they remained committed and excited about the project through my maternity leaves and as I returned to writing.

I am also grateful for my two beautiful children, Lucas and Penelope, who only made me more determined to accomplish this project; and my wonderful partner, David, who made my work a priority and dispelled my doubts even when he didn’t understand what I was talking about.

The English Department at York University has been a joy. I would like to thank all my colleagues, particularly my doctoral cohort, who were so helpful in the proposal process, and our proposal leader, Marie-Christine Leps, who pointed out when I got excited about ideas and demonstrated how to hold on to that feeling.

table of contents

introduction

There is one thing we can be sure of: a lingua franca (humanistic French, Anglo-American sabir, or Esperanto code) is always apoetical.
Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Language creates one of the boundaries that delineates social groups. The group coheres around correspondence to an accumulation of utterances—molding newcomers and registering outsiders. This function draws theoretical attention which then re-informs group depictions. Consequently, Black women have developed a particularly strong corpus of writings on language. In theoretical texts and creative works (and entwinings of the two[1]), the question of language—its power, its use—arises in response to Black women's peculiar displacement in Western discourse where all the women are white and all the Blacks are men.[2] Hortense Spillers writes that "black American women are invisible to various public discourses" ("Interstices" 153). Language is both lock and key to the image of Black women, underwritten and overlooked, which has a palpable influence on our experiences. Stuart Hall explains that the Black body is scripted a certain way, but that it can be rescripted; and it must be rescripted into "a non-coercive and a more diverse conception" ("New Ethnicities" 447). With language variety, Black women's novels present and then rewrite Black women's discursive exclusions to evoke the experience of reorientation. Their use of standard and dialect offers a synaesthesic experience of sight and sound that creates active presentations of race and gender. Black women are not just present, but rather intimately so, advocating a cohesion and distinctness that insists on their individual presences as Black and woman without excluding others. This advocacy

1 Deborah E. McDowell observes that even Black women's writing gets discursively fixed: "the theory/practice opposition is often racialized and gendered, especially in discussion of black feminist thinking, which, with few previous exceptions, gets constructed as 'practice' or 'politics,' the negative obverse of 'theory'" ("Black Feminist" 558).

2 A phrase coined as the title of an important, unprecedented anthology of Black women's scholarship, *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (1982), inspired by bell hooks identification of this exclusion in *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) (8).

challenges the oppressive hegemonies of language, race, and gender hierarchies that exclude Black women.

When studied, the language use of Black women is often read as singular, attached to either standard or dialect. Black women have been located as the source of folklore, and therefore vernacular (Adisa 28); however, in her quantitative measurement of themes in creole sayings, Carole Boyce Davies notes that the vast majority are insulting toward women, characterizing them as vampires, devils, sirens, or hags (185).[3] Walt Wolfram cites mothers as the driving force in marginalized children learning the standard, with women often at the forefront of language change in culture; Andrea Davis adds that "[t]his socialization of [standard] English is especially directed at girl children for whom English also functions as a sign of respectability and decency" (180). James and Leslie Milroy cite multiple quantitative "studies of different speech communities" where women "approximate more closely than men to the publicly legitimized norm" (81). Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s history of Black writing in the English Americas conspicuously begins with a woman writing in the standard. The standard claims may seem to oppose the vernacular one, but integrated, these attributions demonstrate the strategic challenge of Black women's discourse, presenting a linguistic complexity that rescripts the underwriting and overlooking.

To explore this challenging complexity, I use the distinctions of *parole* and *langue* to guide my analysis of the literary approach to standard and dialect. Ferdinand de Saussure divided language into two parts, *parole* and *langue*. The former refers to utterances, the use of language; the latter refers to the abstraction of that actualization—all that forms the system of

3 Some of Davies's samples come from the ethnological research of Zora Neale Hurston, who figures prominently in my dissertation.

language, which enables the composition and comprehension of the utterance. Users of a language express the living variety of that language and structures are applied to the general idea of language. In their descriptive practice, linguists do not recognize the opposition of a standard to (various) dialect(s). As *parole*, all language use is dialect, idiosyncratic iterations of the abstract. The systemization of *langue*, however, suggests the possibility of an ideal expression that corresponds to all the rules of the system—a standard—against which variations can be judged—a dialect. Using sociolinguistics, I consider how they intersect in literary language use.

A standard cannot be defined linguistically, definitively fixing lexical or grammatical features (Milroy and Milroy 22), but it is defined socially and politically, often quite strictly, as sociolinguists have observed. Mary Bucholtz writes that a standard implies “both unmarkedness (standard as ordinary) and power (standard as regulative)” (“Whiteness” 87). The implications contrast with those of what may be called a vernacular. Similar to standards, vernaculars are also difficult to fix linguistically (Lemke 4, 5). In an attempt to define them, Sieglinde Lemke argues that their use often “signals a lack of cultural capital” (3). They are also differentiated by attachment to a particular locality in opposition to the assumptions of a more broadly accessible standard. Standards and vernaculars are goals that can move or change depending on one's position in society; vernaculars can even become standards, as in the notable example of the Romance languages’ relationships to Latin. Metapragmatics, the thinking behind lexical or grammatical choices conscious and unconscious, are construed in response to these processes (Brown 596). David West Brown points out that metapragmatics can support or challenge ideologies, the system of beliefs underscoring hegemonies, reconfirming or upending the

perception of a group (598). This challenge is particularly evident in Black women's language use.

My project reads Black women's novels through a sociolinguistic lens to depict their literary language use in a moving relationship to their intersectional categories. This approach attends to the metapragmatics of the language use, rather than the accuracy or authenticity of the linguistic elements. The novelists' metapragmatics reframe the image of the Black woman to assert Black and woman as an evolving identity without a fixed relationship to those categories. In its investigations of culture and identity, raciolinguistic theory aligns with Hall's reinscription into a pluralized autonomy, a shift from essentialism to positionality that seeks to displace hierarchical cultural values ("New Ethnicities" 443-444). Asserting raciolinguistics' commitment to challenging white supremacy, Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores argue that "analyses of shifting, intersectional positionalities and assemblages of signs must situate individual embodiments and language practices in relation to broader structures and patterns of power" (637). Given the English standard's debt to writing, its literature offers many examples of metapragmatics in concordance or discordance with dominant ideologies. With novels by four Black women from different periods and regions, this project demonstrates a way to read Black women's language variety as presenting an anti-oppressive interaction of individual and group.

Writing underscores the systemization which allows language to frame people as insider or outsider, valued or denigrated. The representation of specific pronunciations or usages with specific kinds of people has a history in English literature that goes to back its earliest examples

(Minnick 1). Initially, indications of accent were generally used for comic effect (with Chaucer being a notable exception) (Minnick 3), but the Herderian Zeitgeist raised implications beyond amusement. Building the foundations for the study of philology in the West in the eighteenth century, Johannes Herder proposed that a national language echoed the national spirit, an essentialist relationship that would help racialize its populations. Andrew Elfenbein argues that Herder's influential thinking leads to the proliferation of a certain kind of English text; he writes:

> Histories of English all agree, as Murray Cohen notes, that there is more of almost everything linguistic in the second half of the eighteenth century than in the first: more grammars and more kinds of grammar, more theories of language, more sorts of questions asked about language, more dictionaries, spelling books, proposals for reordering pedagogy, and more languages taught. (18)

In their summary of the period, the Milroys read this increase as a merely practical matter of communication in a growing Empire (31), but Elfenbein sees another factor. He argues that the rise is directly connected to the imposition of new national expectations. Education in the English language became a moral practice that expressed the values of the nation, so there was an explosion of texts dedicated to this moral education.[4] Elfenbein explains: "The eighteenth century saw the rise of books of usage for natives, which aimed to teach readers not how to speak English, but how to do it correctly" (18). As European countries were reifying their national character through language (and colonization), the English ramped up their writing to cement their conceits. Naturally, linguistic nationalism was also a concern across the Atlantic in

4 Joseph Errington notes a similar process of moral valuing in the study of language of colonized peoples: on the one hand, a helpful communication aid, on the other, a means of classifying those languages lower than English in a linguistic hierarchy.

the new United States; Noah Webster was compelled to create an American dictionary in the early nineteenth century as part of the same impulse. All the dictionaries and grammars clarified the stakes of national language: how to be properly English or American.

Judgments of English language use, and therefore English national being, were measured against the prescriptive examples of the written word. The social concept of the standard became a political weapon. Elfenbein writes: “The English experts transformed English so as to recast personal identity, intra- and inter- group bonds, and collective agency” (19). The interest in language speaks to attempts to identify foreigners. The texts constituted a filter that would keep the national culture pure, free from foreign contamination. The goal of purity underscores that this linguistic project was simultaneously a racial one. The project works through iconization, a counterpart of indexicality where a connection is established between a linguistic form and its social meaning; in iconization, the form is seen as a reflection of essential characteristics of a group (Bucholtz, “Whiteness” 88-89). Bucholtz explains: “The ideology of racial markedness therefore has as a corollary an ideology of linguistic markedness” (“Whiteness” 87). In their interaction, a group image is formed.

The visibility of writing made non-white bodies hypervisible; fixing the sound to the sign, the sign foregrounded the body. In their early popular linguistic representations, the darker the body, the more deviations from standardized orthography, grammar, or sense in its speech. Elfenbein observes that print gave “Jews and slaves” a recognizable dialect, “typographical and aural hallucinations through which they acquired concreteness as a familiar, much-repeated set of deviations from a Johnsonian standard” (78). In literary studies, dialect is used to refer to a stylized version of vernacular that, along with its possible grammatical or lexical deviations

from the standard, is marked through phonetic spelling. Elfenbein writes: “With orthographic standardization, dialect became audible because it became visible as bad English” (76). Against the purification filter, dialect was not only nonstandard but incorrect, confirming nationalism’s necessary hegemony. Rosa and Flores describe the emergence of dialect as the process “through which people come to look like a language and sound like a race” (631). The tension between visibility and aurality was crucial for racialization. Jane Hill argues that a white public space is constructed through monitoring the speech of racialized populations, while ignoring similar variations in white speech (682). Doing so contributes to rendering whiteness as the invisible norm, making white speakers—rather than the actual language—the unmarked standard. Despite speaking the same named language (English, in this case; the *parole* not *langue*), people become (supposedly) visible outsiders within the nation. Literature confirmed these exclusions. In discussing this fusion of racialized identity and literary dialect, Elfenbein notes that there was no distinction between the real sounds of speech and “transparent derogation” (78), so that it was clear that literary dialect had little to do with any mimetic origins by this point. Abandoning accuracy, literary dialect became tied to an expression of outsiderness, forcing the uneducated, the poor, the criminal, and the racialized into a spoken foreign language.

The colonialism that accompanied European nationalizing both clarified and complicated the intralinguistic foreigner. In tracing the development of the texts that formally standardized English, Elfenbein points out that many of the grammar writers were not from the centre, London; they were from the margins, the colonies—and they were white (21). Deeply invested in language as a sign, they mapped paths to imperial embrace with their grammars, but

these paths were not accessible to the racialized, who could never be white though they might be educated, wealthy, and lawful. Accordingly, Rosa and Flores argue: “To the extent that colonial histories shape and often overdetermine interpretations of racialized subjects’ language practices, it becomes crucial to develop a theory of racialized language perception” (627). In the wake of linguistic imperialism, postcolonial theory presents two metapragmatic strategies: appropriation or rejection (mastery of form and deformation of mastery, in Houston A. Baker Jr.'s African American dichotomy [*Modernism* xvi]). These approaches emerge from a linguistic binary similar to *parole* and *langue*: language as creative or creator. In the former, an unencumbered *parole*, Saussure’s system prevails; language is a neutral force available to anyone and appropriation is not pejorative. In the latter, an oppressive *langue*, Herder’s influence prevails; language is essentially linked with the violence of colonization and, in a counter-reaction to the grammarians, rejection by the postcolonial subject is inevitable.

To show a split between the approaches to colonial languages, Bill Ashcroft positions together on the creator side two Black writers, French-speaking Martinican Frantz Fanon and English-speaking Kenyan N'gugi Wa Thiong'o. In Ashcroft’s reading, Fanon and Thiong'o consider the colonial standards as oppressive instruments. As a psychiatrist, Fanon focuses on the mental impact of linguistic imposition as tool of marginalization. He identifies an indelible mark left on the mind by the inscription of the Manichean opposition of black and white (Ashcroft 323). Thiong'o follows Fanon's lead, rejecting the English used to control and degrade his people and decides to use only his native language of Kiswahili in his fictions (Ashcroft 325). Ashcroft places himself on the creative side. To set up the weaknesses in the creator arguments, Ashcroft begins his article on “Language and Race” with a historical reading of the

connection between the article's eponymous elements that suggests Saussure's theory of the arbitrariness between word and object. In what can be read generously as an optimistic overcorrection of the creator overdetermination, Ashcroft questions the conflation of a particular (oppressive) language use with the language itself. Seeing language as a neutral tool, he argues that those on the oppressive creator side have erroneously elided language and culture (Ashcroft 326). Continuing this theme in the language section of the *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, he and his co-editors include more writers such as Chinua Achebe and Braj Kachru, who argue the creative side. Achebe and Kachru defend English as a unifying language amidst the territorial polyphony of traditional African and Indian languages respectively. The binary traps Fanon and Thiong'o in opposition to Achebe and Kachru, a painfully familiar dilemma in the debatably postcolonial arena of American racialization.

The constructs of American slavery intensify the colonial process. Slaves were banned from learning how to read or write—a restriction with increasing codification in more states in proportion to growing fears of insurrections in the nineteenth century. In a fateful irony, the slaves' forceful expulsion from standard education was then read backwards as a sign of mental inferiority. Monitored for their diversions from the standard and implicated as less than in these diversions, slaves had to contend with the heavy assumptions that hung over their texts when they began to write. Gates introduces the anthology he edits on race and writing by discussing the slaves' difficult position in English literary history. As he points out, denied their humanity and their freedom, the early racialized writers were impelled by literally vital political concerns as well as aesthetic ones, and their language choice was informed by those dual concerns (Gates, "Writing Race" 9, 11). Phillis Wheatley, whose works appeared just prior to the

Revolutionary War, was the first published African American writer and used traditional English poetry forms and “elevated” poetic language partly as proof of her humanity. It was a demonstration of her ability to reason, and therefore her equal place in the human race (Gates, “Writing Race” 8). Mastery of form, including the use of the standard, would be the only strategy espoused by that racialized community for generations after Wheatley.

The US’s national linguistic history demonstrates that the overt prestige of a dominant standard does not preclude a covert prestige for a deplored vernacular. The use of literary dialect rose during the 1830s Jacksonian period as part of a promotion of the American common man, an expression of American nationalism. In response to what was partly perceived as a British mocking of peasants, dialect was used to challenge the political power of the educated elite who were still too linked to the violently rejected British authority (Minnick 4). Aiding Webster’s cause, vernacular promotion helped to establish an American standard as separate from the British one. The vernacular emphasized the independent American democratic as a distinct national culture (Gavin Jones 36). The trend continued as the US recommitted to this essential character. James Nagel places the development of literary dialect after the Civil War as part of a trend towards a particularly American realism called the local color movement (xxiv), an attempt tied to the picturesque that applied a vitality supposedly lacking in more civilized, or wealthier, whiter peoples. As Elfenbein suggests, they exploited “the ambivalence of a repressed alternative” (80). From trend to aesthetic movement, the use of dialect became culturally entrenched. Brown, however, notes the importance of context: “in a more formalized speaking situation, using multiple negation might indicate a lack of education and out-grouping; in a less formal one it might indicate a lack of pretension and in-grouping, both indices being

construed by the dominant ideology" (596). The use of dialect by racialized characters did not necessarily have any positive connotations. While white usage could be indexed as democratic, Black usage was iconized as deviant.

Inextricable from the perpetuation of the iconization, until late in the nineteenth century, the most prominent writers of African American dialect were white. The so-called plantation novels that emerged in the wake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and proliferated after Emancipation used maximally phonetic orthography, so-called eye dialect, for the language of happy slaves unable to function without the guidance of "massa" (Minnick 10). Despite the actual language variety of slaves (and free coloured people), this style of dialect—more concerned with spelling that focused on sounds, even when pronunciation might correspond to the standard—became the standard of Black literary presences. Late nineteenth-century African American short story writer Charles Chesnutt found the vernacular of poor Black rural southern folk distasteful (Minnick 83-4); however, while his popular narratives were explicit about the horrors of slavery and sympathetic to the ongoing plight of former slaves, he gave his tales of slave life a frame similar to the even more popular dialect stories of white writer Joel Chandler Harris, who trafficked in antebellum nostalgia. In the work of both men, the tales of a Black dialect-speaking character were framed by a distanced, questioning, anthropological-style standard narrator. Gayl Jones describes it as recreating the minstrel archetypes of the standard-using "Mr. Interlocutor" and the foolish fellow dialect speaker (*Liberating* 57). While the standard narrator contextualized and interpreted, the dialect speaker performed the show. John Wideman argues that this frame, which presents Black speech as subordinate, is how a Black vernacular enters literate culture ("Defining" 80).

By the Harlem Renaissance, certain Black cultural elites advocated avoiding dialect writing because of this subordination (North 11). Late nineteenth-century African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who also wrote in more traditional forms, was famously ghettoized by his dialect poems, which, in their vernacular "authenticity," were reviewed and promoted as his only works of value (a direct contrast to Wheatley's reception). Literary critics saw merit only in his dialect voice, not in the content of his work or his skill in mastery of form. Based on Dunbar's experience, Harlem Renaissance poet James Weldon Johnson claimed that writing in dialect could not yet adequately represent the full spectrum of the Black experience (North 42). He would change his mind, but in the early 1920s, Johnson still feared that it could only depict the extremes of humour and pathos, possum and watermelon, to which Blackness was reduced in minstrelsy. Bucholtz writes that "ideologies of race are also ideologies of language" ("Whiteness" 87). The clear hierarchy of language reflected a hierarchy of race; societal subordination was structurally reinforced in literature. The standard frame defined the purpose of Black speech as superficial entertainment and determined the reality of Black people from that definition (Wideman, "Defining" 81). In fixing opposing narrative positions, the standard frame narrowed the English origins of literary dialect to their oppressive racialized implications. With artists focused on assimilation into the existing nation, dialect was rejected as a literary standard at the expense of African American English (as linguists call it).

A few generations later, language helped ground the nationalist credentials of the Black Power Movement in the same manner as the country. Geneva Smitherman writes that Black Power, inspired by theorists like Fanon, announced itself with the conscious choice of the word 'Black' to define its population (41). Proudly claiming the opposite of whiteness, the renaming

of the ethnic group of slave descendants to Black attempted to revalue the negative connotations of darkness which had been attached to them, the capitalization emphasizing the personhood of the new nominalism. Rejecting assimilation into the geographical nation, the claim to a cultural nation figured largely in the movement's revaluations; therefore, the creator side of the language binary took prominence in its cultural productions. As Joshua A. Fishman explains the process, the promotion of vernaculars is a way for political leaders, who are usually elites, "to communicate with, organize, and activate recently urbanized but still predominately illiterate populations" (41). Interestingly, often the elites do not primarily speak this vernacular, but find it useful as a connector; exploited for its suggestion of a shared history, it is invoked as the mother tongue (Fishman 41). With Black Power, the vernacular rescued the theorizers of the movement from an association with the authority of the racist mainstream. There was a reaction against "[t]alkin proper" (Smitherman 12)—a repudiation of a previous generation of elites who were seen as conciliatory integrationists and indicted for using the language of the oppressor. Championing deformation of mastery over mastery of form, the new Blacks championed literary dialect as the written corollary of the African American vernacular, similarly to the early US repositioning of its vernacular. In Black Arts' poetics, literary dialect offered a folk credibility that performed its politics. This held true in other parts of the diaspora. Caribbean artists had coined their own version of Black in the French term, *négritude*; their version of the African American vernacular was creole, or, as Edward Kamau Brathwaite calls it, "nation language." Davis notes that "Caribbean writers have also increasingly insisted that Caribbean experiences can only be adequately written in Creole languages" (181). This time driven by the nationalizing goals of the marginalized, the Black standard was back.

Gender further particularizes this dilemma of literary linguistic binaries. Carving a space between Black Power and Second Wave Feminism, Black feminist literary criticism gained prominence in the identity movements of the 1970s. Significant claims arose around the metapragmatics of Black women's language use. Susanne Mühleisen argues that Frederick Douglass enters humanity through the pen, but that Black women enter through the voice.[5] Identified as primarily vocal communicators, Black women were expected to make writing speak; in this task, they were restricted to literary dialect.[6] The early Black feminist criticism read literary dialect in diegesis as the progressive and revolutionary expression (Cudjoe, Watson, McDowell). Opal Palmer Adisa writes that women writers have a "responsibility to speak, and to speak in language that their sisters can understand": "nation language" (28). Those novelists who apparently confined dialect to dialogue were seen as supporting that hierarchy of language which valued standard language abilities over vernacular ones, therefore supporting an oppressive system. These prescriptive readings, however, are complicated by descriptive analysis of Black women's actual language practices.

Without dismissing either standard or dialect, reading both in Black women novels presents a resistant metapragmatics that plays with iconization. Brown suggests that "when the logic of influence works from the bottom up, rather than the top down, the metapragmatic rearticulation of an ideology need not be affirmative or consistent; that it can, in fact, also be

5 Douglass, though, began as a speechmaker encouraged to write his story and continued to be a well-respected orator, while many prominent black female speechmakers were also copious publishers.

6 Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" is an early example of this classification. A slave on a family farm in upstate New York, Truth was owned by members of the region's Dutch immigrant community (of Washington Irving's Sleepy Hollow, in fact). Her first language was Dutch, so her English would have sounded nothing like that of the southern slaves. The first full transcription of her renown speech is written in standard English, and does not even include the famous question; the second and more well-known one, written twelve years later, introduces "Ain't I a Woman?" – a question which has become metonymic of Black feminist practice (McDowell, *Changing Same* 36). McDowell also notes Nell Irvin Painter's question about why Truth's "'naive… persona… seems to have better facilitated black women's entry into American memory' better than any of her educated black female contemporaries" ("Black Feminist" 562). The current scholarly fashion is to call the speech "Ar'n't I a Woman?"

resistant" (598). Rejecting a nationalist monolingualism, integrating standard and dialect can challenge the subordination of difference. Black women's frames can reorient the purported objectivity of the traditional oppositional frame to highlight its subjective intention. They create a frame that acknowledges the impossibility of totality and the authority of choice, presenting a more complicated depiction of the interaction between the world and the Black female subject.

The linguistic binary imposed in the postcolonial itself develops from the imposition of humanist singularity, which, in order to maintain its confinements and exclusions, reincorporates challenges to its authority by inscribing them as incompatible oppositions. Sylvia Wynter reads the development of Western humanism as reducing the human to one man: "White, of Euroamerican culture and descent, middle-class, college-educated and suburban" ("No Humans Involved" 43); she finds a convenient name for this reduction in the formerly common shortened form of human, Man ("On Disenchanting" 209). Everyone else is non-Man, incompatible with his rational authority, divergent from his standard.

Wynter argues that Black women's writing offers something more than just non-Man; their discursive presence is a challenge to his ideological supremacy. Their texts replace his singular authority with a plurality that turns oppositions into diverse integrations. In the afterword to a collection of essays on Caribbean women's writing—collected in consideration of the "historical absence of the woman writer's text" (Davies 1)—Wynter concludes that the emergence of Black women's texts heralds a move to "demonic ground": "a vantage point outside space-time orientation of the humuncular observer" ("Beyond Miranda" 364). The humuncular space-time orientation is Man's view, his perspective made universal (Wynter

"Beyond Miranda" 364-365); therefore, the appearance of Black women discourse, a parallax view, is a paradigm shift. Wynter demonstrates the move with *The Tempest*. Black writers have found a literary exemplar of the exclusions of Western humanism in Shakespeare's late-stage play. First performed in an era of increasing literacy as the initial encounters with Others were resulting in determined domination of those Others, *The Tempest* stages an encounter that seems to metonymize that of the African and Caribbean/Latin American colonial experience. The slave Caliban says: "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother / Which thou tak'st from me" (Shakespeare 1.2.331-332). Caliban, whose name possibly anagrams into cannibal, is the subaltern colonial subject resisting the linguistic oppression that enforces enslavement. He says: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse" (Shakespeare 1.2.363-364). Wynter, though, identifies another problem in the social organization represented on the island. There is a significant absence: Caliban's female counterpart. Sexual desire in *The Tempest* is directed at the white, upper class (only) woman, Miranda. If Miranda as white woman is canonized as the rational object of Caliban's desire (in fact, the desire of all the men on the island [except her father presumably]), then the racialized woman is an absent "potential genitrix" (Wynter, "Beyond Miranda" 361). Wynter argues that Caliban's lack of desire for his own mate is the "founding function" of what Maryse Condé calls "the social pyramid" of the global order inaugurated after 1492 ("Beyond Miranda" 360). She theorizes that "[t]he absence of Caliban's woman is therefore an ontological absence" (Wynter, "Beyond Miranda" 361). Black women's texts then assert their selves as alternate desiring presences—an ontological shift that invalidates the pyramid.

Wynter borrows the term ‘demonic ground’ from the biologist Alex Comfort, who simply wants to imagine what biologists may be missing from their linear human perspective (213). Aware of his richly allusive term, Comfort is careful to distinguish his usage from the “imaginary demiurge” (211), but I would like to retain the danger of the imaginary in my use of Wynter’s new paradigm. The humanist paradigm expels demons; there, the Black woman is Sycorax, absented before the text even begins.[7] The shift to demonic ground reveals the presence of Caliban’s woman within humanism, the dangerous Sycorax reoriented. Now subject of desire, she endangers Man’s oppressive certainty with the assertion of her own desire. Black women’s desires are as dangerous to Man’s authority as the presence of the mythical demon. Wynter writes that it is transgressive to “[go] beyond the boundaries of our present episteme into a new constitutive domain of knowledge,” a process she calls disenchanting discourse (“On Disenchanting Discourse” 240). Her naming of the demonic integrates the opposing forces of language, its centripetal pressure and centrifugal possibility, *langue* and *parole*. This dangerous duality encompasses Man’s erasures and Black women’s assertions. Davis claims that Black women’s “writing in English... almost always begins with painful acts of resistance that out of necessity seek to challenge and destabilize” (179-180). Black women are located in a narrative of oppression, but their play with language challenges that story. In the novels, desire is often manifested sexually; this is a metonym for an assertion of subjectivity. The unashamed expression of desire rebukes the ontological absence, reveals it as a sensory lack—a wilful blind spot. Their desire alerts us to the lack by presenting an alternate form of knowledge that supports the paradigm shift. If the demon is the outsider within abjected from the nation of

7 In his *Barabajan Poems* (1994), Brathwaite positions Sycorax in opposition to Prospero, who we might read as Man.

Standard Man, then Black women's voices are that of the serpent's, offering the knowledge that shifts us from the eternal, closed (universal) Eden to a beautifully and terribly mortal, changeable universe: a shift from singularity to multiplicity. Revaluing her historical abjection, Black women enacting desire is a radical otherwordly act that demands language variety.

Novels provide an exemplary field to follow the linguistic play of Black women writers on demonic ground. Wynter claims that fictional narrative provides the most lucid place to see the intent behind discourse, a revelation crucial to the disenchantment of Man ("Disenchantment" 230). In a narrative of desiring discourse, these writers oscillate between discourse and body, playing with their racialized and gendered iconizations to destabilize those associations. Louisiana, née Ella, declares in her eponymous novel: "I am becoming. Language is key" (Brodber 117); the variability of language use in the novels insists on identity variability. Through Mikhail Bakhtin, I locate the novel as a site of intent with inherent linguistic diversity. Within the novel, language can move, revealing (and reveling in) a variability that replicates that of borders and races.

In tune with sociolinguist theory, Bakhtin notes that scholars had previously studied language in literature as if it were unitary, but this unity does not exist in the novel (269). He writes: "The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls" (Bakhtin 261). His tracing of the novel's stylistic lineage parallels the history of literary dialect offered previously; he claims that it was:

> the minor low genres (out of the mainstream of the great chivalric romance), on a small scale (itinerant stage, public squares on market day, street songs and jokes) that were first worked out for constructing images of a language, devices for coupling discourse with the image of a particular kind of speaker, devices for an objective exhibiting of discourse together with a specific kind of person and not as an expression in some depersonalized language understood by all the same way. (Bakhtin 400-1)

These early works depict a heteroglossia that imitates society rather than refines it. This imitative heteroglossic practice culminates in the novel, where "all socially significant world views have the capacity to exploit the intentional possibilities of language through the medium of their specific concrete instancing" (Bakhtin 290). The novel takes the diverse speech from the prior forms and turns it to ends, staging debates between diverse social perspectives. Bakhtin identifies the basic distinguishing feature of novel stylistics as the orchestration of its theme through different languages (263). The novel is a narrative of language ideology. This narrative is Bakhtin's language image; ideology is "[t]he framing context, like the sculptor's chisel, [which] hews out the rough outlines of someone else's speech, and carves the image of a language out of the raw empirical data of speech life" (357). The novel genre is then a framed narrrative, a long form sibling to the works of Chesnutt and Harris, that produces an image; however, with heteroglossia, it need not be a fixed one.

The novel dialogic—the orchestration of heteroglossia—is primed for the revelatory intervention of Black women excluded from the mainstream. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson reads Black women's writing as characteristically dialogic in its intersectional character (118). Their uncomfortable position in discussions of gender and race puts their writing in dialogue with

aspects of otherness within the self and with the generalized Other. The Black woman is "Other" of the Same and "other" of the other (Henderson 20). Henderson casts oppression as a discursive dilemma in Black women's writing; the writers must raise the problem of Black women's relationship to power and discourse, but to represent their oppression and erasure, the representation must remain on the borders of discourse and retain its special vantage point of insider/outsider (24). The novel dialogic is open to this destabilizing plural positioning. Affirming the novel's revolutionary capabilities, Bakhtin sees its birth from "minor" works, "out of the mainstream," as a particular challenge to hegemonic authority. Contrasting poetry to the novel, he sees verse as unitary, and therefore aligned with "cultural, national, and political centralization," whereas prose is "the heteroglossia of the clown," undermining pretensions to absolute authority (Bakhtin 273). Bakhtin contends that heteroglossia gives a bodily form to the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, classes, schools, circles, generations, and between differing epochs of the past (291). The corporeal analogy becomes vital in the novel. Bakhtin explains that "the art of prose is close to a conception of languages as historically concrete and living things" (331), as *parole*. For Bakhtin, the vitality of this challenge to authority makes it warlike: "[the prose art] deals with discourse that is still warm from that struggle and hostility, as yet unresolved and still fraught with hostile intentions and accents" (331). In this language of physical conflict, the dialogic is a "contraction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (272). The novel will throw its own live bodies, "discourse that is still warm," at the battle, a war of utterances.

Bakhtin's implied violence raises an issue for Henderson. She argues that Bakhtin's dialogic is "primarily adversarial" in a way that maintains conventional categories and boundaries of discourse (Henderson 62). Each language image "fused" to a (communal) body (Bakhtin 357),[8] the battle endures. To transcend this dialogic battle, Henderson suggests incorporating Gadamer's dialectical model of conversation, which offers consensus, communality, and identification (62). From sociolinguistics, translangualism offers another dynamic to disenchant bodies fused to singular images. With the translangual perspective, the frame lays bare pretensions and presumptions to complexify the Black women's discursive images—individual bodies in intimacy with communal ones.

The question has been whether standard or dialect limits or liberates (Rickford and Rickford 38), but translangualism moves beyond this question entirely by moving the writer within both forces. Translangualism makes permeable the boundaries between standard and dialect, and it bridges the distance between the creator and creative sides of language. Richard Otheguy, Ofelia García, and Wallis Read argue that while sociolinguists consider the *langue* and *parole* distinction a given, the categories are not made distinct enough when studying the practices of bi- and multilingualism. Researchers understand the code-switch as an "expressive transgression" of the boundaries of named languages, endowing the speakers with an agency that can display "linguistic mastery and virtuosity"; however, they still consider the user as manipulating two separate systems (Otheguy et al. 282). According to Otheguy, García, and Read: "The named language adopts the view from outside the speaker, a perspective from which the speaker has to fit as a member of a set group; it offers description based on external

8 Poignant against Henderson's observation that Black women writers have been drawn to the dialogic, neither gender nor ethnicity are part of Bakhtin's list of heteroglossic socio-ideological categories.

categories that emanate from, and in turn reaffirm, sociocultural or national (and also often political) structures" (297). Translangualism "adopts the perspective of the individual, the view from inside the speaker"; it is "*using one's idiolect, that is, one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language labels or boundaries*" (Otheguy et al. 297, italics theirs). In its attention to subjective expression, rather than focusing on a singular language as resistant, whether standard or nonstandard, the expansive possibilities of translangualism more clearly identify how Black women writers' metapragmatics produce linguistic identities that challenge hegemonic ideologies.

Translangualism reorients Bakhtin's fusions as Édouard Glissant's Relation: the novel as rhizomatic. Deleuze and Guattari propose the multifaceted rhizome as an alternative to the singular root model of development. This critique, like Bakhtin's rejection of the literary monad, aligns with sociolinguistic critiques of the philological family tree model, which posits pure languages and developed concomitantly with modern ideas about race and its hierarchies (Sebba). Joseph Errington argues that the family tree model is an attempt to place peoples into discrete lines and deny intermixing (64). Similarly, Glissant asserts that "[t]he root is monolingual" (*Poetics* 15). Grounding these theories in the racialized experience, Glissant takes up the rhizome as specifically related to the Black diaspora's rupture from singularity: the abyss. Through its absolute break with a known past, the unwilling voyage from Africa to America leaves in its wake an abyss; the abyss contains the unknown—both of the past, the lost homelands; and the future, the undetermined new positioning (Glissant, *Poetics* 6). Its oceanic base makes it a fluid conduit (Glissant, *Poetics* 7). The abyss acknowledges the confinements of

history and offers the possibility of expansion. As the past and the future, the abyss is a frame for the present, a frame in changing contact with the image through gaps of unknowing.

In Glissant's formulation, the history of Black people in the Americas—the legacy of slavery with its erasures and its intermixing—gives rise to a cultural contact that informs heteroglossia. The Plantation clarifies the image; Glissant writes: "It is also within the Plantation that the meeting of cultures is most clearly and directly observable" (*Poetics* 74). Controlled by the Man, the Plantation is also the violent imposition of racial and linguistic hierarchies. Presenting itself as the soil of the authoritative root, the Plantation attempts to deny the interactions of its heteroglossia (Glissant, *Poetics* 75): the creator waging war against the creative. Bakhtin agrees that "authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it" (343). Confined by its own monolingual borders, the lingua franca of the introduction's epigraph is also Bakhtin's authoritative language, static and obscuring. Witnessed on the Plantation, "the great Western languages," the colonial grammarians' "supposedly vehicular languages" in fact arrest movement by obscuring links. The named language overshadows with its externally imposed boundaries. Anticipating the postcolonial approaches, Bakhtin argues of authoritative language, "one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it" (Bakhtin 343); so, for Bakhtin, this means that "[i]ts role in the novel is insignificant" (344). The novel contains oppositions; it does not exclude them. Glissant, however, does not affirm or reject the authoritative language; he interrelates and de-hierarchizes it: "Relation, in contrast, is spoken multilingually" (19). In this multilinguality, Relation reveals oppositions as integrated. Bakhtin's dialogic includes difference, but his opposing socio-

ideological bodies are fused to language and battle linguistically. Glissant's Relation supports the slippage between body and word, the possibility of play with ideology in the novel. He writes: "Relation is movement" (*Poetics* 171); Michael Wiedorn elaborates: "Relation connotes action and future, creative potential" (913). Glissant deconstructs the root to promote the movement of the route. The multitude of possibilities in Relation engenders the translangualism of the moving image.

The rhizome's proliferation of associations entails movement along the connections; thus, "The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation" (*Poetics* 18). It is the dialogic as travel, not battle. Errantry accretes heteroglossia, which provides the energy to generate more linguistic movement. Glissant writes: "Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (*Poetics* 11). The rhizome constructs heteroglossia as adaptive interactions, ensuring the dialogic as dialectic. Glissant argues that "the dialectic is not a linear approach toward that which is contrary. The dialectic is a total rhizome of what's different" (*Poetics* 19). It is the continual production of difference through interconnectedness. Relating the process back to language, Glissant engages creolization. Glissant's creolization is not the linguistic creole—a mixed language, a codifiable basilect. Though it is inspired by the generation of creoles, it is not meant to privilege the vernacular. Rather, it evokes the "fluid set of linguistic resources" of repertoire (Benor 160), which supplies translangualism with its wide variety of "features to make meaning" (García 87). In creolization, heteroglossia is freed from struggle against "a unitary language" (Bakhtin 270). In the production of choice from variety, creolization "never becom[es] fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as

define" (Glissant, *Poetics* 34). As Clevis Headley describes it, "creolization... is an infinite process in movement" (90). As language changes, so does its relationship to the image. In relational difference, the image can be defused, no longer a weapon. Creolization suggests the possibility of intimacy with the image, a transgressive translangualism.

In my own errantry, I use Caribbean theorists to analyze novels by US authors and a novel by a Caribbean author set in the US; these texts demonstrate just how permeable these linguistic and national borders are. At the turn of the twentieth century, Wai Chee Dimock notices a shift from studying literature nationally to questioning "the analytical adequacy of the sovereign state" (3). She suggests that "nation" is a simple shorthand for a network of relations, and to properly view those relations, the scale must be enlarged. Glissant agrees: "The limits—the frontiers—of a State can be grasped, but a culture's cannot" (*Poetics* 165). Dimock notes that languages are suited to analyses that exceed periodic and national boundaries, which is especially applicable to one as dispersed as English (5). Still, in her use of language to explore the emerging question of diaspora in African-American literature, even Dimock focuses only on the nonstandard (142). Caribbean theorists offer a way out of this singularity through integrating opposition. Norval Edwards notes that Caribbean scholars, including Wynter, have been using the analytical paradigm of dialogism "long before Mikhail Bakhtin became fashionable" (17). He writes that "[d]ialogue becomes the site for staging a series of conflictual and creative encounters and relations that constitute the cultural grammar of Caribbean writing and criticism" (N. Edwards 18). Calling it the Repeating Island, Antonio Benítez-Rojo figures it as containing and processing chaos. The archipelago that forms the Caribbean then becomes a receptacle and an

atomizer of people and culture. Hall calls it “the place of many, continuous displacements” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 234)—Glissant, “a sea that diffracts” (*Poetics* 33). Accommodation of opposition is immanent in the dual nominalism of the Caribbean land and sea. This dialogic of earth and water presents (unsteady) footing from which to re-vantage oppositional politics. Henderson’s explanation of Black women’s discursive position has a geographical analogue. The slippery Caribbean is the archipelago of the abyss: demonic ground that turns antagonistic opposition to intimate Relation.

Errantry also works in time. Often genealogies of racialized literature trace a trajectory toward artistic liberation–that Phillis Wheatley was as contained by her language as Black Arts writers were free with theirs. This perspective, however, reduces the rhizome to the root. As Glissant writes, “text [should] never [be] presented linguistically as an edict or a relay, on the basis of which some literary progression might be detected, with another text coming along to perfect the former, and so on” (*Poetics* 69). Time does not make better writers, though it does change the tenor of the issues they have to confront. The specifics of time and space are nodes on the rhizome, the variety of vantages that reveals new ground. To read across space and time repeats the oscillation of unity and distinction within the image of Black and woman.

On demonic ground, these texts see and hear with the serpent’s forked tongue, the split yet integrated sensor a metaphor for the synaesthesic translangualism of these novels. In all these novels, translangualism is not just a property of the author, but is embedded in characters who display the same free facility. The chapter Daguerreotype begins near the beginning with the destabilizing of linguistic associations of *Contending Forces* (1900) by Pauline E. Hopkins. The earliest Black women novelists, Hopkins and her contemporaries historicize the emergence

of Black women's desires in discourse. Hopkins frames her assertion with her oppression. With this frame, Hopkins avoids the expected representations of named languages by playing with the presumptive connections of sound and body to text and authority. Her desire translanguages in an assertion of subjective equality. Next, Moving Pictures uses Zora Neale Hurston's now canonical *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) to move from the historical and establish the theoretical stakes of framing turned to Black women's purposes. Her use of dialect in the novel is often figured as the root origin of Black women's interest in linguistic play. Not the reductive eye dialect of the plantation novels, her dialect exhibits her research in diasporic ethnologies. Her play, however, with standard *and* dialect exhibits her translangual facility, underscoring the variability of Black women's linguistic identities as demonstrated in her ambivalent protagonist. Double Exposure uses *Louisiana* (1994) by the Jamaican sociologist and novelist Erna Brodber to explore the diasporic implications of Hurston's metapragmatics. The biography of *Louisiana*'s protagonist is clearly inspired by Hurston's own, particularly her work as an anthropological researcher. Brodber also deploys narrative polyphony within her main character and with other characters, in addition to a plurality of narrative identities, geographies, and textual genres that grounds this racialized and gendered translangualism in the diaspora to explicitly politicize Hurston's theorizing. Finally, Photonegative concludes the readings with *Sula* (1973) by Toni Morrison. Performing an unconscious inversion of Hurston's practice, Morrison's discourse embodies her linguistic theorising in a relationship with absence. Foregrounding the sorrows of erasure as part of heteroglossic generation, Morrison structures her translanguaging with absence as a call to the reader's social responsibilities.

From their initial publications, Black women novelists have played with a repertoire of standard and nonstandard English to perform and promote their complex identities against their simplified iconization. The linguistic drive of these novels comes from the desire to be seen, but specifically seen through the generosity of intimacy, which allows veiling alongside revelation. Together they present a practice of translangualism that directly responds to the confinements of linguistic singularity. Otheguy, García, and Read note that "the common features that are seen to be shared by idiolects emerge only *after* the idiolects have been classified on a cultural basis belonging to the same named language" (294, italics theirs); the linguistic category only arises in response to the social one. The metapragmatics of these texts align in answer to the discursive creation of Black women in relation to the cultural classification of Man.

The linguistic-somatic intimacy of these novels is aimed at language ideologies. Intimacy occurs not only within the novel but between the novel and the world. Glissant writes: "To declare one's identity is to write the world into existence" (*Caribbean Discourse* 169); Wiedorn argues that "Glissant traces a line from thought to action, as new ways of reading call for new actions in the imaginary. ... living Relation. Or rather, to experiencing/experimenting with its imaginary (imaginaire)" (913-914). To read differently is to experience differently, which is to act differently and speak differently. In the examples for this dissertation, it is a moving imaginary, driven by the rhythms of language variety. Katherine McKittrick, Frances H. O'Shaughnessy, and Kendall Witaszek highlight the importance of rhythm in Wynter's theorizing. In Wynter's own practice of demonic ground, she develops the human beyond the Darwin model of evolution: "She argues that we are, as a human species, bios-mythois: the word (*mythoi*) conditions the study of nature (*bios*); mythoi and bios are enmeshed and,

together, posit the human as biological-storytelling species" (McKittrick et al. 867). They argue that the simultaneity of the bios-mythois, a "rhythmic interplay between nature and narrative," "provides a rhythmic framework that refuses the linear teleology of 'evolution,' which hierarchically organizes—and evaluates—humans according to phenotype" (McKittrick et al. 867). It disrupts linearity with the rhythm of oscillation. Similarly, Wiedorn argues that "Glissant's essays have often staged a contradictory cohabitation of opposite arguments, insisting on a simultaneity of (apparent) antagonists" (904). For my purposes, *bios-mythois* is not always a simultaneity, but is integrated in a movement back and forth that produces Relation: the errantry of the novel. The coming together and falling apart of body and language in desire in the novel can escape Man's arresting control with transgressive intimacy. Rhythm underscores the experience of this errantry. The narrative of these metapragmatic destabilizations of Man's structures offers an experience of embodied language use, a rhythm of translanguaging that demonstrates oppression and its resistance to rescript Black women's images.

In authorizing their novel desire, these Black women writers integrate oppositional hierarchies to reorient the battle stance to one of intercourse, turning the postcolonial linguistic opposition into a fruitful multiplicity. In their exclusion from discourse, Black women's bodies are made a contradiction to thought—all surface, no interiority. From slavery, the Black woman is reduced to skin and sex; then, even in writing, she can only be sound. These writers use synaesthesia to rescript the indexicality of sound and writing. The intimacy of the senses is a template for the integration of oppositions, foregrounding the experience of that dynamic integration. Engaging the movement of language, Black women's discourses depict the mutable

depth of their images. Wynter argues that “[t]he fixity of ‘Man’ and its model necessarily depends on the fixity and nonvalue of the *nègre*” ("Beyond the Word" 645). Glissant muses that “[h]umanity is perhaps not ‘the image of man’ but today the evergrowing network of recognized opaque structures” (*Caribbean Discourse* 133). Bakhtin, too, invokes network intimacy in considering the novel’s dialogism with rhetorical and artistic genres, which he calls “intimate interaction (both peaceful and hostile)” (269). From this intimate interaction these Black women writers inhabit the opposition of body and discourse with translangualism to deploy their protagonists beyond the binary into the world, a network of interaction. Glissant writes:

> The dialectic would have no chance of entering into what we refer to as being the real, if it kept to its constitutive bifidities [*bifidités*], for example the pro and the con, the positive and the negative, the master and the slave, Being and nothingness. Today’s humanities call out to the unexpected (wild) dialectics of multiplicity. (qtd. in Wiedorn 911)

The wild dialects are the serpent speaking demon love. Insisting on the intimate somatic presence—the Black and female—the metapragmatics of these novelists rescript the world with a rhythmic narrative embrace: discursive intimacy that dances us to demonic ground.

chapter two: daguerreotype

With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,/ And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask"

At the first meeting of the National Association of Colored Women in 1895, Virginia Earle Matthews gives a talk, "The Value of Race Literature," which argues that "[o]ur history and individuality as a people, not only provides material for masterly treatment; but would seem to make a Race Literature a necessity as an outlet for the unnaturally suppressed inner lives which our people have been compelled to lead" (qtd. in Sawaya 76). The unnatural suppression places a specific force on the expression of "Race Literature," which increases when gender is considered. This is the engine of nineteenth-century essayist and teacher Anna Julia Cooper's famous declaration: "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say, 'when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me'*" (69, emphases hers). Cooper places within the statement many textual highlights; it is within quotations, the speaker is capitalized, the position is rhymed ("when and where" and "then and there"), and the crux of the assertion is italicized. In this excess of writing, Cooper draws attention to the linguistic authority of Black women in positioning their own bodies, underscoring their right to set discursive terms alongside physical ones.[9] The strength of Cooper's desire to manifest this authority outside of the text ornaments the text. Pauline E. Hopkins's translangualism in *Contending Forces* (1900), the first Black woman's novel of the twentieth century, also counters that unnatural suppression in a textual display of desire. Elena Lombardi glosses Jacques Lacan's rewrite of Jacques Descartes's *cogito* as "I desire, therefore I exist" (Lombardi 5); the equation for nineteenth-century Black women writers is I desire, therefore I write. Emerging from a recent history of

9 As others have noted, Cooper textualizes Sojourner Truth's refrain.

discursive invisibility, Hopkins's ornamentation appears in a repetition of genealogies and circumstances that allows her to play with the expectations of standard and dialect. In asserting her desire through her translangualism, Hopkins's writing exceeds Man's frame. Her manipulation of literary language dismantles oppressive ideologies.

Caliban's absent mate desires to speak and, in assertion of her humanity, she must speak her desire. In *Contending Forces*, sexual desire embodies the desire for authority. Black women's sexual objectification begins, of course, in the brutal economics and power relations of slavery where Black women were valued as worker-property and producers of more worker-properties (Angela Davis 6-7). Angela Davis argues that rape was "an uncamouflaged expression" of "economic mastery" and control over workers (7). Describing Black women as "reified into a status of non-being" ("Interstices" 155), Hortense Spillers theorizes this diminution as their bodies reduced to flesh, scripts with no depth ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" 260). This is inherent in their sexual objectification. In her inspiriting musings on Black women's sexual representations, Spillers begins: "Their sexual experiences are depicted, but not often by them" ("Interstices" 153). Elizabeth Ammons argues that Black women have not been silent in her reminder that they have been "extraordinarily rich in oral literary tradition" (*Conflicting* 20), but, like Carole Boyce Davies, Spillers points out: "In the world of 'toasts,' 'roasts,' and 'boasts,' in the universe of unreality and exaggeration, the black female is, if anything, a creature of sex, but *sexuality* touches her nowhere" ("Interstices" 155, emphasis hers). Excluded from authority over representation, Black women are all sex and no humanity. Sex is a physical act, but sexuality is beyond physicality in the way of what Sylvia Wynter terms *bios-mythois*: "the human as biological-storytelling species" (McKittrick et. al 867);

sexuality is act and narrative, the self-representation of a sexual being. Without subjectivity, there can be no sexuality. Black women have been objects of desire, but not ontologically; the obscuring objectification of Man's desire ensures their discursive absence because it only operates without their consent. Man confirms his exclusionary desire with an authoritative monolingualism that obscures Black women while claiming to expose the Black woman's unfitness as woman.[10] It is a dehumanizing desire that denies even itself, misdirecting in the magic trick of oppression, turning the fault on the victim. Under these circumstances, self-representation is revolutionary; the ontological disturbance of an object asserting its own desire is the heteroglossic destabilization of a paradigm shift to demonic ground.

Sex and sexuality make up the historical hinge between racial and gender politics, and Black women's writing. Hopkins's exploration of sex and race dynamics structures her destabilization of Black women's discursive images. In the preface to the novel, Hopkins writes: "Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is record of growth and development from generation to generation" (13-14). Echoing Matthews' claim that the goal of literature is "the preserving of all the records of a Race" (qtd. in Sawaya 76), Hopkins begins preserving a record of violence against Black women's bodies; her novel demonstrates their ongoing oppression alongside a possible linguistic freedom.

Contending Forces begins in the antebellum period with the narrative of a slave master's abuse. In order to satiate his rebuffed then camouflaged sexual desire, Anson Pollock arouses a

---

10 Charles Cullum explains:

> the stereotype of African American women from the time of slavery and continuing through to post-Reconstruction was as naturally licentious, oversexed, and so inviting and tempting men, in particular white men, into sexual liaisons, and correspondingly, as being tainted, soiled, by those very liaisons, as, that is, 'fallen' women incapable, by definition, of qualifying as 'true' women. (124)

murderous mob by encouraging speculation that his object of desire, white woman Grace Montfort, is secretly Black and that her husband Charles Montfort plans to free his slaves (the former unconfirmed even by the narrator and the latter true). The mob kills Montfort, allowing Pollock to enslave Grace and her children. This antebellum trauma frames the post-Reconstruction main plot in which the mystery of the protagonist's shameful therefore secret background, which she hoped to leave behind in New Orleans—Sappho was abducted and raped by her white uncle—is the obstruction to her romantic plot with the hero, Will Smith—a direct descendant of the Montforts. Will is tied to the historical frame by blood; Sappho is tied through a narrative of Black female abuse. This repetition of blood and rape propels the novel narrative. Kate McCullough argues:

> Using rape in place of 'passing' as a figure for relations between the races, Hopkins self consciously underscores the ways in which the white American imagination had linked sexuality to racial identity and had, moreover, figured a racial 'threat' in sexual terms. Thus, she both addresses and redresses the discursive terms used to construct African American womanhood and in so doing exhibits not a post-Reconstruction African American drive toward assimilation but an emphasis on the historical construction of race relations and how they are sexually configured. (25)

In the late nineteenth century, Black women writers claim the narration of their sexual oppression as part of racial uplift. Ammons argues that Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) embeds "verbal self-definition" deep within "sexual self-definition" (*Conflicting* 31); in *Contending Forces*, they surface together. The repression of sexual authority puts the pressure on language as a place of resistant authority, intensifying the linguistic expression.

Narration of abuses is only one part of this project; assertion of desire is the driving purpose. Ann DuCille's theory on the sexuality of the Black sentimental text claims that one of the "most important raison[s] d'être" for nineteenth-century Black women's texts is the right to erotic desire (46). DuCille's argument depends on a distinction between placement and displacement; claiming deliberateness in the sites of passion and desire, she writes: "...sexual desire is not *displaced* by social purpose but *encoded* in it" (45, emphasis hers). Encoding suggests a way to read a link between the body and the language of the text. Contrasted to the violence against Black women in *Contending Forces*, Hopkins's expressive linguistic variety allows her to find a passion in representation, displaying authoritative desire over the heteroglossic intercourse of discourse. Sexuality weaves the body into the text, encoding the body as ornament—a highly wrought dialogic of languages and bodies that engages in repetition and reversal to reorient.

Black women's subjectivities are the confluence of this crossroads of body and language. Hopkins's translanguaging through standard and dialect acts, as Daphne Brooks explains of Black women's live performances, to "call attention to the skill of the performer who, through gestures and speech as well as material props and visual technologies, is able to confound and disrupt conventional construction of the racialized and gendered body" (8). Hopkins's translanguaging skill is evident in her textual ornamentation. Dorri Beam describes ornamentation as "disproportion" (21); ornamental excess "move[s] out of the physical body… to overproduce the textual body" (33). In her racialized and gendered practice, Hopkins overproduces the linguistic image to enter that physical body—Black and female—and assert her discursive control, disrupting convention in revealing historical erasures. Ammons describes

Hopkins's writing as rough and unharmonious ("Afterword" 212); it is the polyrhythm of this Black female narrative, its complex obscurity produced from the mix of desire and oppression. In Hopkins's composition, Black women are not just presence, but "making present" (Beam 33), presenting a palimpsest: a thick texture, full and weighty. Brooks argues that "there are ways to read for the viability of black women making use of their own materiality within narratives in which they are the subjects" (7-8). DuCille reads this in the marriage plot as a specific positioning of passion, "a rewriting of the convention and an act of reclamation" (46). In a discursive excess from suppressed desire, I read a complementary passion in the reclamation of Black women's bodies through a rewriting of language use. In an oscillation of text and body, Hopkins's repetition with variety is the "proliferation, intensification, and embellishment" through which that text expresses an alternative presence (Beam 22): the loving demon.

In Hopkins's reorienting narration, the text delights in its deployments, drawing up Black women's submerged desires. In an assertion of Black female desire and a protection from Man's desire, the ornament possible from a free use of translangualism produces opaque bodies indicating high density—impenetrable. Édouard Glissant describes opacity as a rejection of the oppressive transparency of Western rationalism (*Poetics* 14). Clevis Headley explains its importance to Glissant's theorizing: "without the ontological armor of opacity, one is left vulnerable to the oppressive gaze of transparency that demands the right to assimilate the Other within the Same" (92). One is lost in Mae Henderson's discursive dilemma; however, opaque language maintains the difference that Henderson values. While still voicing "the torments of past and present" (Dash 42), "the demand for opaque language can be understood as a strategy

for guarding subjectivity from the universalizing tendencies of regimes of Sameness" (Headley 93). The opacity possible in translangualism avoids this simplification. Brooks sees Hopkins's "disruliness," as Ammons puts it ("Afterword" 213), as "something in excess"; Brooks argues that this excess fuels a show of what she terms "spectacular opacity": "dark points of possibility that create figurative sites for the reconfiguration of black and female bodies on display. A kind of shrouding, this trope of darkness paradoxically allows for corporeal unveiling to yoke with the (re)covering and rehistoricizing of the flesh" (8). There is a tension between revelation and obscurity that displays change to protect what has been exposed. Asserting what Glissant calls "the right to opacity" (*Poetics* 203), Hopkins traffics in excess to assert herself, but not make the characters transparent. Using ornamentation to reveal herself as subjective being, Hopkins depicts complexity rather than transparency. She takes the reduced object and refracts her subjective expression through a mirror of whiteness, using the image the master has imposed as a daguerreotype, mirror from one angle, revealing a different image from another. Ornamentation offers an opacity that protects her depths and reflects Man's abuses back to him, a daguerreotype of demonic ground. In the shift of position, the image within the frame diffracts in the polyrhythm of translangualism demonstrating, but not excavating, subjective desire.

The late nineteenth century was the first mass flowering of Black women's discourse in mainstream Western culture. Harper, long thought the first Black novelist, called the 1890s, the decade her novel was published, "the women's era." Hazel Carby writes: "the period was one of intense activity and productivity for Afro-American women" (96). The work of the period encompasses the political and the literary. Ammons writes that "[i]t was no accident that the

[outpouring of stories and novels by American black women from the early 1890s] coincided exactly with the tremendous political ferment unleashed and mobilized within the black community, and particularly within the black women's movement, at the turn of the century" (*Conflicting* 22). Claudia Tate notes the nineteenth-century writers' awareness of the political foundation of their literature: "Many of the black women writers of the post-Reconstruction period complemented their literary interventionism with activism in specific reform movements" (*Domestic Allegories* 11).[11] Their literary work is then integrated into their causes. Henry Louis Gates argues that slaves wrote to prove themselves human ("Writing Race" 8-9). In this era, Black women's writing proves *bios-mythois*.

Matthews focuses on women as her racialized literary guide:

> Woman's part in Race Literature, as in Race building, is the most important part and has been so in all ages…. All through the most remote epochs she has done her share in literature. When not an active singer like Sappho, she has been the means of producing poets, statesmen, historians, understandingly as Napoleon's mother worked on Homeric tapestry while bearing the future conqueror of the world. (qtd. in Sawaya 77)

Matthews offers a measure of authority to the women of the past, but her talk makes clear that in the present it is time to activate that authority. Hopkins perhaps alludes to Matthews' literary imperative in naming the protagonist of *Contending Forces* Sappho (Sawaya 77n13). She has seen Sapphos step forward in the previous decade, but her textual Sappho emphasizes the continued need for action.

---

11 Specifically, "temperance, women's suffrage, the nullification of segregation laws, the reform of convict-lease systems, and antilynching legislation" (*Domestic Allegories* 11).

Noting that writing by Black women, excepting novels, had been published in the United States since the eighteenth century (the earliest anywhere), Ammons argues that the women's era inaugurated "an almost militant, shared—as opposed to sporadic—public determination among many women writers to *name* the systems of violence, sexual control, and silencing that governed the lives of countless American women" (20-21, emphasis hers). Teresa Zackodnick explains that the goal for nineteenth-century Black women writers was "to dispel [a] distorted view of African American women" (qtd. in Cullum 125). Before Hopkins, there was Harper, whose novel (along with William Wells Brown's *Clotel* [1853]) bolsters Hopkins's nineteenth-century sensibility (despite her twentieth-century publication). Acknowledging Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and Amelia Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne* (1891), Ammons writes that *Iola Leroy*, the earliest known novel for many later Black woman writers, "does represent a substantive first, if not a literal one, for it was the first novel by a black American woman to gain both immediate and lasting recognition"; going into second and third editions, it never stopped being published (*Conflicting* 21). Harper is a "harbinger" (Ammons, *Conflicting* 27). Ammons explains: "Harper's novel embodies what would become one of the core issues of serious writing by women at the turn of the century—the will to break silence by exposing the connection among institutionalized violence, the sexual exploitation of women, and female muteness" (*Conflicting* 20). Harper, however, is reticent compared to Hopkins. Harper's historical novel alludes to her present; the first name of her protagonist (and novel), Iola, is the pseudonym that Ida B. Wells, the well-known anti-lynching activist, used in her early newspaper writing (DuCille 35); another character's full name closely resembles that of the author of a slave narrative published the year before *Iola Leroy* (Foreman 349). In contrast,

DuCille writes that Hopkins "explicitly identifies lynching and concubinage as the subjects of her first novel, *Contending Forces*" (35). Ammons agrees: "...if lynching and rape are the great buried subjects of *Iola Leroy*, they are blatant in *Contending Forces*" (*Conflicting* 78). Carol Watson recognizes the singular intensity of Hopkins's novel in her survey of African American women's novels: "*Contending Forces*, a stark melodrama which compares the brutalities of post-Reconstruction America to that of the South during the slavery era, is the most forceful protest novel written by a black American woman prior to Ann Petry's *The Street* [1946]" (22). Sigrid Anderson Cordell finds this unique explicitness throughout Hopkins's writing: "What sets her fiction and journalism apart from that of her female contemporaries—both black and white—is her blunt depiction of brutality and violence and the explicit link that she draws between violence and social, political, and racial oppression" (52-53); however, it is particularly evident in her first novel. Carby argues that "*Contending Forces* [is] the most detailed exploration of the parameters of black womanhood... in Hopkins's fiction" (144). DuCille writes: "Of the many African American novels written between the publication of *Clotel* in 1853 and the turn of the century, *Contending Forces* arguably offers the most complex (if not complete) representation of the intricacies of black American life in the latter 1800s" (38).[12] Hopkins's excess emerges from an urgent project of sexual opacity.

Hopkins activates the sentimental, which offers heightened sensibility in a domestic plot. The domestic highlights sexual relations. In this sentimental novel's racialized challenge, the sexual endangerment of the Black female sentimental heroine is sharpened by her physical

12 "Many" is relative to the none prior; other than William Wells Brown, for the men, there is only Martin R. Delany's serialized *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859) until Charles Chesnutt's two short story collections at the end of the century; there are about three by women in this period, one the same year as *Blake* and two in the 1890s, according Carol Watson's bibliography in *Prologue* (Appendix A, 119). There used to be four, but, upon further biographical investigation, Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins was revealed to be white (Gardner 178). Of those left, the earliest one, *Our Nig* (1859) by Harriet Wilson, is under dispute as possible autobiography (Gardner, 225n14).

whiteness, highlighting the prejudice as both racialized and gendered. The preface declaims: "The atrocity of the acts committed one hundred years ago are duplicated today, when slavery is supposed no longer to exist" (15). Some readers, though, have found the sentimental too emotional for serious issues. Richard Yarborough, who writes the introduction to *Contending Forces* in the foundational Schomburg series of nineteenth-century Black women writers, finds political aims incompatible with the sentimental, suggesting the interaction "causes marked inconsistencies in tone," hearing "discordances" (these, in fact, as a feature of all Black writing prior to World War I) "as black writers struggled to discover a vehicle that would satisfy their urge toward realism without undermining their adoption of popular literary forms" (xxxvi). McCullough observes that, while Yarborough equates protest with realism (23), feminist scholars have argued for the political use of the sentimental novel, and readings of Hopkins (enabled by his edition) have taken the intersection of race into consideration (24). Cordell argues that Hopkins's deliberate use of the genre "claimed a voice for African Americans, particularly African-American women" (52); a voice that speaks directly to those historical and ongoing atrocities. McCullough explains:

> That Hopkins, an African American, is writing what the subtitle of her novel identifies as a 'Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South' is itself a radical move that must by necessity have ramification on the sentimental tradition since she is appropriating a form that was constituted in part by the absence of black women authors and heroines from its pages" (25).

What Yarborough reads as inconsistent can also be read as the intersection of identities constructed as incompatible, and therefore, incommunicable by Man. The struggle is against

this suppression; the intimacy is in the expression. Tate argues that, in "a domestic ideality" that centres Black women's equality, these early Black novelists "construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct Victorian gender conventions in order to designate black female subjectivity as a most potent force in the advancement of the race" ("Allegories" 107). Asserting a right to the domestic, Hopkins uses white sentimental tropes precisely to enjoy her Black control over them, to delight in the possibility of *her* literary authority.

The *bios-mythois* of Hopkins's translanguaging is made visible through this narrative movement. Carby describes the novel's historical frame as "an overture to the main story" (132). An overture introduces the themes which will be resolved in the main piece; it has an intimate relationship to the main: similar but different. In this case, the move from the frame to the main is the move from Man's system to Black women's desires. Through the oppression of Black women, there is no distance between the doubles in the novel—a union made in blood;[13] however, the repetition of bodies and situations allows Hopkins to rewrite the interracial interaction. Blackening the sentimental as George Elliott Clarke demands Black writers Blacken English (Compton 141), Hopkins engages in an interracial discourse on all levels.

Naturally, the mixed-race characters offer fertile material for interracial analyses. Of the magazine serials which followed Hopkins's first novel, Siobhan Somerville writes that "Hopkins located a powerful project within her fiction… the possibility of interracial desire" (140). In *Contending Forces*, the physical expressions of interracial desire involve rape and repressive violence. The mixed-race characters embody the ongoing suppression of Black women's desires; the text, however, works against this to express a literary interracial desire.

13 Her final novel, *Of One Blood* (1903-1904), seems the culmination of this concept. It is arguably more popular than *Contending Forces* as a site of scholarly investigation with far more hits on *Google Scholar*, though the numbers are closer together and trade leads on *JSTOR* and the *MLA Bibliography*. These numbers overall, though, are marginal in comparison to the work on women in my other chapters, Zora Neale Hurston or Toni Morrison.

Carby suggests considering the interracial romances as “literary devices within Hopkins’s own historical context” (140), calling the mixed-race character a “device of mediation” (89-90): “literary vehicles for exploring historically specific structures of racialization, sexuality, and power” (Somerville 141). In her foundational analysis of the biracial character in American literature, Judith Berzon sets a scene of mainly women, torn between the races, and dying tragically as a result (74). JoAnn Pavletich notes that the tragic mulatta is a stock figure in sentimental fiction (647). In *Contending Forces*, however, in a seemingly pointed discussion on biracial identities, Dora Smith, a Montfort descendant, proudly states: “I am not unhappy, and I am a mulatto. I just want to enjoy my life, and I don’t want to die before my time comes either” (Hopkins 152). Thomas Cassidy argues that, for Hopkins, African America is “by its nature cross-racial,” and “thus problematizes the very concept of ‘race,’ and challenges the philosophical underpinnings of racial discrimination and violence” (665). Expressing her right to desire, Dora voices the alternate perspective that grounds the text’s presence.

Hopkins underscores this alternative in her depiction of mixed-race men. The biracial male narrative begins in the frame with the two Montfort sons who enter slavery due to the change in their mother’s status (alongside the tragic mulatta was the trope of the unknown mulatta becoming racialized). Soon thereafter, they experience a sharp divergence of experience that returns one to whiteness, while the other remains Black. This split concludes with their descendants reuniting as an interracial family at the end of the novel. In a counterpoint, in the main, there is the nearly white character of John P. Langley, a villain in this sentimental melodrama. Langley is engaged to Dora, the happy mulatta above; however, destroying his potentially character-saving marriage to a Montfort descendant, Langley seeks out Sappho’s

secret in order to blackmail her for sex. Having grown up with no family, he dies alone in the vast empty whiteness of the Yukon, searching for gold. He is the main tragic mulatto of this text,[14] living and dying alienated from both the Black and white populations.

Significantly, the narrator attributes Langley's poor character to his "cracker" blood: "We might call this a bad mixture—the combination of the worst features of a dominant race with an enslaved race; and in some measure John Langley would bear out the unfavorable supposition upon close acquaintance" (Hopkins 90-91). Paralleling "the worst features" and the "enslaved" suggests that there are no good qualities to be found in any slave—essentially any Black person—but anything positive the narrator finds in John is on his Black side; any "Natural instinct for Good" is linked to "whatever God-saving quality that might have been loaned the Negro by pitying nature" (Hopkins 221).[15] In this construction, goodness is the consolation for enslavement, tempering the phenotypical valuations. There is an ambivalence around whiteness (though "cracker" suggests strong grounds for a class critique[16]). Langley is described as "very fair in complexion. His hair was dark and had no indication of Negro blood in its waves; his features were of the Caucasian cut" (Hopkins 90); however, the narrator places these "pleasant features of the Caucasian race" alongside "the narrow boundary of the horizon of his mental vision" (Hopkins 221). This myopia, it must be noted is not just the failings of "cracker" blood. In a coincidence that is easily read as one of the sentimental's departures from realism, in the same conclusion where the hero, Will Smith, is revealed to be the great-grandson of the Black Montfort son, Langley's ancestor is revealed to be Anson Pollock, the originary

14 Sappho's father is another tragic mulatto, killed by the mob his white brother arouses when threatened with legal action for his crimes against Sappho.
15 There is perhaps indication of this positive influence in the bluntness about racism with which John debates the white politician Colonel Clapp (in private) (Hopkins 227-237).
16 Yarborough writes: "Furthermore, Hopkins's own elitist views mar her treatment of lower-class black characters like Sarah Ann White and Ophelia Davis" (xli)

villain of the narrative: wealthy and mannered, ostensibly not a “cracker.” Pollock is absorbed under this pejorative label (much as Black people have had to suffer) by the omniscient narrator’s selective deployment of information.

Unlike the elevated plane on which the families of the biracial brothers are reunited, opposed to the virtue of the Montforts and their descendants, white Pollock and his Black descendant are linked in their venal falsity. The genealogical similarities are enacted in the men’s sexual threat to the Black woman; the act is entwined with their greed. The narrator’s depiction of Pollock—“[Montfort’s] opposite; his ruling passion was covetousness. His eyes were fairly dazzled by the sight of the gold so carelessly strewing the floor. It positively took away his breath” (Hopkins 49)—is directly paralleled by Langley’s denouement: leaving the scene of his thwarted villainy to prospect in the arctic, where he freezes to death. Explicitly (but also tacitly) joined later with a blatant wink in the too casual disclosure that the P. stands for “Pollock” (Hopkins 122) (apparently, the family, though obsessed with their racialized history as Montforts, consider the name repetition a “mere coincidence” [Hopkins 222]), the two villains are also introduced in similar fashion. First:

> Anson Pollock, whom Charles Montfort had chosen for his friend, was a man of dashing appearance. He carried his years jauntily, and had a good opinion of himself where women were concerned. He was made much of by the ladies in the vicinity because of his wealth. It mattered not that his wife had died mysteriously ... his fair speech, auburn curls and deep-blue eyes, so falsely smiling, won his way, and Mr. Pollock was the popular ladies’ man of two counties. (Hopkins 49-50)

Suggesting that John P., as Dora calls him, also insinuates his way into the life of Montfort's descendants, the narrator presents the younger Pollock with the unpromising: "Lately another person had attached himself to the Smiths" (Hopkins 88); she later elaborates: "He possessed a gentle refinement of manner, apt to take well with the opposite sex; but to a reader of character, the strong manhood and honesty of purpose which existed in Will Smith were lacking in John Langley" (Hopkins 90). These quotes establish reading as the crucial difference between the success of the two villains—distinctly not their race (or even necessarily time period). Montfort, the reader is told, is not a reader of character; the narrator notes of him: "if the latter had been an observant man, he might have been a bit puzzled at the expression on his face. But Charles Montfort was ingenuousness itself, seeing in no man an enemy" (Hopkins 49).[17] Langley's fiancée Dora, Will's sister and Montfort's great-granddaughter, also does not initially sense Langley's covetousness; but John P. also works harder to dissemble than his forefather: "He meditated on the subject [of their Montfort tragedy] constantly, but with the shrewdness characteristic of his nature, carefully concealed his thoughts from every one" (Hopkins 221). In contrast to her great-grandfather, supporting the narrator's assurances of her "shrewd common sense" (Hopkins 114), Dora does eventually perceive Langley's venality and end the engagement before real harm comes to her. The implication is that the Black descendants, despite the genealogical similarities to their white ancestors, must both read better and dissemble faster than their forebears. Their ability is birthed in Hopkins, who asserts textual control.[18] In the historical frame, the Montforts enter the watery erasure of the abyss. In the

17 There are many suggestions that Montfort is mostly good, but tragically foolish and/or blind, but the strongest is his ladylike seduction by Pollock.

18 Cordell reads the "multiply-embedded narrative structure" of Hopkins's short story "Talma Gordon" (1900) as a distancing mechanism that also reveals:

> By creating layers of frame-tales to be stripped away by the reader, the narrative structure explicitly reveals three aspects of social history: first, the historical reality of violence against black women in the

main, John P. is banished to a polar wasteland like Frankenstein's monster for the sin of threatening the Black heroine's bodily autonomy.

Maintaining categories, Hopkins exposes their permeability in the narrative of interracial interactions, destabilizing the rationality of their imposition. She sets up familiar scenes, then reveals surprises—defies expectations; there is a blur, a point where things are unclear, when features perceived as still move. The layers are joined, but in the move from frame to main there is a twist that instills movement. Susan L. Williams argues that the daguerreotype double made it uncanny: "it always produced a double of oneself even as one attempted to look at another," thus it "could reveal the truth not only about others but also about oneself" (165). In this daguerreotype frame, Black women's discourse asserts an alternative desirable desiring presence with narrative's ability to reposition. In the text's display of spectacular opacity, Black and white, man and woman, hold their pose—but also shift to resemble each other. In that centripetal and centrifugal tension, the oppressive reduction of the Black female body is countered by the excess of the mixed-race text.

The *Contending Forces* preface contains a paradox. Hopkins writes:

> I have tried to tell an impartial story, leaving it to the reader to draw conclusions. I have tried to portray our hard struggles here in the North to obtain a respectable living and a partial education. I have presented both sides of the dark picture—lynching and concubinage—truthfully and without vituperation, pleading for that justice of heart and

---

> United States; second, the extent to which white, upper middle-class identity depends upon perpetuating and hiding that violence; and, third, that this situation creates enormous potential for rage on the part of the oppressed. (53)

The layers, Cordell argues, distance the reader from that rage. With the sentimental's intensity of emotion in *Contending Forces*, the repetition from the frame to main erases the receptive distance that Cordell sees in the short story.

> mind for my people which the Anglo-Saxon in America never withholds from suffering humanity. (15)

Carby reads the contradiction between the “hard struggles” and praise for Anglo-Saxon compassion as “a vacillation between severe critiques of the position of blacks in the North and moments of unashamed sycophancy,” arguing that it comes from a “failure to negotiate the contradiction between her belief in a tradition of Northern radicalism and the fact of Northern racism” (130). The dialogic proposes a rescue of this failure. Bakhtin argues that nineteenth-century “hybrid constructions” use their double-voicedness for authorial unmasking of hypocrisy; the second emphasis is “indignant, ironic” and “is the one that ultimately predominates in the final unmasking” (304). Centring this process, Cassidy reorients the vacillating failures as deliberate repositionings. Noting the disjunction of the “impartial story” and the “pleading for that justice” (664), Cassidy argues that Hopkins oscillates between two audiences in her preface:

> because Hopkins understood her black and her white audiences to be far apart on racial issues (and depicted them as such in her preface and in the novel), she developed a self-contradictory narrator—omniscient but unreliable—whose moral judgments are shaded according to the complexion of the audience Hopkins is trying to reach, whose views sometimes contradict one another, and whose opinions are sometimes refuted by her characters and by her story. (661)

The narration provides a moving association of material and audience, creating an opaque palimpsest in which the revelatory daguerreotype shift is not available to all (much as Montfort cannot see Pollock). Cassidy writes: “the text is constantly translating its basic message into

different forms of language use, geared toward different audience," in what he calls a "dialogic polemic" (663). Tate cites the tension between desire and repression as the source of these idiolectic varieties. In the "mediating [of] both black and female domestic and civil desires, on the one hand, and the racialist codes of the post-Reconstruction period as well as the social constructions of bourgeois esteem on the other" (*Domestic Allegories* 108), Tate writes that "Black female narrative desire in the domestic novels is decidedly plural, that is to say, dialogic" (*Domestic Allegories* 108). Spectacularly opaque, the dialogic paradox is a veil that frees.[19] I read Hopkins's preface as setting up the novel's narrator not as unreliable, but as ironic.

Her irony (re)presents the Black women's desires. The narrator is the standard third-person omniscient nineteenth-century narrator, but there are deliberate and conspicuous tone shifts throughout—sometimes arch Austen, sometimes sentimental Stowe. In its heteroglossia, the text is positioned and re-positioned, Cassidy explains, "inside and outside both white and black life, in an attempt to air the differences and forge a plausible accord" (662). There is a determined thrust to the outcome of the accord. Repeating the paradox of hard struggles and Anglo Saxon compassion, the narrator fills a passage with (seeming) praise of white people, while describing the hardships that the present-day generation of Montforts have endured; the narrator asserts that "the Negro question" is "the most important, the mightiest in the land" and "is quietly assuming greater proportions as it forges its way to the front to take its place shortly as the gravest question" (Hopkins 87-88). She opines that not even "the most fertile brain of the highly cultured Caucasian" can work it out (Hopkins 88). Similarly to Carby, Yarborough is

19 In her article on appropriation in visual arts, "Who's Doing the Twist," Coco Fusco writes of the privileged women of late sixteenth-century Peru, who took on the Islamic practice of veiling, learned from Moorish Spain, to allow them more "social mobility and privacy" since they were "less easy to identify in public places" (69). These women are freed by being "doubly masked," as Cassidy calls Hopkins's text (661).

confounded by the narrator's intentions: "Given the negative portrayal of most white Americans in *Contending Forces*, we can safely read the phrase 'the most fertile brain of the highly cultured Caucasian' as sarcastic. However, we cannot so readily dismiss the subsequent references to 'white blood' and 'a superior race.' ... Hopkins never challenges the basic assumption that races can be ranked qualitatively" (xxxv-xxxvi). It is not clear why Yarborough distinguishes "the highly cultured" from "a superior race," especially given they occur in the same paragraph. Both statements of ostensible praise can be read as a rather arch query on the fixity of these values, given that the more clearly sarcastic phrase directly references a failure to think beyond the current ranking of the races. With a double voice, the text's claim of superiority speaks these denigrations, but can also propose the radical implications of evolution: the possibility of change. Hopkins writes: "Surely the Negro race must be productive of some valuable specimens, if only from the infusion which amalgamation with a superior race must eventually bring" (87). Given the amalgamations the novel depicts, the "if only" proffers quite as much sarcasm as the "fertile brain." Again, the narrator is rather arch when complimenting whiteness. These are the values of the world, but their presence in the racialized sentimental reveals the oppressive fantasy enacted. The text does not dismiss these references, but comments on them. Though seemingly incongruous with the sentimental (like the political), irony works in this space between the idealized liberatory fantasy and the all-too-real oppressive fantasy, oscillating between the binaries. Through her dialogic, Hopkins asserts Black women's authority within and despite the artificial rankings of sexism and racism.

The idiolectic variety prefaces a dialectal one that widens the breadth of Hopkins's translangualism. Literary dialect is a major issue for late nineteenth-century American writers.

Dialect literature diversified alongside Black women's texts. It also, of course, confined. Gavin Jones argues that "[t]o an unprecedented degree, the social and personal significance of dialect provides the framework around which late-nineteenth-century works are structured" (2). He writes that "[l]ate-nineteenth-century America was crazy about dialect literature," a "new movement" that "was judged to be the most significant literary event of its generation" (Jones 1). Distinguishing it from previous examples of dialect usage in its mainstream realism (39), Jones explains: "New literary genres developed: the dialect poem, the dialect story, the dialect novel" (1). Its power, Jones argues, resided in beliefs that the authenticity of dialect made the minority population transparent, "reveal[ing] their stream of consciousness, their worldview, their very stuff of self" (46). This transparency wielded against those populations, their nonstandard expressions justify their social status. By the time Hopkins's novel is published at the turn of the century, the movement has become "the cult of the vernacular" (Jones 1). Spectacular opacity suggests a way out of the cult, rendering Hopkins's (and Harper's) dialect use as part of the ornament that proffers movement and complexity, a Gilded Age solution.[20]

With the opacity of Relation, the linguistics are less important than the metapragmatics; the narrative is about trajectory not transparency. Reassessing the early Black women novelists, Carby criticizes the dialect in *Iola Leroy* as "poorly written" (156) and "a flawed attempt" (81), but she determines that the qualities of the characters rescue them from Brown's reduction to

---

20 Brooks, quoting Spillers, writes: "Having little access to the culture of property, to the culture of naming, or to patriarchal wealth, the mythically rendered black body—and the black female body in particular—was scripted by dominant paradigms to have 'no movement in a field of signification'" (D. Brooks 5). DuCille identifies the nineteenth-century iteration of this fixity; excluded from the cult of true Womanhood, she argues that the Black woman is forced into "what might be called the cult of true primitivism" (73). Glissant's opacity specifically addresses this confinement with strategic primitivism, which can disturb those cults by destabilizing their associations (Dash 42). Opacity works against the presumed transparency of the cults, with the sentimental working as a type of primitive in its moral simplicity. Headley writes that opacity "is resistance to conceptual containment, those efforts to determinately arrest the ontological torrent of concrete existence behind a dam of rigid concepts" (94).

complete bufoonery (80-81). Character is Gayl Jones's criteria. She claims that "the only nineteenth-century black novel which admits intelligent and complex speakers of dialect and 'elevated uses'" is Martin Delany's experimental *Blake* (1859) (Gayl Jones, *Liberating* 126); *Blake* "provides a sturdier bridge to Zora Neale Hurston's work and its aims than do any of the others" (Gayl Jones, *Liberating* 128). In *Blake*, the Black main character speaks in a standard, but when he encounters dialect speakers, it is not used for "comic relief"; they are still "moral, serious, and complex human beings" (Gayl Jones, *Liberating* 127). Carby similarly explains that despite their illiterate dialect, the slaves in *Iola Leroy* "share skills of literacy": "though unable to read the written word, [they] read through their owners' pretenses and disguised emotions" (82). The illiterate slaves are educated in reading character, but their literate owners cannot read them. Unintentionally no doubt, the inaccuracy of the nineteenth-century novels' literary dialect underscores the non-transparency. In her analysis of Harper's use, Ammons writes: "Harper tells us that we must look not simply at the literal language of people told to be silent. We must also look at their coded language, their disguised speech, if we truly want to hear what is being said" (*Conflicting* 32). Encoded in the language is its opacity.

Literary dialect can reduce these populations to pejorative stereotypes, but it can also strategically suggest a subjective interiority without exposing it to oppressive reductions. The characters must enjoy the translangualism of their authors. Carby writes that Harper "was aware of the relationship between social power and the power of language" (81). Hopkins follows Harper in using the language to complexify. Kristina Brooks writes of Hopkins's dialect use in the serial *Hagar's Daughter* (1901-1902): "By framing John's speech here as a foreign, or nonstandard, dialect, Hopkins marks the distance between this character and her own narrative

voice, as well as between himself and others, including Venus, Jewel, and Hagar, who share his racial identity" (155). *Contending Forces*, too, plays on this tension between "comic relief" and "complex human beings,"[21] and between speech and racial identity. In the move from the frame to the main, the text underscores dialect itself as an element of plurality; while being confined, dialect users could speak out of both sides of their mouth, and from other mouths, exploiting the ambivalence of language. Gavin Jones writes:

> Black language was a powerfully disruptive force because its relation to white English was both generative and undermining. Mixed with white language, black language had produced a distinctive, hybrid southern accent yet had still retained the power of resistance in its ambiguous, rhetorical rituals that lay partially beyond white comprehension. (108)

In the ironies of the "primitive," their dialect usage complexifies by concealing to reveal.

Ornamenting the text, Hopkins's literary dialect is the confluence of the opaque interracial crossroads. The dialect use in the historical frame begins when the British Caribbean Montforts arrive in the United States. That chapter beginning with dialect lyrics, their ship is essentially welcomed with the song of dock-working slaves. Dialect within lyrics doubly sets the expression apart from the standard prose of the novel; even further, the work song is highlighted as a block quote, suggesting an internal epigraph in its chapter initiating position. Though it is a song, it is described as a "musical monotone" (Hopkins 32), a seeming retreat

---

21 K. Brooks argues that, in Hopkins's first serialized novel, *Hagar's Daughter* (an unknowing passing plot clearly influenced by *Clotel*), the only individuated slaves in the historical frame are marked as the minstrel characters: Mammy, Buck, and Wench partly through their dialect speech (133), which encourages their status as objects of amusement (145). Brooks argues that Hopkins uses other Black characters, rather than Black language, to shift the tie between the language and racial ideology, the foolish dialect speaker; Brooks does, however, highlight one moment where the language itself does the commenting when she points out that a white character's translation of the Mammy character's testimony both pokes fun at the dialect and the "grandiloquent" hyperstandard translator (145).

from musicality that highlights the piece as a poem. The de-emphasizing of its melodic qualities highlights its rhythmic qualities, underscoring the embodiment of language.

The song is a ballad about a slave considering an escape for love. The slave decides not to risk the whip inevitable if caught: “Cut yer back an’ ol’ brack Sue’s”; instead, he “cuss massa ‘hin’ de fence” (Hopkins 33). The song concludes with the comment: “Mass don’ hyar make no differeyence” (Hopkins 33). The performance of this song on the public docks, under the eyes of many masters, offers a moebius strip of privacy and publicity deliberately difficult to grasp—like a secret. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that the late nineteenth-century recuperative discourse of homosexuality had “an oddly oblique shape”: “I would describe it as the occluded intersection between a minority rhetoric of the ‘open secret’ or glass closet and a subsumptive public rhetoric of the ‘empty secret’ (164)—an intersection of covered content and emptied structure (165). The slaves speak (or sing) directly, but assumptions about their race, exploited through that versifying expression, obscures the meaning: the dialect is an “extravagance” of “deniability” and “flamboyant display” (Sedgwick 166). As performance, it exploits the uncertainty of play. The slaves turn that hypervisibility into a spectacular opacity.

The song directly announces a subversive attitude towards the master’s authority, a rebellion intensified by brutal enforcement; yet it evades confession in its stylized form, intensified here by its typographical difference both space and letter-wise. The slave’s difference as Other, that surface, becomes all flattened out from one perspective as superficial entertainment, but displays uncomfortable depths from another as tragically real content. Including another axis on the sense paradigm, in this case, the slave can read, but the master

cannot hear (cannot understand dialect); the style is deafening. Immediately harmless in the reality of the slave's material disempowerment but directly pointed with its manipulation of language, the anger of the slave is both veiled and exposed.

The leisure-time alternative performs the ambivalence of this language—its mutability depending on context.[22] The song changes dramatically when it is time for a break:

> the bell for the noon rest sounded faintly in the distance, gradually drawing nearer, and again their rich and plaintive voices blended together in sweet cadences as they finished placing the heavy load to the satisfaction of their drivers: 'Hard, dat merry, purty bell go/ Jing-a-lingle, jing-a-lingle, jingle bell,/ Jing-a-lingle, jing-a-lingle, jingle-a-lingle bell,/ Jingle bell, jingle bell.' (Hopkins 33)

The obvious subversion of the work song is turned to the nonsensical repetition of the wrapping up song. From work to rest is a turn to seeming senselessness, the relief of surcease expressed in a simple sound without argument—even the sense of melody restored in the "sweet cadences." In this tuneful senselessness though, the content of their leisure is made opaque, precious time protected from prying ears.

This ambivalent usage is further disturbed by the next appearance of leisure and dialect: individuated prose dialect (as opposed to the slaves' communal lyric voice), spoken by an overseer and his friend ("crackers"). These are the first sections of dialogue with long soliloquies, a characteristic of this novel (and *Iola Leroy*); thus, this convention begins with

---

22 After this light tune, the narrator comments: "Even so sang the children of Israel in their captivity, as they sat by the rivers of Babylon awaiting deliverance" (34). The comparison of American slavery to biblical enslavement was common to the abolitionist movement, particularly in the slave narrative as a counter to the genealogical attachment to the cursed Ham and the illumination of Christian hypocrisy in owning slaves. The biblical history places this language in the context of social status, anticipating Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), a rewriting of the Israelites' flight from Egypt in literary dialect. In this context, the (non)content of the song most immediately juxtaposed renders the comparison both bathetic and poignant, repositioning the language again as a challenge to that senselessness.

dialect, but with white speakers. In *Clotel*, a chapter with poor whites shows their diction as "virtually indistinguishable from the slaves' diction," which Gayl Jones reads as further evidence for Brown's dismissal of those slaves (*Liberating*, 126). Hopkins's rendering of dialect is (mostly) as unwieldy and undifferentiated as Brown's (or Harper's), but its use suggests reading the Black and white language similarity as another example of the arbitrary distinctions between the races that maintains the fantasy of supremacy (as opposed to real, experiential differences that affirm equality).[23] The covered content intersects with the uncovered structure. These men, introduced as "idlers on the wharf" in an ironic description of slave overseers (Hopkins 35), enact the violent brutality of a slave society.

The white men's lazy conversation depicts the horror made casual of maintaining slavery, establishing the brutal power dynamics of racialization: "we jes don't spec' to hav' no foolin' 'bout this yer question of who's on top as regards a gentleman's owning his niggers, an' whomsoeveder goes ter foolin' with that ar pertickler pint o' discusshun is gwine ter bemade a eggsample of, even ef it's a white man" (Hopkins 37). Their discussion meanders through the impossibility of emancipation. In one story, a white man is tarred and feathered for selling whiskey to Black people, and his son is whipped and almost hanged for planning to run off to Canada with a slave, a Black woman: "his wurst offense, in gineral, wuz that he wuz meaning fer to marry her" (Hopkins 36). The story ends with disappointment that the "celebrashun" planned for the hanging was called off; and the worry that "somehow or nuther folks is gittin' squeamish" about these fatal consequences (Hopkins 37). There is a lot packed into the story. It establishes the possibility of consensual relationships between the races; it depicts the formally

23 Hurston does this, too, in her strange and critically deplored last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), which follows the adventures of white people who speak in dialect.

legislated extreme violence that meets these relationships; and it suggests a changing tide in society's perception of the legitimacy of the violent response.[24] Their conversation registers resistance to this tide.

Difficult to read in the callously indifferent attitude towards this racialized violence, their long conversation is also legibly difficult. Gavin Jones argues: "By forcing people to pronounce words by spelling them out, dialect writing had the power to alienate the 'literary' reader within his or her own language" (48). Hopkins takes the white men's dialect in the white man's frame further than alienation. Its orthography contains a preponderance of apostrophes and nonstandard spellings that are much less prevalent in the text's subsequent representations of dialect, which are all spoken by Black people. The almost excessive apostrophes (though were it consistent, there could have been even more!) impede the reading as Gavin Jones suggests (the inconsistencies perhaps hinder it even more). The reader is rewarded for this struggle with the callous and casual brutality of the content. The appearance of the apostrophe (and all the commas, as the men double back and interject) becomes like the lash of the whip that one idler is observed to always have with him. As Jones writes, dialect is "simultaneously an affirmation and a mutilation of the linguistic standard" (49). The white men's conversation is the inverse of the slaves' verses; while the latter reveals its desires but conceals its force—the open secret—the former empties desire in a show of force—the empty secret. This first appearance of extended dialect speech troubles the expectation of Negro humour promised in the preface, presenting minstrelsy as brutality. In the idlers painful incomprehensibility is the

24 The reality of the text's contemporary time offers the irony of *Iola Leroy*'s hopeful Reconstruction. Both published in the nadir of Black civil rights ("nadir" is historian Raymond Logan's term for the 1890s [Watson 10]), both authors are well aware that those in power respond to the merest hint of equality with even greater brutality—as will eventually be visited upon the newly-arriving Montforts, whose appearance is noted by these men in the course of their idling chatter.

danger of language, its oppressive obfuscations maintain the alienation that allows the secret committees and genetic rumours that enact enslavement or death (or both). The text exploits the negative iconization of dialect but offers a different view on its relationship to race. The similarity of the dialect and its content suggests the intermixture that these white men battle against. In the ambivalence of nonstandard language use, the different stylistic placements underscore the power differentials of this intermixture.

Within this union and secession of interracial expression, the ability to express is gendered. Amy Dunham Strand claims that, like racialization, the iconized language of dialect is centred in the male (122). This is certainly true in the slavery section of *Contending Forces*; the main voices in the frame are male. In the main, however, the ornamentation of dialect is shared between the genders. Sedgwick argues that Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890) stages a transition from the open secret to the empty secret that is also a move from the sentimental to modernism (167). Replacing the white male body with Black female ones, Hopkins's contemporaneous expression offers a different trajectory. While the empty secret of the frame silences the slave woman,[25] her descendants voice the reorientation of that oppression as the open secret of the main narrative.

The text foregrounds this shift by individuating women from the slave masses in the frame. They are singled out as unheard vessels; we meet Caliban's mate and her progeny, but do not hear her voice. In the frame, the women's individuation emphasizes that they are only fodder for others. The idlers mention the slave who almost elopes to Canada, but name "a

25 *Iola Leroy* offers a similarly slave-dependent paradigm of female silence; Ammons writes: "As the white daughter of Eugene Leroy, Iola is visible and has language: We can see and hear her. As the free black woman survivor of slavery, Iola likewise has physical presence and language.... As the enslaved black woman, however, Iola has virtually no direct presence or speech in the text" (*Conflicting* 31). Iola's narrative frames the silence of her slavery. Ammons concludes: "We can hear Iola only when she is free" (*Conflicting* 32). *Iola Leroy* centres this structure within Iola Leroy; other slave women in the novel speak.

Mulatto gal Sal" (Hopkins 38), whom one of the men wins in a raffle and plans to breed (39). The first slave woman mentioned is noticed working in her garden with her child: "her pickaninny was astride her back, spurring his mother as a rider his horse" (27); she stands to "bob a queer little courtesy" to Montfort as he passes with the clergyman (27).[26] Montfort recalls this scene watching his own son play horsey moments before a mob shoots him dead and enslaves his wife and children. The text both insists on that moment of individuation and buries it in the ecstasy of brutality which follows.

Lucy, the maid of Montfort's wife, Grace, is the first Black woman to speak. Lucy, however, only has two lines (and her presumably Caribbean dialect quickly becomes indistinguishable from the US speakers in the two sentences of the first): first, to "reckon" things will be fine (Hopkins 46) (they will not); and last, only through report in a letter near the end of the novel, where her quote is not even hers. Surviving to meet Montfort descendants, she quotes scripture and dies (Hopkins 381). The representation of this silence reaches its horrific culmination with Grace, the last individuated slave woman of the historical frame, who suffers the imagined fate of "ol' brack Sue" in the work song. The other slave women identified, but not (really) heard, establish the intense degree of status change for Grace, the former mistress. The ancestress of the post-bellum white-looking Black characters, her tragic mulatta end is "a gruesome subject" (Hopkins 16); though her own voice is muted, the description is explicit.

Grace begins subsumed by her husband. She is first a woman commented on—notably, a comment about miscegenation and the casual attitude of the British towards it; the narrator

---

26 The narrator uses the adjectives "queer" and "peculiar" to describe the actions of the Bermudan slaves. "Peculiar" recalls the popular nineteenth-century expression, "peculiar institution," that was meant to indicate the specialness of US southern slavery. In association with queer, its application to the Bermudans plays with their specialness on this idyllic island, but it also includes the implication of odd or strange. This is an unnatural institution.

mentions: “there might even have been a strain of African blood, polluting the fair stream of Montfort’s vitality, or even his wife’s, which fact would not have caused him one instant’s uneasiness” (Hopkins 23). Analysis has focused on Grace’s potential Blackness because of her end, but the narrator begins with Montfort’s own, his wife’s an afterthought. In his economic power though, his potential racialization is erased by the glow of gold. The narrator judges that Montfort “perverted right to be what was conducive to his own interests” to the point of convincing himself that his slaves “fared better with him than they would have with another, perhaps, or even if they held property themselves” (Hopkins 22, 23). It is the second justification which convicts him. The narrator pronounces:

> Nature avenges herself upon us for every law violated in the mad rush for wealth or position or personal comfort where the rights of others of the human family are not respected. If Charles Montfort had been contented to accept the rulings of the English Parliament, and had allowed his human property to come under the new laws just made for its government, although poorer in the end, he would have spared himself and family all the horrors which were to follow his selfish flight to save that property. (65)

Montfort is, at the core, not so different from Pollock (or John P.).

The Montforts have left Bermuda to avoid the British timeline of emancipation. Though British slavery is presented as enlightened when compared to American, in the British Eden of Bermuda, which the narrator even compares to Prospero’s isle in *The Tempest* (Hopkins 22), these Calibans have not even cursing to “profit on’t.” The first appearance of slaves is dancing in the background as Montfort debates his emigration with his clergyman on their walk from

church. The slaves are described as dancing to "the strange monotonous music of drums without tune, relics of the tom-tom in the wild African life which haunted them in dreamland":

> The scanty raiment of gay-colored cotton stuffs set off the varied complexions, —yellow, bronze, white, —the flashing eyes, the gleaming teeth, and gave infinite variety to the scene. Over there, waterfalls fell in the sunlight in silvery waves; parti-colored butterflies of vivid coloring, and humming-birds flashed through the air with electrical radiance; gay parrakeets sung and chattered from the branches of the trees. (Hopkins 26)

Reduced to simple bodies, the slaves are rather more than de-individualized. Part of the Caribbean idyll in contrast to the North Carolina docks is the merely scenic presence of the slaves, indexed with the island's shining waterfalls and sparkling winged creatures. Opposed to the present concerns of the working North Carolina slaves, their Bermudan brethren are almost hidden in the narrative. Though they are ostensibly the reason the reason for Montfort's fatal move, they are merely decorative background to his greed.

The slaves' insubstantiality as humans without speech—which the US slave songs allude to, particularly in leisure when they are of no use to the master—means they barely intrude in the debate over Montfort's emigration, the white discourse.[27] Neither does Grace. Again, the trouble begins with him, and unfolds on his wife as bystander. Montfort's debaters bring up his wife as a reason to stay: "'But surely you will not expose your wife to the inconveniencies of life in that country,' said another. 'She has had her choice, but prefers hardship with me to life without me,' proudly returned Mr. Montfort. 'A willful man must have his way,' murmured one who had not yet spoken" (Hopkins 29). Jennifer Putzi argues that Hopkins is "more explicit

27 Interestingly, though, none of debaters is individually identified, their voices only attributed to "one" or "another" (Hopkins 28-29).

about the issue of complicity and responsibility in relation to Grace's husband" (12), who is self-satisfied and overconfident in his economic rights. The reader does not hear the marital conversation on emigration, only that "his wife makes the decision to accompany him" (Hopkins 29). The text's reticence suggests there was not much room for choice; in her diminished authority, Grace is made to endure worse consequences for his inadequacies. Montfort is immediately killed, but Grace is first tortured.

The danger of ethnic ambiguity begins with the white man and culminates in the Black woman, through the conduit of the complicit white woman. The idlers direct attention to the woman, underscoring that slave status is inherited from the mother. The uncertainty unimportant in Bermuda is the first thing they mention about Grace as she arrives in the US: "Thar's too much cream color in the face and too little blud seen under the skin fer a genooine white 'ooman" (Hopkins 41). Grace's ambiguity within the system is turned on her; she has power, but it is contingent. Putzi argues that the uncertainty around Grace's race is important because of "Grace's complicity in the very system that subjects her to abuse and drives her to suicide" (12). She claims that Grace "does not simply benefit from the labor of her husband's slaves. Her intimate connection to the institution is exemplified in her relationship with her 'foster sister,' Lucy" (Putzi 13). The narrator explains that "[t]heir relations had always been those of inseparable friends rather than of mistress and slave," but then adds parenthetically: "(to Lucy her mistress was always 'Miss Grace')" (Hopkins 46). Putzi notes the inequality: "Grace calls Lucy by her first name only, whereas Lucy calls Grace 'Miss Grace'" (13-14). Another ironic juxtaposition, Lucy's true status is the afterthought now; and Grace's fantastical ambiguity is foregrounded. Also mentioned in an aside: after Grace's exit, Lucy must take her

place as Anson Pollock's slave mistress. The always-Black woman suffering extended torture, her slave narrative lurks under Grace's sentimental one haunting the reader with the community of Black women who suffer as a whole. Yarborough writes: "...the uncertainty regarding her [Grace's] racial identity limits her usefulness as an exemplar of cruelly assaulted black womanhood" (xxxiii); it does, however, demonstrate the gendered vulnerability of which Black women are the exemplar. Under the imposition of white men's desires, Grace's silence as a white woman is extended even further as a Black woman; having to submit to her husband's greedy will, she is then made unwillingly subject to another white man's covetousness. Putzi observes that "they still have a whipping post on their plantation at least a year after assuming the property; this whipping post ironically becomes the scene of Grace's beating" (12). It has been a warning for Grace, too. Her screams and cries to her (dead) husband are all prior to her whipping, afterwards she enters the silence of the flesh. She is made Black woman, too; in her silence, she joins the collective.

Grace's whipping inscribes slave status on her skin, making her hypervisible so that her flesh becomes the text that subsumes her voice, ambiguous no more. Spillers writes of whipping scars: "The undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color" ("Mama's Baby" 260). Allison Berg sees the whipping, with its graphic description of the blood flowing from the sliced skin, as a "slave-branding" (Putzi 11); Putzi writes: "No matter what her racial identity and social status before she is violated by Pollock's flunkies, she effectively *becomes* black while she is tied to the whipping post" (11, emphasis hers). The word becomes flesh and uses up the body in the alchemy. Her race rendered uncertain by region and rumour (a

secret, which unlike Sappho's later mystery, may not even exist), even the report of her death is inconclusive: "Shortly after these events Grace Montfort disappeared and was never seen again" (71). The narrator concludes: "The waters of Pamlico Sound tell of sweet oblivion for the broken-hearted found within their soft embrace" (Hopkins 71). The waters—the natural world—through proximity (not explicitly) speak for Grace in its unindividuated mass grave. Grace seems fully bound to her slave status in the sentimental abyss.

This binding, however, has its own contingent power. After death, the end of her Black flesh, Grace is heard again, but only through the fantasies of slaves—moments when they escape their flesh. Grace is seen as a ghost "walk[ing]" the plantation, "weeping and wringing her hands" (Hopkins 71). Interestingly, her son Jesse—who must still think of her as a white woman—sees her, with her husband, as an angel, supporting him; Jesse singles her out by name, calling "Father, Grace," after her eyes seem to speak to him and this convenient prayer (which through the virtue of her name maintains her as the white man's silent vessel) solidifies his parents into an "actual presence, tangible though viewless"; later, in times of extreme stress, he feels the "touch of a tiny hand" (Hopkins 75). The Black woman is again foregrounded as silent. The hallucinations of Grace's newly Black son suggest Spillers's radical conclusion in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987); conceiving of "the Law of the Mother" for the descendants of enslavement, she writes: "The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother, handed* in ways that he cannot escape" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby" 277, emphasis mine). Jesse thinks: "It was his mother's hand; he knew it to be so" (Hopkins 75-76). Jesse's marking explains why he never claims whiteness again, though he eventually escapes slavery and moves North to have several children, one of whom is the mother of Dora and Will.

Spillers writes: “This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside” (“Mama’s Baby” 260). Turned inside out, Grace’s racial uncertainty embodies language’s ambivalent power, its ability to turn. This marking and subsequent veiling is reoriented in the main narrative’s discourse.

From Napoleon’s mother, the text moves to Sappho. Framing the main narrative, this violent history exists in its present, but the contemporary women have a voice to tell it. Announcing the paradigm shift, the happy mulatta Dora’s inauguration of the main narrative reads as an amusing dismissal of the traumatic past; the chapter begins: “‘Thank heaven that is done,’ said Dora, as she sat down wearily in her mother’s large rocker in the cosy kitchen” (Hopkins 80). The dialect speakers in the main narrative respond to those in the historical one. The dialect moves from negative linguistic community to a positive racial one in a performance of language’s shifting positionality: suppressive muzzle or subversive mask, depending on your angle. Gavin Jones writes that “dialect could encode the possibility of resistance... by recording the subversive voices in which alternative versions of reality were engendered” (11). These main narrative speakers seem to provide “the exquisitely droll humor peculiar to the Negro” that Hopkins indicates she will introduce in her preface “to give a bright touch to an otherwise gruesome subject” (16).[28] They activate the subversion of the slave’s song.

This brightness happens in long sections of dialect direct discourse, spoken by female and male friends of the main characters. In the “Friendship” chapter, which establishes

28 Hopkins parenthetically adds “(a work like this would not be complete without it)” (16), leading to the question of what “a work like this” is.

Sappho's growing connections in Boston, the text relinquishes the narrative to one of her new friends:

> Doctor [Abraham] Peters was a well-read man, greatly interested in scientific research, but who had lacked the opportunity to obtain information in his youth. He had been a slave when a boy, a few years before the Civil War. Now he was the church janitor, and to eke out his scanty income kept a little bootblack stand just around the corner from the church, and knowing something of medicine and nursing the sick, had advertised himself as a magnetic physician. He displayed much skill in practice, and had acquired something of a local reputation. Doctor Peters and Sappho were good friends, and he brought out all his store of knowledge, proudly displaying it for her approval. (130-131)

Sappho's attention to Doctor Peters echoes Iola's philanthropic patronizing of dialect-speaking former slave Aunt Linda, but Peters also suggests an evolution of Brown's character, Sam—the main dialect speaker of *Clotel*—also named a doctor, but a clearly false one to Peters's folk-legitimated one. Doctor Peters's appearance exceeds his origins. Like the slave song, his discourse is set apart from the plot, though it is notably more embedded in the text. He is given several pages of direct discourse with no comment from Sappho or the narrator. When Peters finishes his series of tales at his convenience, the text turns back to the developing romance between Sappho and Will with no transition, giving his story equal (but separate) narrative status. The translanguaging of the text sets Peters as another soloist in the band.

Among Peters's stories, he relates this experience:

> I sung an' I prayed an' I wrastled fer help in that ole steamboat kitchen down behin' my bigges' brass biler where I was kivered from pryin' eyes. All of a suddint I felt the

> power, an' the Lord spoke to me an' he said: 'Git up, Abraham Peters, an' go out an' hoodoo the fust man you mett.' Bless yo, chile, I riz up in a hurry an' started out, not knowin' no more than nuthin' what was meant by that. Fust man I saw when I got on deck was the cap'n; I went up to him, an' I smiled. I must have been a purty picture with my face all grease an' tears. I says, not thinkin' what wurds I was goin' ter utter: 'Mornin', Cap'n; how's yer corporosity seem to segashiate?' Cap'n he roared; you could a heard him holler up to Boston. He slapped me on the back, an' says he 'Abe Peters, that's the gol darndest think I ever heard.' With that he hauled out a five-dollar bill an' gave me, an' walked off laughin' fit to kill hisself. By night I had twenty dollars in my pocket, an' everybody on the boat was a callin' me 'corporosity segashiate.' I've used that hoodoo ever since, an' I ain't found nary white gempleman can see to git' way from it without showing the color of his money. (136-137)

In this last tale, Peters begins hidden away, behind the boiler like the slave cursing behind the gate, but he is inspired to get up and go out. His unthinking phrase turns his boss to thinking, and nets Peters a profit—which he immediately realizes is repeatable. Peters's facility with the hoodoo establishes his magnetic doctoring credentials; his power over corporeal sickness comes from this linguistic authority.[29] The nonsensical leisure play with language is put to use, a Caliban profiting from his curses. In Peters's telling, the curse is a blessing. It is a literally a gift from God that allows him to control the oppressor so that "nary white gempleman can see to

29 Tamara Olaivar traces a quote from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, "Your corposity sagaciating O K?" (14.1482-1483), to this moment. She relates that early scholarship traces "sagaciating" to Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories, particularly "Wonderful Tar-Baby Story": "How duz yo' sym'tums seem ter segashuate?"; later scholars more generally associate the sentence with southern American vernacular. Olaivar, however, argues that the provenance is Peters' tale: "[the chapter 'Oxen of the Sun'] sustains the spirit of the 'hoodoo' greeting of Hopkins's novel. As Joyce's [doctor] characters become more and more inebriated, the narrative deterioriates into a linguistic bacchanalia" (174).

git' way from it."[30] In the individual excess of language, there is room to manipulate; minstrelsy becomes power. Hopkins's performance of "Negro entertainment" is her own hoodoo, which explicitly speaks to the trick of dialect, the opacity behind its apparent transparency, as the idlers speak to the brutality of white supremacy, the empty secret under the cover.

The slave song indicates that the politics have always been a part of minstrelsy for the African American; with some transparency behind the opacity, ornamentation has always been subversive. In the tilt from the opacity that reflects the slave's performance back to the master, the turn of the daguerreotype reveals dialect speakers who disturb the linearity of the plot to establish an ethos and a symbolism that encodes the variety of the text in oscillation of community and individual. Along with Doctor Peters's tales, there are the dialogues of the two washerwomen, Mrs. Ophelia Davis and Sarah Ann White, who live in the basement of the Smith's rooming house. They are introduced explaining their shift from in-house service to laundry in the context of their looting after the Civil War: "yas'm, I'm tired o' livin' in white folkses' kitchens. … Yas'm, I feathered my nes', I jes' did" (Hopkins 105). Having honed the slaves' ability to read faces, they, like Dora, perceptively read Sappho's carefully constructed reserve and retreat. Dora claims: "she has the sweetest and saddest face I ever saw. I have read the story of the woman with a story written on her face, but I never believed it anything but a fairy tale" (Hopkins 89). In the first physical appearance of Sappho in the text, after the narrator's ode to her beauty with a quote from Alfred Tennyson, the women add: "I haven't see enything look like thet chile since I lef' home"; "thar ain't nothin' like thet growed outside o'

30 Peters's "corporosity segashiate" offers a frame for John Langley's accommodationist speech to the League: "Let us await the issue of events with patience, trusting in the fealty of our party leaders, putting faith in their sagacity to push our claims and redress whatever grievances we may have at a seasonable time" (253). Peters's nonstandard works confounds in the place of its (presumable) standard analog. Against this variety, Langley's becomes a hoodoo, exploiting the irony of its propriety to place his "sagacity" into the same sarcastic arena as the narrator's "fertile brains."

Loosyannie" (Hopkins 107). Not only (counter)readers, they are also critics, returning dialect to what Gavin Jones identifies as its American roots in direct political commentary (37).[31] McCullough notes that it is Ophelia who compares race relations between North and South, explaining that the South may want to keep Blacks poor but the social distance there is smaller than in the North, which may preach equality but wants distance from Blacks (35-36). Rejecting this alienation, Ophelia can read white faces as well as she can near-white ones. She then takes centre stage in a scene of female competition staged in dialect.

Ophelia and Sister Mary Jane Robinson each try to raise the most money for the church mortgage. The fundraiser fair includes some prophetic readings by a psychic that enable plot machinations around the main characters; throughout this section, however, this main plot is backgrounded to the competition, which involves long dialect dialogues of storytelling and strategizing with their friends. The competition comes down to a demonstration of the women's ability to leverage the proximity afforded by being in service to white people—another version of Peters's hoodooing. Other than the English side of the bifurcated Montforts, this silent philanthropy is the only positive intrusion of white people in the novel. At one point, when her rival appears to be winning with the entrance of a group of white people who have paid for a private dinner within the fair, Ophelia exclaims: "White folks don't scare Ophelia Davis. I'se seed them befo' in my life, an' I've eat at the table wif 'em, that's mo'. … I think too much o' my white people to trot 'em up here to this one-cen' 'fair" (Hopkins 214). Ophelia's disdain takes on the doubleness of the preface's juxtaposition of hard struggle and compassion; *she*

31 Jones begins his study on American dialect use with John Adams's mid-eighteenth century "Humphrey Ploughjogger" letters, appeals for common sense and a middle ground as political satire in dialect; Jones argues: "Dialect was much more than a humorous gimmick; it *enabled* certain types of political criticism, especially among those who were alienated from centers of power, by creating another level of discourse in which deep ethical convictions could be safely represented" (37, emphasis his).

mingles with white people, but respects them too much to lower them to even meet other Black people. Her statement also protects the Black space from oppressive intrusions. Ophelia asserts her control over interracial intimacy. Her parallax view is justified in her triumph, when her white people simply send a large donation so that she raises the most money. Grace's silence is complicit and rebounds on herself, this generosity—authorized by dialect, rather than parenthesizing it—is the useful alliance. Ophelia wins the prize, but the combined collection of herself and Sister Mary Jane helps to exceed the encumbrance, providing a nice cushion for the church (Hopkins 219). The dependence on white generosity is filtered through these expressions of Black autonomy, underscoring a crucial difference from the slave frame.

Ophelia and Sarah Ann also inherit the means of uplift that has raised the Black Montfort descendants, the Smiths. When that family is raised even closer to its ancestral financial heights by their white relatives, the washerwomen propose to take over running the boarding house that the Smiths own. A literal level up from their take-in laundry work, they are poised to take over the narrative entirely. Hopkins seems to index dialect with class, and therefore certain experiences and attitudes, but it is not iconized with Blackness or deficiency. Hopkins's use of dialect suggests community feeling, but there is an individuality that plays within it. The shifting races of dialect-speakers in their different deployments of dialect positions these diversities. The alternate relation to the dominant provides the space for irony, the room to express a changing orientation to a subject even in the same language. Hopkins uses that ironic doubling to protect what the violence has wounded. Her translanguaging through race puts the socio-ideological language in conversation with itself: a refraction of the dialogic that reorients the battle as reflection.

The daguerreotype image of the Black woman produces a carnivalesque reorientation (to use another Bakhtinian term), a juxtaposition of language that can curse behind the gate at attempts to reduce it or burst in the front door with the force to multiply it. Hopkins's dialectal ornamentation is enhanced by a standard corollary in the use of quotations. Attended by lowered expectations, the use of dialect exploits an indirectly direct expression, the ornamented anger; the educated standard reinforces the appeal with its chiasmic directly indirect, the anger as ornament. Layering with the dialect monologues are the standard speeches. The formal orating begins with "a public indignation meeting" on the problem of lynching (Hopkins 225), organized by the American Colored League, "a group of leading colored men," after a particularly brutal incident in a southern state (Hopkins 224). The first three speakers—a white politician, Dr. Arthur Lewis (a Booker T. Washington analogue), and Langley (Langley and Lewis are rivals for Dora's hand)—take up a chapter arguing for unity through conciliation, essentially asking that the lynchings be ignored. The next chapter is named for Lycurgus "Luke" Sawyer's starring role, "Luke Sawyer Speaks to the League," though he has not yet been introduced as a character. The chapter begins with the "suppressed murmurs of discontent" (Hopkins 254), with which "the community counters these arguments about the importance of 'brotherhood,' of national party unity" (Sawaya 245). From these murmurs, Luke steps forward with an improvised speech about his experiences with the racial brutality of lynching and rape. Cassidy writes that Luke's "role as a spokesperson for black common folk is signaled in part by the occurrence of the title in his speech" (667):

> Friends, I am thirty years old and look fifty. I want to tell you why this is so. I want to tell you what brought me *here*. I want to tell the gentleman who have spoken here tonight that conservatism, lack of brotherly affiliation, lack of energy for the right and the power of the almighty dollar which deadens men's hearts to the sufferings of their brothers, and makes them feel that if only *they* can rise to the top of the ladder may God help the hindmost man, are the forces which are ruining the Negro in this country. It is killing him off by thousands, destroying his self-respect, and degrading him to the level of the brute. *These are the contending forces that are dooming this race to despair!*" (Hopkins 255-256, emphasis hers)

Sawyer's repetition of "I want to tell you" against the syncopated italic beats puts the audience in an anticipatory state. While his diction does not match the folk as Hopkins has established it, the effect of his words casts a spell similar to Peters's hoodooing or Ophelia's fundraising, but its audience is more diffuse—he speaks for and to the common folks at the meeting, to the orators on the dais, and to the reader of the text. This repositioning plays on expectations of Black oratory. Luke is clearly from a lower class, but his language disturbs iconization.

Luke's repetition of the novel title in the chapter that his name titles works to position the use of the standard as just another element of repertoire, not the authoritative ground of humanism. In the standard speeches, lamination, where "speakers may borrow other's words to simultaneously project both their own and other's identities" (Bucholtz, "Da Man" 450), is another iteration of the double-voiced prefatory irony and dialect ornamentation. Mary Bucholtz explains that lamination is "a transformation of the original utterance into a new frame or context, with a resultant change in its social meaning" ("Da Man" 450). In this parallax

positionality, Bucholtz's white subject, Brand One, performs his access to cultural variety, but his use reinforces traditional hierarchical language and racial ideologies ("Da Man" 456). His code-switch fixes the racialized original matter as lower status. Bucholtz, however, agrees with Brown's conclusion on metapragmatics and ideology; her own conclusion argues that there are contexts in which "certain uses of the 'other's' language can build cross-racial affiliations that may usher in a 'new ethnic' identity category" ("Da Man" 455-456). There are liberatory possibilities in this doubling of language.

The novel, which emerges from the unofficial "lower levels" according to Bakhtin (273), offers this context through its narrative changes. *Contending Forces* presents many lines clearly identified by quotes or italics as laminations, announcing their difference from the speaker/narrator, their alternate voice, much as the dialect visually represents its difference from the standard. Bakhtin writes of double-voicedness that it serves "to express authorial intentions, but in a refracted way" (324). In her daguerreotype, Hopkins almost supersaturates the characters' considered elocutions with quotes from other speeches, creating a highly wrought lamination. In her preface, Hopkins notes that she uses "a combination of the best points made by well-known public speakers in the United States—white and black—in defense of the Negro. I feel my own deficiencies too strongly to attempt original composition on this subject at this crisis in the history of the Negro in the United States" (16). Sydney Bufkin, investigating Hopkins's general mention of authorship in this quote, finds that there are "few lines recognizably attributable to anyone in particular" (84). With lamination, Hopkins's humility juxtaposes ironically with the authority of her appropriation; it is still within her voice and directed to her purposes that these points are expressed. In this play, Luke's repetition of the

title becomes a lamination of the author, foregrounding the decorative that Montfort overlooked. His lamination is direct, yet indirect as ornamentation. Playing with the idea of authority, Hopkins asserts the deployment of her own.

Integrated in the flow of narrative, these laminations assert Hopkins's authority through their display of translangualism; these expressions are as much part of her repertoire as any other. Will Smith gives the final speech at the League, closing the chapter named for Luke. Cassidy argues that "to an extent Luke's address is revised by Will's into overt political agitation" (668). Will has the one moment of dialect use in these speeches: a lamination of Irish-English: "'Begorra,' replied Pat, 'an' is it a guvimint they have here? Sure, thin, I'll vote agin it'" (Hopkins 265). Will's use contrasts the political power of the Irish with their nonstandard English, an explicit acknowledgement of the racialization of pejorative dialect indexing. Bucholtz writes that the laminator "is able to display not only his original statement and his antagonist's orientation to it but also his orientation to his antagonist's marking of him" ("Da Man" 450). Will appropriates the Irish's effective authority with his lamination, speaking a universal possibility of shifting status that arouses his auditors and echoes his words beyond that moment, shifting their status; they go home "filled with thoughts that burn but cannot be spoken" (Hopkins 273). His increase in lamination activates Luke's challenge to the status quo through its own movement.

Will's laminations mainly express this shifting of position through what Gabrielle Foreman calls histotextuality, a method of diverse articulation. Using Harper, Foreman explains how marginalized writers "incorporate historical allusions that both contextualize and radicalize their work by countering the putatively innocuous generic codes they seem to have endorsed"

(329). The specific allusions reveal the stratification of these codes, the ideologies which form, so that their use serves to affirm possibility and choice. D. Brooks writes of Black nineteenth-century histotextuality: "Embedding her popular and particularly sentimental narratives with layers of 'socio-ideologically determined language' and historically rich referents, Harper and her activist black female contemporaries created historically dense homonyms and portals of radical discourse" (296).[32] Foreman clarifies that, not hierarchized or buried, "[t]he radical nature of Harper's prose is *on the surface* for readers who can access and then interpret the text in accordance with their own nuanced activist and literary concerns" (329, emphasis hers). This surface conceals depths. Bakhtin argues that part of what sets the novel form apart from poetic and rhetorical genre is that its double-voicedness is "fertilized by a deep-rooted connection with the forces of historical becoming that serve to stratify language" (325). If the historical frame presents the empty secret, the flattening of oppression, with histotextuality this surface becomes spectacularly opaque—its density belying any emptiness. The surface of histotextuality protects plural possibility.

This protection is evident in the text's use of Ralph Waldo Emerson's writing. The Emerson quotes are specifically racialized and gendered, turning them from exclusive humanist tenets to inclusive demonic texts. The novel begins: "The civility of no race can be perfect whilst another race is degraded," from Emerson's "Emancipation in the West Indies" (1844) speech, which "links the novel's precipitating action directly to West Indian emancipation" (Bufkin 79). That precipitating brutality continuing, this line is then repeated by characters in the main narrative—another iteration of the frame's direct effect on the main. During the ladies'

32 Elizabeth McHenry grounds this strategy in the Black women's literary clubs in the nineteenth-century, arguing that they studied a wide variety of literature "as a method of developing and fomenting social change" (Beam 166).

sewing circle, another church fundraiser, which is complemented with a seminar on race (naturally, the text suggests), the moderator, Mrs. Willis, includes the quote to support her argument for the virtue of Black women despite sexual compulsion (Hopkins 150). Insisting on linguistic freedom against sexual oppression, the quote's repetition in the text emphasizes its lamination and so explicitly links the narrator's translanguaging with this female race leader, and, more implicitly, with the hero's leadership role. Finding inspiration in the same text, Will quotes from this Emerson speech twice. In his rousing speech to the American Colored League, which builds on Luke's, Will rejects the idea that African Americans long for miscegenation: "Social position is not to be gained by pushing" (Hopkins 264); and during an informal gathering of leading white men, he argues with a visiting Southerner about an even playing field for the races: "Ideas only save races" (Hopkins 285).[33] Bufkin observes that the Emerson quotes are clearly recognizable among Hopkins's "best points"; he argues that "Hopkins appropriates … a clear intellectual path that stretches back not only to abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, but also to a broader intellectual movement that played a foundational role in the New England intellectual tradition" (79). Tate reads this appropriation as a rejection of the authentic values of slave culture: "The newly freed black population assimilated the tenets of bourgeois individualism, as propounded by white authors such Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau" (*Domestic Allegories* 56). These specific laminations, however, suggest that the assimilations are an assertion of freedom of expression

33 Bufkin notes another critic, Sean McCann, who has read this as a simplified Du Bois' appropriation, pointing out this suggests that Du Bois was similarly cross-culturally inspired (85). As Ammons observes of Du Bois's "forcibly bringing the two [traditional Western poetry and of African American spirituals] together as equals, complements, and contrasts," much of Du Bois's theorizing is actually anticipated in the novels of late nineteenth-century Black woman writers (*Conflicting* 150). DuCille suggests double-consciousness in all (82); Carby reads a talented tenth proposal in Harper (84-85); Bergman (185) points out that the opposition (with reunion through marriage) of Will Smith and Arthur Lewis's ideals in *Contending Forces* actually pre-dates the rift between Washington and Du Bois.

against its withholding, surely an authentic slave value. Using Erving Goffman's definition, "the antagonist's utterance is a *lamination* overlaid on the original utterance" (Bucholtz "Da Man" 450, emphasis hers), Bucholtz connects lamination and Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse: "multiple layers of identity and self and other may be present in a single discourse" ("Da Man" 447). All coming from the same speech, visibly suffusing the text's language is the particularly American theoretic on freedom as individual possibility. The laminations embed anti-racism in democracy, in the freedom to choose not only a government but a text, freedom of mind. The laminating ornamentation rebels against exclusive, oppressive transparency.

Yarborough reduces the orations to accidental ethnological reports: "Although these speeches and arguments rarely bear directly on the romantic plot, they do offer a fascinating view of the ideological struggles taking place in turn-of-the-century black American" (xxxvii). This reading applies the standards of the conventional nineteenth-century omniscient narrator, who, Andrew Elfenbein argues, embodies ideals of expository prose (144). Partly measured against the use of dialect, the novel assumes that "readers know that voices reveal motives, but narrators reveal truth" (Elfenbein 124). Hopkins's long passages of dialogue and speechifying against the ironies of her narrator destabilizes this expectation. Cassidy argues that the reader must tune out the unreliable narrator and tune into the voices: "the most overt political messages in *Contending Forces* are made clear through the various social meetings and public debates. Conversation is not presented as idle or beside the point in this novel; it is how things are done, and much of the plot development is basically a movement from one discussion to the next" (666). This not only highlights the importance of this moment; it also reinforces the importance of the dialect speech. While narration is subordinate to direct discourse, dialect is

not subordinate to the standard. In her use of dialect and standard, Hopkins reveals "what are, in fact, complex and interlocking cultural and linguistic phenomena," as DuCille corrects the fallacy of the Black and white dichotomy (9). Tate describes the cultural entanglement as a problem emerging post-Emancipation: "African Americans became bicultural; that is, they deliberately acquired dominant bourgeois constructions of individual and collective success, while retaining to various degrees the wisdom of slave culture" (*Domestic Allegories* 57). Glissant would argue that this begins with the clash of cultures within the Plantation, the slave society, producing his rhizome of Relation; however, it does seem to take on newly visible expression at the end of the nineteenth century in the ornamentation of the palimpsest.

Hopkins's laminations express a Black woman stylin(g) on her own absence from this discourse, a new perspective on the hierarchized language indexing. The standard language is a sign of extensive repertoires blurring their imposed boundaries, translanguaging, uplifting. A tradition, having been imposed on her, is turned to her purposes and desires; its repertoire expands as she does. "[O]rientation is displayed," Bucholtz explains, through "parallelism with variation" ("Da Man" 450). Through the parallels of the frame, the speeches join the spectacular palimpsest of play with discourses. Helping to ornament the palimpsest, the content of the laminations intensify the active force of the text, active within itself. The narrator's own use of highly wrought standard laminations complements the orators' use to excess. Daniel Hack observes:

> In addition to its Preface, *Contending Forces* contains several other paratexts: illustrations, epigraphs, chapter titles, and chapter epigraphs. Along with the epigraphs and chapter titles, some of which are themselves quotations, the novel includes more

> intercalated quotations than Hopkins's later novels, making *Contending Forces* the most allusive and in that sense 'literary' of her novels. (488)[34]

There is a common characteristic in Hopkins's quotations; Hack adds that "All the writers Hopkins cites are white, and almost none is contemporary" (488). DuCille argues that "almost all texts participate in larger, intercultural dialogues or polylogues in a complex nexus of literary cross-dressing and back talking" (24); for Black writers, Gavin Jones suggests "the potentially more subversive process in which they signify on white linguistic models" (191). For Hopkins, these are particularly historical models. Hack claims that Tennyson is quoted most often in the novel, but "no critic has ever asked why Hopkins chose to end *Contending Forces* with this passage from Tennyson's 1847 poem *The Princess: A Medley*, or what difference this terminal epigraph makes to our understanding of the novel. This is so even though readings of the novel almost invariably address its ending in terms of plot, treating it as a major interpretative crux" (489-490). While Emerson philosophizes, Tennyson versifies; for both, Hopkins's histotextuality translanguages through discursive forms to dialogue out of historical oppression.

In the final image, the Smiths, with Sappho and child now included as wife and son, sail away from the United States to visit their (white) English Montfort relatives in a corrective parallel to their slave-owning ancestors' first appearance in South Carolina. They complete the slave triangle, but "return" to Europe as former slaves going to collect the money owed to them. The other side of the opening historical frame is this concluding quotation: "My wife, my

---

34 Carby writes of Harper: "Literacy, the power of the word, becomes in Harper's text a lesson for her black readership to learn, not fear" (83), as per Matthews's injunction. Ironically, claiming Hopkins as a plagiarist is an emerging area of study; Pavletich also writes about Hopkins in a 2018 collection, *Rethinking Pauline Hopkins: Plagiarism, Appropriation, and African American Cultural Production*. In the text's dialogic, unlike Montfort's debate, unacknowledged voices are embraced rather than ignored.

life. .../ Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me" (Hopkins 402). Hack claims that Hopkins "literally" gives the final word to another writer in "an extravagant gesture few novelists risk" (489); its extravagance is the final flourish of excess in the emergence of Black women's desires —more twists in the frame in its recovery of Black women as wives and in its difference from Lucy's final lamination. Hack argues that "the recurrent citations of Tennyson throughout the novel suggest that Hopkins's choice of a terminal epigraph is no mere afterthought but rather part of the design of the novel as a whole" (490). Explaining the "counterintuitive" use of Tennyson, he writes: "Hopkins mobilizes Tennyson in *Contending Forces* to put the novel in dialogue with writings by other African Americans—[Charles] Chesnutt and Cooper in particular—and to further its challenge to existing racial and sexual norms" (490). Recalling the literary base of the English standard (writing is much easier to codify than the oral) (Milroys 51), the use of the classic Victorian poet as intra- and interracial intertextuality, demonstrates the scope of the African American woman's desire alongside the breadth of her repertoire against the history of her suppression—for both author and protagonist. The laminations layer facets as expansions of possibility. They present the parallax view of demonic ground, where subjective movement is not restricted to Man.

Sappho's body is ornamented with this lamination as Will's language is with Emerson. Having introduced Sappho with a few words from Tennyson, "queen rose and lily in one" (107) (which Ophelia and Sarah Ann contextualize), Hopkins sends her off on a happy ending in the horizon with lines about a different beautiful Romantic Tennyson heroine. By the end, Sappho's ornamentations rewrite even more tradition that has attempted to write her out. Hack finds that the Tennyson allusions "cluster primarily around the figure of Sappho"; in that cluster, the

tragic Tennyson poems are applied to a happy ending (490). Tennyson the sad sentimental avatar, his lamination within this text expands the image of the sentimental heroine. Gloria T. Randles argues that Sappho "represents the internal 'contending forces' of the novel more dramatically than any other character" (qtd. in Cullum 118). She embodies their intimacy through Hopkins's translanguaging. Hack notes that the "slightly altered quotations bespeak a casualness and familiarity" (491); their excess insists on recognition of Hopkins's facility with lamination. Her laminations explicitly challenge the authority often unquestioned in these forms. There is an authority in that alteration, an expression of desire that fights against confinement. The main narrative's relationship to the historical frame sets the narrative in an inescapable paradigm, but the lamination of the closing frame suggests the possibility of exceeding that paradigm through the spectacular opacity of translangual ornamentation.

Ornament wrests authority from Man. The free translangualism in *Contending Forces* embeds authority in Black women. Brooks sees in Hopkins's expansive literary output a "traffic in cultural excesses" that "instill[s] movement," linking her specifically to the excess of "spectacular opacity," which unleashes "the insurgent power of imaging cultural identity in grand and polyvalent terms which might outsize the narrow representational frames bestowed on them" (8). Similarly, with echoes of Wynter, Beam writes that, countering the simplicity of "man's body" as the perfect form, "ornament is enabled as a site that can challenge its universality" (22). She finds ornament in the generic variety of one of Hopkins's serialized novels, *Winona* (1902-1903), which "embodies black female desire in the design of her text

rather than in her heroine" (35).[35] Beam's segregation of Hopkins's novel from the other texts in her study is justified by her specific attention to flower-related highly wrought language, but the translanguaging in Hopkins's first novel achieves the same effect within both text and heroine. Beam writes that "ornament triggers a kind of second sight" and "melody is rendered visible" (23). *Contending Forces* produces this synaesthesia through the performance of language varieties in unexpected bodies. This layering of sensation suggests Brooks's use of opacity: "a kind of performance rooted in a layering and creating a palimpsest of meanings and representations" as "a present reminder of black feminist agency and the complex body in performance" (350n13).[36] Turning the Black woman from sex object to sexual subject, Hopkins embodies the reorientation of an oppressive mainstream discourse in Sappho.

The narrative oscillates between acknowledgement and assumption. Obvious and hidden in its assertion of racialized and gendered presences, it uncovers the empty secret to fill the open secret as the full secret. Passing would be the empty secret, the draining of ethnicity to fit the structures of oppression. Grace Montfort's rumoured past gestures towards the passing plot, but Sappho never attempts to pass, though she has the same phenotype.[37] Somerville argues that "Hopkins simultaneously borrows from and counters the conventions of the nineteenth-century

---

35 Ammons notes a similar generic excess beginning with Harper: "In *Iola*, Harper, 'weaving,' draws on and intermixes a conglomeration of inherited forms—melodrama, journalism, adventure fiction, slave narrative, abolitionist fiction, the realistic novel, oral tradition, the romance—to reach toward a new form" (*Conflicting* 27). Ammons finds this new form "imperfectly realized" (*Conflicting* 27), which is a polite rendering of the confusion critics feel around these late nineteenth-century novels.

36 Ammons writes: "Teetering on the threshold of a new era, Harper offers a novel that, in its formal self-fracturing, speaks to the inadequacy of any single inherited long narrative form—the slave narrative, the domestic novel, the nineteenth-century African American novel, the white antislavery novel, the tight high-culture Anglo European art novel—to serve her purpose of writing a political novel about a black woman in the United States" (*Conflicting* 27).

37 On her way back to Louisiana after fleeing Langley's indecent proposal, Sappho encounters a train conductor "who ordered her out of the comfortable day-coach into the dirt and discomfort of the 'Jim crow' car"; with echoes of the dock idlers, he remarks: "white niggers couldn't impose on him; he reckoned he knew 'em" (Hopkins 348). In the aftermath of her secrets being spilled, Sappho does not even register his comment; the narrator writes that his brutality "failed to arouse her" (Hopkins 348).

novel of passing"; Sappho's mysterious appearance at the Smith's boarding house "recalls the novel of passing and its conventional protagonist," Somerville argues; she writes that "Hopkins simultaneously borrows from and counters" its nineteenth-century conventions (143). Sappho does not hide her race, but she does hide her history as the raped and orphaned Mabelle Beaubean.[38] Pavletich argues that Sappho's secrecy is a desperate grab for agency in the wake of her brutally realized powerlessness (650). DuCille contends that true agency comes later: "It is only when she confronts the past, embracing her son, that she is able to transcend it—that she indeed becomes an 'active female-hero' entitled to her own desire" (43). In both cases, in the awareness and articulation of her powerlessness, Sappho asserts a linguistic authority over experience. Though framed by a history which she is doomed to repeat, she has access to this authority through translanguaging. Embodying the full secret, Sappho voices its confluence.

The Black woman's body endures abuse, then reproduces herself into multiple liminal bodies, building and diversifying community in an oscillation of centripetal and centrifugal forces. In the interaction of body and text, the multiple women in Sappho's narrative perform the moving image of Black women's complex bodies; their narrative forms a rhizome of Relation. Vincent Woodard incorporates the frame into the main by integrating Grace into Sappho—an oscillation between individual and individual, that becomes an oscillation between

38 In this expansiveness, beyond naming the text, Luke furthers his narratorial role by relating Sappho's traumatic story, forcefully bringing the abuses of the historical frame into the main. This renders Sappho more transparent than she has offered at this point. She has an understandably intense reaction to hearing her concealed story unexpectedly revealed; Luke's tale, however, also retains some protection for Sappho. Ending his story with the death of the child known as Mabelle Beaubean, he distances the narrative from the woman who survived Mabelle's trauma, now known as Sappho. Luke's telling does not expose Sappho's private thoughts. The narrator confirms this sharing, rather than usurping, of authority by not directly indicating to the reader that this is Sappho's story. Certainly, her fainting fit at the conclusion of his tale is a clue (much like John's 'P.'), but the link hides behind the gate at this point. The secret of her survival functions like the distancing narrative layers in Cordell's reading of "Talma Gordon," but here, it serves to protect the character, rather than the reader. The uncovering of the empty secret—the brutality of white men—becomes the open secret of the plot—the rape of Black women. Luke leaves his mark on the pages—in the plot—of the novel in the inverse of the white dialect-speaking overseers leaving their mark on the black woman's body.

individual and community in Sappho's narrative. Woodard argues that Sappho's hardships parallel Grace's (77); therefore, in the layering of Grace, Mabelle, and Sappho, "Hopkins argues for a racial uplift politic that centralizes black female experience and that considers sex and sexual trauma as central forces that have shaped black cultural formation" (81). Woodard argues that this tripartite "plots the geography of the African diaspora onto the female black body and black female historical experience"; Mabelle as the US, particularly South, Grace as the Caribbean, and Sappho as New World Africanism, US Afrocentric myth making and Ethiopianism: "a diaspora of female black experience," like the triangular route of slave cargo (73). Woodard makes a case for errantry, writing that the process of transformation from Mabelle to Sappho "is an internal movement that involves departure—migrating away from the self—in order to create a new internal landscape unencumbered by a legacy of regret and shame" (83). Carby reminds that we cannot escape history, the abyss remains. She describes Sappho's attempts to deny her history as "a utopian desire" for "the uncolonized black female body" (315), but this uncolonized body is nowhere, impossible. "[O]n the terrain of the previously colonized," Carby writes, the revelation of the secret is a reunion with the colonized self (315). Black women's narratives acknowledge the empty secret that creates the open one. Mapping connections through the lens of gender and race, the reunion of secrets reveals the decolonized parallax of demonic ground, sedimented by the nodes of the rhizome.

In desiring discourse, the body becomes the word without reducing itself to flesh. Veiling her trauma, Sappho's very name is an expression of desire. We meet Sappho in her second incarnation, when she has gone from Mabelle Beaubean, which translates to my beautiful handsome, an excessive (and non-English, so obscured) reduction to a possessed

aesthetic, to Sappho Clark, an English last name almost homophonous with her profession and a first name which could be metonymous for sexuality (having or abstaining): from sex object to sexual subject.[39] Woodard assumes that Sappho's renaming rejects her traumatic past. In a discussion which mostly criticizes Hopkins's focus on middle-class femininity, Houston A. Baker suggests that the name is cruelly ironic; he foregrounds the allusion to mastery of the word, but deplores that this Sappho is only a typist, not a creative writer (*Workings* 24). The deliberateness of her changed name, however, maintains a corporeal and linguistic desire. Somerville argues that "Baker too quickly dismisses the sexual significance of Hopkins's choice" as 'anomalous sexual proclivities' which 'may indeed be relevant'" (145);[40] he completely overlooks the sexual significance that is certainly relevant to Hopkins's choice. Somerville outlines the two nineteenth-century narratives of Sappho, the poet: "a courtesan and a dangerous mode of female licentiousness" or "a desexualized figure, a bodiless model of 'Greek Love'" (146). Sappho, the protagonist, encompasses both. The woman formerly known as Mabelle is introduced as a typical, chaste sentimental heroine, but has a secret which undoes this characterization. There are elements of Mabelle's trauma in her new name. Woodard explains: "In nineteenth-century New Orleans, the name 'Sapho' was often used to refer to women of the evening," from the notorious brothel Sapho House: "Oftentimes, a woman by the name of Sapho would serve as mascot for a brothel and represent the range of sexual pleasures and fantasies one could satiate within such an establishment" (84). Sappho's pain, and indeed much of her de-sexualization, comes from time spent unwillingly in one of these brothels. In the

39 DuCille actually suggests a third, unspoken, name as the crucial one: "The signal name change, as I read the text, is not from Mabelle Beaubean to Sappho Clark but from Sappho Clark to Mrs. William Smith. ... Will Smith and his family are Sappho's coauthors" (43).
40 Somerville notes that critical discussions have tended to avoid this association (145); its critical elision links to the excess of Tennyson in their taboo delight.

conventional sentimental, no similarly angelic heroine would survive this experience, never mind achieve a domestic happy ending. The plural inferences of this protagonist's name map her unconventional path. Somerville explains that Sappho, the classical poet, "symbolized seemingly irreconcilable notions of womanhood, associated as she was with prostitution, lesbianism, and chastity" (147). As Matthews proposes, Sappho encodes irreconcilable Black women. At the crossroads of the irreconcilable body and word, there are opportunities to reposition.

Sappho renames the "overdetermined nominative properties" with which Spillers begins "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe": "'Peaches,' and 'Brown Sugar,' 'Sapphire,'" and so on (257).[41] Working out the psychoanalytic implications of the Black woman, Spillers finds her "[e]mbedded in bizarre axiological ground," her status telegraphically coded by the names ("Mama's Baby" 257). Sappho contextualizes the ground as demonic. Re-"signifying property plus" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby" 257), Sappho's nominalism recodes the bizarre as the demonic, taking her plus and exploiting the excess. Because her poetry fragments were found in Egypt and Ovid may have described her as sable, some historians claimed her as Black (Somerville 146-147). Somerville explains: "Her cultural location—at times Egyptian, at time Greek—remained ambiguous" (147). Sappho the poet's ethnic ambiguity is exploited by Sappho the character as a de-fusing of the socio-ideological body of Black women, rescripting Grace. Sappho's name brings together the individual body and the word: a *bios-mythois* title, expressing the Black woman's desire. Asserting this subjective physical presence, the resonances of this name, layering the palimpsest, tell a story of a moving body, rather than static

41 Spillers's names are resonances of the names Nina Simone sings in "Four Women": Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches; with each verse holding back the character's name until after her self-description, Simone rewrites the overdetermined associations.

flesh. Sappho's chosen name is a narrative of becoming that refracts multiple ways to read her post-traumatic body. The oscillation of desires within her name perpetuates plurality, turning binaries into multiplicities.

"[W]ith its orientation toward the image of a language" (Bakhtin 354), the deliberate language variety in the novel—DuCille's placement—depicts its own daguerreotype double: the reduction to flesh as Grace Montfort experiences or a layering opacity as Sappho Clark demonstrates. Williams claims that the daguerreotype is a nineteenth century "agent of revelation" (161); the unveiling of the complex black woman is the unveiling of a mystery. The Black woman protagonist's desire is the centre of the abyss, apparent but fathomless. I have argued for the import of the author's choice, but, within the narrative, who gave Sappho her new name—which character authorized her pluralizing signification? There is no mention of even the nuns who care for her after she is rescued providing such a service. In dehumanizing conditions, the re-name is a powerful force; of the diasporic practice, Glissant writes that "its force comes from being chosen and not being imposed" (qtd. in Degras 616). Woodard argues: "The creation of Sappho Clark correlates to the Africanist process of creating Africa into a pristine homeland, a mythic place of origins" (82); Caribbean Canadian writer Dionne Brand calls the creative process the fiction of living in the Black diaspora (18). The scholarship assumes that Sappho chose the name herself, but the re-naming process is not depicted, nor even commented on in the novel. The unknown offers space for creation.

We negotiate between the impositions of the fragmenters and the integrating of fragments. Somerville claims that, in the nineteenth-century, "[t]he figure of Sappho, like her poetry, represented fragmentation and contradiction" (147); she argues that, "[f]or Hopkins, this

ambiguity reinforced the mystery that structured *Contending Forces*: Who is Sappho Clark? What is her past? Why is she alone?" (147). Somerville writes that "Hopkins builds the narrative around Sappho's silence and the gradual discovery of her past. The novel thus positions the reader to expect, even to desire, the eventual exposure of her secrets" (145). With the truth of Grace's ethnicity or even the classical poet's, the naming is the tension never resolved; retaining the impermeability of the abyss, her name is the ornament of the opaque. This secret naming remains submerged though Sappho's plot-driving assault will be revealed. Before her name list, Spillers explains: "I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name" ("Mama's Baby" 257). Keeping back this significant element, the space for creation insists on a place to protect. In this textuality, some hard-won protection from an inheritance of brutalization is possible. The full secret occludes the crossroads into confluence.

The opening frame depicts desire imposed on Black women by white men; the closing frame, "the terminal epigraph," as Hack terms it, inhabits the white man's discursive authority over women, a lamination-stuffed palimpsest reorienting Man's hegemony. At the core, the two main Black women, Dora and Sappho (each an echo of other Black women in the text) privately enact their own desire, with continual revelation and concealment. Here, the translangualism of the author is displayed by these Black women. Their performance occurs during a snowstorm that keeps both women at home and at leisure, setting the scene for domestic intensity, a treasure box of desire.[42] Sappho is new to the boarding house and the women are getting to know each other. They decide to have a tea party in Sappho's room and emphasize the separation of the event from everyday life. Sappho asks Dora to "play 'company', like the children"; Dora tells her mother she is "going visiting"; then the women lock the door "to keep

42 The affirming iteration of Langley's arctic demise.

out all intruders," even drawing the curtains "to keep out stray currents of air" (Hopkins 117). They are warm and cozy—the narrator several times mentions the "little stove" and fire in the room, and describes Dora as "cosily bestowed" in a rocking chair (Hopkins 117), while Sappho "lay back among her cushions" (Hopkins 118). Somerville reads the narrator's description of their set up as "stilted and feminized language," which she contrasts to its "overwhelmingly erotic" content in descriptions of their repast (150). The careful control that Somerville reads as avoidance also demonstrates the value of this moment. Somerville calls the descriptions of the space "flowery," and thus using "lighthearted and inconsequential diction" (150). Beam, however, argues for the subversive possibility of the flowery. Ornament is not inconsequential for these women. The intensity of the women's seclusion belies this innocuousness. The comfort of their cocoon sets the stage for their desire. Somerville observes that "Hopkins's description suggests doubleness," not only in repeating synonyms for two, in alliterative adjectives and parallel clauses, but in comparisons of the food and their bodies (150). The doubleness maintains the "private, safe, and domesticated space" (Somerville 150) of the jewel-box scene of desire, keeping every element in an occluded intimacy. Somerville sees this scene as "a displacement of Dora's and Sappho's desire" (150-151): a temporary expression, possible "only in a carefully controlled space set apart from the main narrative" (149).[43] Strategic placement suggests a performance of authority over revelation, the deliberate articulation of the right to erotic desire. The controlled space highlights its content. Referring to the twisting and

43 Somerville suggests that the scene could be read as the women expressing desire for each other (149). Arguing that "Hopkins's depiction of the relationship between Dora and Sappho illustrates this struggle over the definition and representation of women's erotic attachments as she oscillates between models of romantic friendship and lesbian pathology" (148-149), Somerville uses Dora's dispassion for Langley as more evidence for her passion for Sappho. This argument, however, avoids Dora's own subsequent evasions and concealments around her feelings for Dr. Lewis, who will become her husband. I would suggest that Dora's discomfort is more directly a sentimental trope meant to convey Dora's perceptive qualities and Langley's unworthy ones.

turning possibilities of language as “chiasmic reasonings” and “introversions” (165), Beam explains that “this kind of language folds on itself and creates a new space in doing so” (24). In her own chiasmic reasoning, Beam argues that in folding in, “the terms hold open a space” for “unconventional desire” (25). Desire is not displaced or pathologized, but intensified and nurtured. In this private space, it is exposed, but protected—as Somerville herself writes: “direct discussion and simultaneous evasion of the delicate subject of sexual desire” (151). Beam describes the space as “refusing polarities, residing in a place between” (165). It is not just space created but place, therefore presence; it is not transparent, but spectacularly opaque. The ornamented language which encases the desire undergirds the synaesthesia of the reorientation, the investment in the body. In the metapragmatics of the highly wrought display, Black women are considered precious jewels.

The ornamental excess of the women’s conversation both masks and insists on their desires. Hopkins’s use of standard and dialect shifts the racialized iconization to which these varieties are purposed; the women’s translangualism activates this for the reader. Beam argues that the highly wrought shifts language from the referential and intensifies its aesthetic qualities (27). Their display intensifies into spectacular opacity. Beam writes: “That ‘turn’ reorients us to the space the writer has ascribed to her desire and we meet with the world she has refashioned. In our experience of style, we are made to sense the possibilities it creates, of both gendered resistance and feminist alternatives” (27). Repositioning the relationship of text and body, like the narrator’s shifting appeal, presents different facets of Black women’s experiences. In a significant moment of domestic desire, the interaction of standard and dialect both reveals and conceals in a microcosm of the narrator’s process: the highly wrought dialogic.

Settled in their seclusion, Dora begins the discussion describing her want of sentiment around her fiancé (Hopkins 119). Sappho seems to downplay Dora's muted response to her future husband, saying that she would believe in storybook love for the sake of "my little brownie" (Hopkins 119). The endearment is a strange one to modern ears, but it supports that their intimacy as racialized. They then can be idealistic in this protected space; neither woman is romantic about herself, but rather directs that expectation toward the other. Dora asks Sappho if she wants to marry and if she "speculate[s] about the pros and cons and the maybes and perhapses" (119). The move into plural possibilities is signalled by a move into idiomatic language. Exploiting the familiarity, Sappho first diverts with jokey talk around the treats Dora has provided for their party, but Dora persists—even highlighting Sappho's second demurral, a claim of forgetting: "I suspect that is a bit of a fib to keep me from teasing you about getting married" (Hopkins 121). When she asks again, Sappho "with a comical twist to her face" replies, "in the words of Unc' Gulliver, 'I mote, an' then again I moten't'" (Hopkins 121). My research did not turn up details on who Unc' Gulliver might be, but the use suggests a minstrel character, perhaps known for foolish wandering. The minstrel play on the famous Swift protagonist allows Sappho's own gender play within the race place. With ornamental lamination, she performs a show of identity dynamics for Dora as an answer. Sappho's non-answer, her refusal of polarities, is humorous, some of that "light touch," but also opaquely protective. She puts on a mask to veil her trauma, but the performance consciously draws attention to that positioning. Hinting at depths while protecting them, it waves its hand over what is being concealed, "both camouflage and expression" (Sedgwick 172). Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" asks "Why should the world be over-wise/ In counting all our tears and sighs"

(5-6). This scene asks the same; Sappho protects her "tears and sighs" with dialect, asserting her authority over the story and her language while playing with her desire.

The novel dialogic maintains a distinction between its language varieties that serves to display ornamentation. The ornamentation of language variety displays the intimate complexity of Black women. The dialect speaks the oppression that seeds this strategy, basing its effectiveness on a contrast.[44] Dora reads Sappho's performance correctly and does not press any further (also engaged in her own evasions). She returns to her own romantic future, expressing doubt that she can tolerate Langley "for good and all" (Hopkins 121). Sappho's surprise at Dora's doubt translanguages: "Why, Dora, "'I'm surprised at yer'" (Hopkins 121). She begins in the overwrought of the sentimental and ends with a twist of dialect. The surprise is meant kindly, not cruelly; its dialect defuses Sappho's judgment. The switch performs intimacy, a confidence of communion that Dora will follow, but the utterance allows Dora to decide whether or not to explain her preferences further or demur without pressure. In this case, the mask protects Dora (we share the mask). The indirect directness of dialect joins their repertoires in veiling their intimate secrets.[45] Dora returns with a lamination that she attributes to "Dr. Peters," responding that "a girl hesitates to 'git jined to eny man fer betterer or worserer'" (Hopkins 121). Dora's dialect response for her own evasion confirms the communion with

---

44 Yarborough reads Sappho's (occasional) formal diction—"('nay' versus 'no')," he parenthesizes—as underscoring Sappho's saintliness (xxxiv); this would suggest that her informal diction underscores her capacity for sin.

45 This contrasts with a scene where "[j]ust as the barriers of Sappho's reserve seemed about to be swept away, there followed, almost instantly, a wave of repulsion toward this woman and her effusiveness, so forced and insincere" (Hopkins 155). It is suggested that Mrs. Willis knows that the hypothetical woman Sappho describes is in fact herself; her "searching glance" as she asks for more details suggests some knowingness (Hopkins 156). Sappho runs from this knowing: "She drew back as from an abyss suddenly beheld stretching before" (Hopkins 155). Somerville suggests that Sappho might be retreating from identification with Mrs. Willis (155). This similarity, the transparency of knowingness, is a return to the abyss, rather than an emergence.

Sappho—a sharing of this language variety and its interracial oscillations.[46] If Wilde's ornamental orientalism helps to abstract the homosexuality in *Dorian Gray* (Sedgwick 173-174), then the dialect in *Contending Forces* concretizes the racialized experiences of desire, producing the ornamental as its protective maneouver. Language variety builds a space for domestic intraracial, homosocial fun within public interracial, heterosexual brutality, naming oppression and exceeding its control. In the turn of the daguerreotype, from the external exposure of the violence enacted on her because she is a Black woman, this private space exposes Black women's capacity for caring and delight.

Notably, Dora's final expression in dialect is the reader's introduction to Peters, whose tales are told after this interlude in the same chapter. The women's intimate performance prepares the ground for his narrative takeover, the private comfort supporting his friendly display. The communion is extended to Dora's brother a couple chapter later, when Will, with another moment of dialect lamination, quotes Peters to cover the intimacy of his secret lighting Sappho's hearth, when she discovers him in the act: "I do mos' anythin' in the wurl. Honey, to git an hones' livin' without stealin' it" (Hopkins 172). In its intimacy, the language allows an endearment that would otherwise make both of them uncomfortable. Deploying it in defence of domestic duty, the honourable Will, the sentimental hero, confirms the nobility of both Peters and his dialect. This intimate recognition—that integration without transparency—is a sign of the moral sensibility of these sentimental paragons, the worth of their desire. The palimpsest of highly wrought language acknowledges Sappho's trauma to foreground that worth. The

46 These moments of dialect intimacy contrast with Dora's abrupt switch to talking about Dr. Lewis, who will actually become her husband, telling Sappho that he believes "that women should be seen and not heard when politics is under discussion"; "Insufferable prig!," Sappho exclaims in response (Hopkins 126). The women's domestic desires diverge, but it does not lead to a split as it does with the washerwomen who do not translanguage over their difference.

interaction of dialect and standard announces the value of the desiring Black women under the impenetrable veil.

The privacy in the novel asserts the desire to control the image. Body and text are the pediments of Matthews's construction of Black women's authority; in their oscillation, Sappho's novel promotes that authority. In the preface to *Contending Forces*, Hopkins writes: "But, after all, it is the simple, homely tale, unassumingly told, which cements the bond of brotherhood among all classes and all complexions" (13). I find this statement the most difficult to read given the twists and turns of the text. Surely it is comical in its downplaying of the narrative play? Considering the content in the wake of the preface, it seems a steady hand before a skittish creature unused to demonic terrain. "Unassumingly told" displays its ironic meaning against the unconventional presumption of its telling. Hopkins positions her text as a connector that allows her to reveal unacknowledged links, but she also downplays the complexity of those links; ironically, they overrun the text. The text delineates the reduction of the body to flesh in the real world, but its very presence offers a site to rebuild a complex image of that body.

The reading of this mixed-race text can be clearly periodized. Ann Allen Shockley publishes her foundational biographical article on Hopkins a few years before Alice Walker's exhuming of Zora Neale Hurston, in a similarly political project of historical unearthings. The two novelists received very different initial responses. Hurston's "primitive" modernism lent itself to the folk-focused Black Power Movement; Hopkins's sentimentalism did not. This is clear in the oft-cited Gwendolyn Brooks afterward that closes the 1978 re-printing of *Contending Forces*, the first printing since the initial publication in 1900. Brooks, who

espoused Black Arts after a political awakening that distinctly changed her poetic expression, praises "bursts of righteous heat," but writes that Hopkins "proves herself to be still a slave" because of the narrator's praise of Sappho's white features and suggestion that "African blood become[s] diluted from amalgamation with the higher races" (qtd. in Cassidy 661). Including Hopkins's peers in his castigations, Baker concludes the style of late nineteenth-century Black women's novels is a studied pretense: a "white-face propaganda *topos*," which he claims Black women writers used in late-nineteenth century narratives to cultivate "*an approving white public opinion"* (*Workings* 26, emphasis his). Brooks and Baker argue the images of text are, in fact, those of whiteness, and therefore, cannot promote Blackness; however, they misread the language that racializes those images. Cassidy pointedly observes that Baker distinguishes this "putting-on in white face" from "[Booker T.] Washington's 'mastery' of the minstrel form" because Hopkins's position is "a 'moralizing' and 'subservient' disguise, rather than a fiercely deceptive one" (Cassidy 661). Considering sexuality explains how the subversive emerges from the subservient in the sentimental's project of accentuation. It is a mask that reveals, a false face that reflects the real.[47] Jill Bergman argues that Hopkins has been rediscovered as a "radical race activist" (182).[48] Rather than reinforcing hierarchical whiteness, Hopkins's language—through its intersection of race and gender—asserts a politically pluralistic Black feminine desire.

In these racialized and gendered metapragmatics, there are material considerations. Harper's Iola teaches and orates, but the text highlights a public arena where she is still

---

47 Tate points out that Hopkins clearly considered even her near-white characters "inclusive parts of the African-American population" (*Domestic Allegories* 80). Yarborough writes that Hopkins's "positive treatment of two dark-skinned blacks—Madame Frances, a mysterious fortune-teller, and the heroic Luke Sawyer—demonstrates that occasionally she could also break free of such restrictive racial conceptions" (xxxvi).

48 Bergman argues that "The defining feature of her activism is her firing from the editorship at *The Colored American Magazine* [in 1904] because of her radical politics"; interestingly, Bergman finds "that the new management objected more to Hopkins's gender politics than to her race politics" (182).

silenced. As part of their uplift campaign, Iola's husband tells her that she should write a book; Tate observes that "she does not realize its fruition within the duration of the story" (171). Publication is crucial to the nineteenth-century uplift project, but there are considerable material obstacles to producing a novel. Ammons writes that Iola "abandons her ambition for the time being, explaining more than three decades before Virginia Woolf's famous statement on the subject: 'One needs both leisure and money to make a successful book'" (*Conflicting* 28). Of Iola's author, Ammons reminds us that "For forty years as she travelled and lectured, Harper was able to write poetry; but not until late in her life did she have enough economic security as well as sufficient freedom from her commitments as an activist to write a long narrative" (*Conflicting* 27-28). Tate writes that "Harper performs Iola's charge, using her novel to nurture the racial and sexual consciousness of her intended readership. Harper becomes the heroine of her novel" (171). For Hopkins, who would return to stenography, like many of her contemporaries—men and women—unable to make the economics of publishing work (Ammons, *Conflicting* 78), Sappho's text offers an escape from Sappho's flesh.[49] Tate writes: "Hopkins's novels stand forthright in their militant agitation for racial equality, but they rely on heroes, rather than heroines, to voice its public expression" (*Domestic Allegories* 13). Beam agrees that Hopkins is more interested in the heroine's "romantic interior" than her "public role" (168). A retreat within the novel, however, is juxtaposed against the novel's own publicity; the publicity of the book asserts the right to privacy.

The language variety comes together in the novel as it does in the main domestic space, the Smith's boarding house. The contained variety of a boarding house, a home with

49 As part of Hopkins's pessimist trajectory, Tate argues that she is more concerned with employment segregation than higher education for women because Sappho is forced to complete her stenography work at home because of her race (and her refusal to pass) (161).

transferrable elements, structures the translangualism of the novel. Sawaya writes: “Hopkins depicts the home not as a private refuge where the mother creates children but as a thoroughly blended space, a ‘lodging-house,’ where the public and private spheres, lower and upper classes are combined” (79). In contrast to the plantation house and its shadow, the whore house, (myth and ‘roast and boasts’ respectively, perhaps), the boarding house represents the Bakhtinian structure of a novel: “several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls” (261). The friendship and support between two dialect-speaking laundry women, Ophelia and Sarah Ann, living in the basement of the boarding house mirrors that of the two standard-speaking main characters, Dora and Sappho, living upstairs. Their parallelism embodies the dialect discourse, set apart from or superseding plot, paralleled with the standard speeches, highlighted by their forum, tackling the same topics from another angle. It is a highly wrought house. Beam’s description of the highly wrought aligns with Gavin Jones’s argument on the effect of Gilded Age dialect; it is “language that invites the reader to pause and savor its sounds, look, rhythms, and the logic of its arrangements and patterns and that, on the other hand, can disturb the reader with its convolutions and involutions, dislocate with its endlessness, or confront the reader with its interposing mass (Beam 33). The boarding house translangualism of the novel does exactly this; it invites in, but like a doll-house with a glass front, it prevents penetration, shutting out.

The sentimental writes the reorientating rhizome of Relation so that the Black woman’s image becomes a daguerreotype, highlighting but protecting her. This oscillation becomes only more necessary in the early years of the twentieth century. Tate opposes Hopkins as pessimist to Harper as optimist: “*Contending Forces* seems to rewrite [*Iola Leroy*] by tempering its

optimism on both fronts. ... Hopkins restrict[s] Sappho's voice to private space, preventing her penetration into the public sphere of influence" (161). And this is her happiest novel! Tate writes that "only the first of Hopkins's four novels—*Contending Forces*—has the traditional happy ending" (12), explaining that "[t]he racial optimism that dominates the 1890s novels and is evident in Hopkins's *Contending Forces* is initially mitigated in her first two serials and ultimately suspended in death-like dissolution in this last novel" (*Domestic Allegories* 207). Tate is referring to the decreasing presence of Hopkins's Black female protagonists; she writes:

> In addition to this inscription of chronic racial despair, Hopkins's serial novels decenter the heroine's prominence. ... In fact, the serial heroines rarely speak.... Hopkins seems to have silenced the discourse of female agency, which was a very important feature of the 1890s domestic novels. (208)

Ammons agrees: "Whatever guarded optimism Hopkins might have felt about the future of African-American woman artist at the time she wrote *Contending Forces* was gone by the time she wrote *Of One Blood* [1903-1904]" (*Conflicting* 84). While the context grows dimmer, Hopkins does seem to retain hope in both streams of the Sapphic power that Matthews's invokes, but the pressure on the language gets even stronger. Brooks finds optimism in the power attributed to the performances of the amnesiac, forced into passing, coerced and unknowing bigamist (both marriages unknowingly incestuous), so unfortunate former Fisk singer Dianthe Lusk in Hopkins's last novel, *Of One Blood*. Hopkins's highly wrought variety of language offers a full secret, the primitive palimpsest—not unspeakable but veiled in miraculous delight. Ammons writes: "the disruliness of her performance as an artist, in particular the formal outrageousness of her long fiction—its refusal to conform to inherited

well-made novel dicta—attacks the idea of rules itself. ... Her rebellion against mastery was both subject and medium for her art" ("Afterword" 211). The rebellion is encoded in the text: on the surface, and indicating depths. Beam writes that "Hopkins' particular innovation was to forge a cultural form of African American romance, that could admit, include, and articulate the pleasures and desires of African Americans without making this 'inmost' realm available to racist ideology" (169). This process of articulation, the expression of the subjective Black woman, is guided by a metapragmatics of exhuming suppressed desire—in its excess is also protection. Williams writes that the daguerreotype invited writers "to articulate and to contain the power of the image," however, by the very nature of writing, "the full power of the image remained beyond the confines of language" (162). Hopkins's texts oscillate between repression and expression, depth and excess, in their presentation of the Black female subject; her condition is depicted in the emerging passion of her language.

With neither capital nor free time, Hopkins's literary achievements are remarkable. Like Harper, she begins in other genres; for Hopkins, it was writing dramas, in which she and her family performed. She then moved into journalism. Carby notes that "Hopkins' debut as a novelist coincided with her becoming a founding member of the staff of *Colored American Magazine*" (122). Amazed, Brooks writes of her fiction: "With astounding fecundity (Richard Yarborough has referred to her as 'the single most productive black women writer at the turn of the century'), Hopkins spent the early years of the twentieth century spinning marvelously original literary narratives for audiences in the Northeast" (285). Brooks elaborates:

> A novelist, journalist, essayist, short-story writer, dramatist, actress, and singer, Hopkins employed multiple generic forms and themes, blending journalism with the sentimental

> novel, historical narrative with westerns, theatre and performance with sensation fiction, and Pan-Africanist ideology with the culture of spiritualism. (284)

The variety of her expression arises from the reflection against repression. Ammons writes "Formally and substantively she [Hopkins] does not stay fixed. She constantly borrows, innovates, invents, enjambs, and switches—which means we must do likewise" ("Afterword" 213). The challenge to find marginalization promising and not exhausting rests on the tilt from noun to verb, argues Nathanial Mackey (283-284). As verb, tilting is always shifting. Hopkins's moving language is ongoing. Pushing against impeded access, Hopkins and her nineteenth-century peers burst a dam; access to their own naming and therefore, their own bodies is an interaction of binaries flowering into multiplicity: crossroads into confluence.

Tilting from the flattening of the historical expression into the surface of histotextuality, *Contending Forces* takes on layers to build a highly wrought palimpsest. Through the repetition of images in the standard and dialect, Hopkins reorients Bakhtin's struggle of languages so that a more complex vision of the Plantation's interracial entanglements in Glissant's Relation becomes visible. The embrace versus the battle are the contending forces of the novel. These crossroads meet at the destabilizing shift of positionality, the potential of errantry: a polyrhythm that encompasses the newly visible variety of the African-American experience, and therefore African-American expression. The interracial language exceeds the racialized body. Bakhtin argues that the novel illuminates "one language by means of another" (361). The variety confirms the parallax perspective that the varying repetitions of the main story present. In a "continual shifting of distance between author and language, so that first some, then other aspects of language are thrown into relief," Bakhtin argues that the variety demonstrates that the

relationship of author to language is in “a state of movement and oscillation” (302). Beam argues that ornamentation moves the reader: “The literary object exerts its resistance, or it surprises the reader into a new experience of reading, a new position in relation to the literary object” (33). For Black women writers, this translangual movement is critical. Hopkins uses her repertoire of standard and dialect to rewrite the possibilities of the Black female image. *Contending Forces* performs its dialogism translanguaging through repertoires of standard and dialect in an irrepressible expression of desire. These destabilizing interventions demonstrate a power over language that authorizes the representation while acknowledging language’s power over her. Hopkins not only splits the signification of her own expression, she incorporates whiteness into the signifier, so that it performs the multi-facetedness of the mixed-race body. Cassidy argues that Baker’s valorization of Washington to the detriment of Hopkins “mask[s] over what might be described as Hopkins’s masked use of masking—her doubly masked double-voicedness” (661). The palimpsest layers standard and dialect to overwrite silence with the complexity of the rhizome; writing the text, the breadth of Hopkins’s repertoire is an explosion of the slave woman’s. Hopkins performs the impenetrable unveiling of the complex body with a passionate translangualism.

chapter three: moving pictures

Like clearcut stereoptican slides, I saw twelve scenes flash before me, each one held until I had seen it well in every detail, and then replaced by another.
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Zora Neale Hurston self-consciously weaves linguistic passion through her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Writing her novel a generation after Pauline E. Hopkins's last novel, in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance which produced a few other Black women novelists (none of whom were even still writing by the time *Their Eyes* is published), Hurston's text encodes a theory of language and desire through her use of standard and dialect. Similar to Hopkins's novel, Hurston's presentation of the subjective identity of a Black woman depends on difference; however, Hurston's complex Black women's images structure translanguaging as affective, a theory of intimacy through narrative that inserts Black women's authority into others. Hopkins's desire is impenetrable; Hurston's penetrates.

To achieve this effect, Hurston's work integrates the complementary tenderness of Édouard Glissant's wild dialectics through the text's synaesthesia. Her novel argues a translangualism of sensation as well as named language to penetrate the reader in assertion of shared subjectivity. Biman Basu claims the voice is "intimately connected in black women's fiction with the nature of language, specifically with the written word itself" and "enacts the conflict between [literacy and orality]" ("Black Voice" 89). Considering the originary frame, Basu writes: "Although [John] Wideman later concedes that 'black speech cannot escape entirely the frame of American literary language' [82], we can observe a continuum in Black women's fiction in which orality ruptures the fabric of the literary text, oral syntax implodes the literary voice ("Black Voice" 89). Basu's language reflects Bakhtin's battle; however, it need not necessarily be a confrontation. Orality offers more material with which to play, while still

acknowledging the violence of the English written standard towards the vernacular, the contending forces of Hurston's metapragmatics. Hurston reframes rather than deframes.

The integration of the senses through the combination of aural and visual language produces that demonic tactility. *Their Eyes* linguistically entwines the form and context of Sylvia Wynter's demonic-embodying, inclusionary, experientially based theory of existence, embedding the experience of Black women writers' emergence into discourse. Basu argues that the presentation of difference allows Black women to challenge dominant narratives that exclude Black women ("Black Voice" 102): "Black women's fiction not only contains a substratum of oral residue, but actively communicates an oral/aural and tactile experience; that is, it manipulates and redistributes the sensory configuration of the literary experience" ("Black Voice" 89). Language difference embodies alternative presences, its synaesthesia emphasizing the experience of its translanguaging. The text pushes an intimacy with the reader that presents the frame's violence while enabling its destabilization in an ethos of experiential equality.

Hurston is a critical touchstone for Black women writers' conscious relationship with language.[50] Henry Louis Gates writes that "Hurston is the first writer that our generation of black and feminist critics has brought into the canon" (*Signifying* 180). She was the lone foremother figure for many Black female prose writers emerging in the Second Renaissance, a Black women's literary renaissance beginning in the 1970s, a second "women's era," the event on which Wynter's shift is based. Cheryl Wall calls Hurston "the first authentic black female voice in American literature" (qtd. in Lemke 78). *Their Eyes* (her second novel) became "the

50 It seems that any examination of Black literary language must include Hurston; in fact, she was only supposed to be part of a chapter in this work, but the many avenues for study made such a limited discussion unfeasible and undesirable.

mother text," according to Sherley Anne Williams (qtd. in Lemke 147). Its rediscovery birthed a canon.[51] Mary Helen Washington, in the foreword to one of the multiple editions of the novel, writes that it is "the most widely known and most privileged text in the African American literary canon" (qtd. in Lemke 74). Sieglinde Lemke calls it hypercanonical (74); June Jordan calls it "prototypical" (qtd. in Lemke 74). Much of this reputation has to do with the language use in the text, especially Hurston's use of dialect. Washington includes the use of "our own language" in a list of qualities that make *Their Eyes* "beloved" (qtd. in Lemke 147). Hurston's work in *Their Eyes* is Wideman's first example of a writer who has "moved out of the frame" ("Framing" 36). Agreeing that she initiates a new approach, Gayl Jones calls it "breaking out of the frame" ("Breaking Out" 152). These encomiums, however, are not unanimous.

Though Hurston was a prominent member of the Harlem Renaissance and did important anthropological work on diasporic Black folktales and folk practices, *Their Eyes* was mostly deplored by Black critics at the time of its publication in 1937. Contemporary African American critics felt that Hurston's view of the South was too pastoral, unclouded by the depressing realities of racism.[52] Exemplifying the complaint against her, Richard Wright felt her language "highly charged," but heard a loud echo of minstrelsy (Washington, "Zora" 17).[53] Wright's

51 There is, in fact, a "Zora canon." At the beginning of 2020, the editors at *Zora*, an online periodical for Black women from *medium*, inaugurated "The Zora Canon," a list of "the 100 greatest books ever written by African American women." In a little friction with "greatest," they also call it the only "comprehensive" list of its kind. The name of the periodical and its canon are a testament to Hurston's place in literature.

52 Washington argues that "she could not depict blacks as defeated, humiliated, degraded, or victimized, because she did not experience black people or herself that way" ("Zora" 17).

53 Wright also writes that Gertrude Stein's dialect use in "Melanctha" reminds him of his beloved grandmother (Miller 109), so he is clearly working something out. Washington suggests that this reaction may have been influenced by Hurston's relationship with white patronage in the Harlem Renaissance. Though many Renaissance writers were beholden to whites for monetary support, Hurston often comes under particular scrutiny, due to the closeness of her relationship with Mrs. R. Osgood Mason (who also provided funds for Langston Hughes among others). Mason, whom Hurston called Godmother, would support Hurston's trips south for folklore material, but Mason also insisted on control over the collection of material and Hurston's work. Though the relationship had ended by the time she wrote *Their Eyes*, the juxtaposition of Hurston's white patron and her interest in the folk, particularly the Black masses of the South, led many of her contemporaries to label her an opportunist playing "the darkie" (Washington, "Zora" 10-11).

critique joined with decades of Black writing that deplored the pejorative associations of literary dialect, fearing that any manifestation inherently repeated the hierarchy of the originary frame. As Washington notes, if the thirties were Hurston's literary meridian, they were also the beginning of her "intellectual lynching" ("Zora" 16). She was mostly dismissed by the literary audience after World War II.

Hurston was rediscovered in the 1970s, during the burgeoning of a move to Blacken English, as George Elliot Clarke demands with echoes of Amiri Baraka's "Black Art" (1966). Black Power reversed the linguistic hierarchy so that Hurston's literary dialect proved her literary and racial *bona fides*. The resulting hagiographization, however, inevitably led to pushback. Nations need canons because nations are exclusive, and Black Nationalism is no exception. In reordering but maintaining a hierarchy, the promotion of Hurston opened itself to critiques of its authoritativeness. Hurston was a critical industry by the end of the 1980s, when Hazel Carby questions her canonization. Critical Hurston criticism reads her literary dialect as presenting an ahistorical, unchanging, and undifferentiated racialization. Challenging the reductive side of folk-obsessed nationalism, where elites exploit and dehistoricize the masses for aesthetic ends (Carby 77), Carby reads Hurston's use of literary dialect (and the journey of her Black female heroine, the very pillars used to elevate her) as evidence of Hurston's complicity in this exclusionary nationalist process (89-90). Carby's opposition of the ahistoricized folk and the elite novelist accuses *Their Eyes* of a hierarchical frame that uses dialect to diminish, much as Hurston's contemporary reviewers did. Taking these criticisms seriously underscores the presence of Hurston's frame; however, the ontological and epistemological duality of her discourse reframes these accusations not as incorrect, but as

incomplete. Blackness is certainly an image in Hurston, but it is not a static one. The images of Black women move and proliferate through a linguistic repetition with difference: Jacques Derrida's différance. Hurston challenges the hierarchical constraints of racialized linguistic binaries—written and oral, standard and dialect—in her performance of différance, frustrating a conclusive position for them. Her dialect is totalizing and variable; her standard is authoritative and permeable. She enacts the processes of language to delight in her Black female power over discourse without denying its contingency and relativity. Integrating the binaries of her Black womanhood, the "Other" of the Same and "other" of the other, Hurston proposes an image of Black humanity not Western humanism to move the binaries.

This power is invested in the two pillars of Hurston's posthumous renown: the dialect and the Black female heroine. The two are, of course, as interconnected as Virginia Earle Matthews's body and text. Assuming a hierarchy, whether mainstream or racialized, critics often discuss the language as if there will be a linguistic winner presented in the text with the main character, Janie, as the locus of competition. The critics' approach to language determines their reading of the characters and their opinion of Hurston. Lemke explicitly correlates positive interpretations of Janie (and her third husband, Tea Cake) with a positive attitude toward the vernacular (78). (Though there is a great deal of debate on Tea Cake's value in Janie's life.[54]) Robert Stepto's influential reading of the text asks whether Janie is actually the empowered narrator, the admirable storytelling Black heroine championed by so many,[55] or if the presence of standard narration actually undermines her empowerment (Awkward, Introduction 19).

54 See William M. Ramsey, "The Compelling Ambivalence of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," for a discussion of various readings on Tea Cake. Darryl Hattenhauer goes so far as to argue that Janie dies at the end because in her submission to Tea Cake, she allows him to bite her and pass on his rabies.

55 Washington claims that Janie is the earliest "heroic black woman" in Afro-American literary tradition because of her linguistic achievements: "she is always the aware voice, consciously undergoing the most severe tests of that autonomy" ("Zora" 16).

Citing Stepto's bewilderment over *Their Eyes*'s omniscient narrator, which to him suggests that Janie "has not really won her voice and self after all" (qtd. in Jones, *Liberating* 131), Jones agrees that "Hurston does not go as far as later writers in breaking the frame and freeing Janie's whole voice as self" (*Liberating* 134). Washington argues that the narrator is complicit in silencing Janie: "in crucial places where we need to hear her speak she is curiously silent, ...even when Hurston sets out to explore Janie's internal consciousness, her internal speech, what we actually hear are the voices of men" ("I Love" 102). Her argument makes clear the political stance assumed in the attribution of the language. If Janie is stymied by the standard, as evidenced by the narration, then Hurston must be privileging it. The standard—in language and gender—maintains its primacy, therefore the hierarchies of the oppressive hegemony are also maintained.

Black texts are often (unfairly) critiqued on their politics, but Rosemary Hathaway identifies one of the issues in judging Hurston particularly in this way:

> As with Wright's review, [Alain] Locke's seems to demand of Hurston a certain kind of conformity or allegiance to a cause. Clearly this is unreasonable weight to put on a novelist, largely because it is typically not a demand made of white writers. Furthermore, such a critique (one that more recent critics have made of Hurston's work, as well) overlooks the ways in which Hurston's novel 'plays' with her audiences, both catering to expectations and subverting them at every turn. (175)

I confess I wish to align Hurston and Janie with a politic, but it is not nominal in the manner of the causes Hathaway generalizes; it is active. It is a belief in movement as an assertion of subjective complexity. Nathaniel Mackey writes: "The black speaker, writer, or musician whose

practice privileges variation subjects the fixed equations that underwrite the denial [of agency] (including the idea of fixity itself) to an alternative" (267). In her free translanguaging, Hurston affirms identity movement, not a Movement. Her centring of Black women as ambivalent symbols is not *a* cause, but *in* action.

In Hurston's metapragmatics, Janie can be both empowered and enervated by language, the linguistic communities she encounters both supportive and judgmental, her language both private and public. The movement of linguistic referents through bodies, main and supporting characters, makes possible a movement of authority that pushes changing perspectives on these values. Claiming Hurston as "one of the pioneer expositor-practitioners of a resistant othering [as opposed to otherness] found in black vernacular culture," Mackey writes that "[s]he emphasizes action, dynamism, and kinetics" (267). The pillars are not fixed pedestals, but adjustable elements of the image. A singular connection between text and identity cannot stand on this ground. Barbara Johnson writes that "Hurston suspends the certainty of reference not by erasing these differences [black/white, inside/outside] but by foregrounding the complex dynamism of their interaction" ("Thresholds" 139). With a dynamic linguistic repertoire, Hurston proves the literary existence of authoritative Black women integrated with an acknowledgement of the authoritative standards that oppress them.

As novelists, Black women are both marginalized and authoritative, creating "a new relation of difference and sameness" (Wynter, "Beyond Miranda" 363),[56] reorienting their Same and Other. Difference is the foundational linguistic challenge of Black literature in English, Gates argues,

56 Houston A. Baker's "changing same" (*Modernism* 14), his name for the living tradition of Black arts, from Amiri Baraka's description Black music, which Deborah E. McDowell uses to title her study of Black women's writing, is echoed in Wynter's balance of sameness and difference.

originating as early as the seventeenth century, soon after the first slaves arrived in the US (*Signifying* 130). By the nineteenth century, literary dialect users were iconized as marginalized peoples—the immigrant, the poor, the racialized. Their difference from the written standard was also their distance from mainstream mores. Andrew Elfenbein writes: "nonstandard pronunciation mark[ed] simultaneous debasement and license" (76). The nonstandard users were free from linguistic rules and therefore free from societal rules—exciting in a picturesque way—but ultimately dangerous in their apparent lack of rationality. Emphasizing their supposedly necessary subordination, racialized authorship was actively, and often violently, discouraged. Stripped of authority over their voices, their language was made to sound as a sign of subordination. Describing the situation in the United States, Henry Louis Gates writes that

> by 1895, dialect had come to connote black innate mental inferiority, the linguistic sign both of human bondage (as origin) and of the continued failure of 'improvability' or 'progress,' two turn-of-the-century keywords. Dialect signified both 'black difference' and that the figure of the black in literature existed primarily as object, not subject. (*Signifying* 176)

The racialized person's reduction to object corresponds to a linguistic objectification—sound made into image, and self reduced to object—both subject to external examination and ranking.

Enlightenment ideals posit difference as subordinate to a hegemonic standard and difference in writing sounds. In his comparative study, *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong claims that there is a natural teleology from the oral to the written that mirrors the development of civilization and science, the progress of the Enlightenment. More materially tangible, the written word is considered more empirically reliable, offering more consistent opportunities for

rational conjecture, driving intellectual progress (Ong 1-15). In its superior rationality, writing is also considered more objective. Having been categorized by this “rational” system, and, of course, hierarchized by its belief in progress, sound becomes intellectually less important; the oral is valued less than the written. This hierarchy is evident even from the medieval appearances of dialect in English writing, where it was used for comic effect (Minnick 1). When that unseriousness is iconized with a particular group, there are fraught political implications. Wideman, in his foundational study on Black literary language, observes that the racialized enter the literary fray structurally reinforcing the hierarchy between the two language cultures: written, white and oral, Black (“Framing” 35). The written image of difference was a sort of visual onomatopoeia that served to support societal hierarchies. The objectified sound indicated people whose living bodies had been emptied of humanity. Expressly excluded from the written, the Black writer faced a paradoxical dilemma: how could written discourse reflect their identity and agency?

To represent their experiential difference of racialization, Black writers also needed a sensual signifier. Black writers have attempted to reinhabit the self with the very sound object that excluded them, dialect, challenging the hierarchical associations that emptied it. They, however, needed to rescript the sign of sound. To revalue its presentation, sound needed to reveal an interior, not displace it. Not mutually exclusive, the written and the oral can enter the other through a performative difference, a sensual translation. In writing, speech can be indicated through typography, setting off the text with spacing or punctuation; pronunciation becomes visible through orthography, nonstandard spellings that foreground phonetics.

Hurston plays in the differential possibilities of sight and sound in text. Her novel brings together the visual and the sonic to insist on Black women's depths, the specificity and subjectivity of the Black and female body and to transitively extend that insistence beyond the text. Deborah Clarke argues that Janie's talking depends on looking, and she attributes this to Hurston's recognition that visual difference is "crucial to understanding how identity is developed" (599).[57] Clarke sees Hurston's insistence on the connection between the visual and identity as challenging vision's association with objectivity—raceless and genderless in the sense of white male neutrality (600). Citing Audre Lorde's argument that visibility is the cornerstone of the Black female identity, Clarke writes that "Hurston ensures that black bodies remain powerfully visible throughout the novel, particularly the bodies of black women" (600). She argues that Hurston shifts the Black body from spectacle to embodied voice, from passive to active (611), from spectacle to spectacular, Daphne Brooks might write. Hurston's play in relating the images of the written and oral makes the sound more resonant, the presence more complex: filling the word, inhabiting it with life—changing how to look and listen. Discussing race, Samira Kawash explains that the "[t]he body is a sign of difference that exceeds the body," but the visible is an insufficient guarantee of knowledge (qtd. in Burrows 444). To be heard and seen is a specific kind of presence that has been denied Black women; the language variety penetrates to experientially instruct the audience on how to hear so they can see her complexity.

In its play with the oral and written, Hurston's translanguaging synaesthesic approach deconstructs the oppressive linguistic oppositions established by *parole* and *langue*. Derrida argues that Ferdinand de Saussure puts writing outside of language, and then deplores its

57 Surprised that initially all analysis of Hurston focused on the voice, when the title emphasizes the visual (435), Stuart Burrows cites Clarke's 2001 article, "'The Porch Couldn't Talk for Looking': Voice and Vision in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," as the first to explore other senses.

external influence on sound, arresting writing's potential for change (*Grammatology* 35-38). Saussure presents speech as interior to language and text as exterior, so that speech is a linguistic pure core threatened by text's encroaching rigidity (Derrida, *Grammatology* 34). Though Saussure is often contrasted with Johannes Herder, who developed a nationalist theory of language, his positioning of speech and text actually matches with nationalism's exploitation of a vernacular as the pure core of a people. Accordingly, Mikhail Bakhtin claims that Saussure's language theorizing errs by focussing on systems (rather than utterances: *langue* over *parole*), making language inert (Bakhtin 264). Both Saussure and Bakhtin see writing as the image of language, but Bakhtin's written image is in a reciprocal relationship with speech. Speech fertilizes writing, while writing frames speech. This reciprocity informs the image. Bakhtin writes that the "linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual significance is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme" (281). The linguistic significance relates to the intentions of the speaker, where the expanding force of expression complexifies the consolidating force of understanding, while the actual significance relates to the listener, where the consolidating force of understanding simplifies the expanding force of expression. It is communication as centripetal and centrifugal, inhaling and exhaling: "[these] are the generative forces of linguistic life" (Bakhtin 270). The interactive image retains the energy of language; it is the body breathing. For Bakhtin, the energy produced by these tensions illuminates the ideological contest of the dialogic. He sees energy within the image, but he does not see the change it can generate.

Édouard Glissant grounds Saussure's distinction and Bakhtin's integration in the Black diaspora. Within the frame of the Plantation, the juxtaposition of African and European cultures forms an "irremediable break between forms of sensibility" (Glissant, *Poetics* 66). Because of this, Glissant argues, "[t]he Plantation, like a laboratory, displays most clearly the opposed forces of the oral and the written at work" (*Poetics* 74). On the Plantation, Man's ground, the break is maintained by physical impositions that embody its language distinctions and restrictions. In opposition to the singular root that structures the Plantation, however, the rhizome produces the movement of Relation (Glissant, *Poetics* 18)—linking and delinking between the nodes, changing each in an ongoing multifaceted chain. Bakhtin similarly sees languages throwing each other into relief. He writes that "the novelistic hybrid is an artistically organized system for bringing different language in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (Bakhtin 361). The juxtaposition of languages does not only illuminate each one distinctly; it seeks to create them as alive. Glissant insists that this leads to "contaminations" (*Poetics* 67); two cultures, two languages, have an effect upon each other (*Poetics* 66). The novel is a Plantation revealed as Relation.

In writing, sound suggests the internal resonance of the word, but in narrative, reversing Saussure's structure, speech represents the external. In *Their Eyes*, for instance, Hathaway suggests that the direct discourse dialect becomes associated with Janie's exterior and free indirect discourse with her interior (179), revealing the metapragmatics creating the image. Janie's mixing of exterior and interior demonstrates the possibility of changing ideologies. Derrida argues that Saussure's discreteness is impossible; there is movement between the

opposition (*Grammatology* 47); Derrida's claim works through Glissant's Relation. *Their Eyes* anticipates Derrida's destabilizing of the written with the oral through the use of the centripetal expectation against the centrifugal possibility in repetition with difference. The crossroads enable confluence.

Bakhtin proposes three devices to create the image of language; Hurston employs all three. The first, hybridization, corresponds to the indirect discourse in *Their Eyes*. Bakhtin describes it as an encounter between two different linguistic consciousnesses within the limits, the arena, of an utterance (a dialogue). He explains that this is deliberately done in novels, but occurs naturally in real life and is the unperceived cause of change in historical life and the evolution of languages (Bakhtin 358). In novels, it is a sample, not an image, unless there is the frame of another language, the representation of a different consciousness that in its framing authority is taken as the norm (Bakhtin 358). In *Their Eyes*'s hybridization, a third-person standard frames the first-person dialect, repeating the originary frame, which often employed a first-person standard speaker to frame the dialect speaker. The second device, the dialogized interrelation of languages, is found in the free indirect discourse of *Their Eyes*. Bakhtin describes it as two utterances fighting it out, fused into one utterance in the battle (359). In Gates's reading, these two utterances are standard and dialect, fused as a free indirect discourse creole, with the vocabulary of one language and the grammars of another. In this fusion, they become another image of language, one that fits within the hybridized first image frame. Finally, the third device, pure dialogues (Bakhtin 360), corresponds to the direct discourse, particularly the tales told in *Their Eyes*'s literary dialect, which is also being integrated into the first two devices. The full deployment puts the devices in dialogue with the images, keeping

their mechanics running to produce a proliferation of images interacting with each other. The difference of the image is a generator, the expression powering the penetration.

Hurston's text ensures that each device also does work within itself to intensify the force of their coming together. All the direct speech is rendered in what she called dialect (Gates *Signifying* 191). In this primacy, it can be read pejoratively. Jones calls it eye dialect: a distortion (*Liberating* 135), which informs her judgment of Janie and the text. In her quantitative linguistic analysis of the dialect, Lisa Cohen Minnick finds that the dialect is the same among various characters who, Minnick claims, would have different dialects (126-127).[58] This empirical support for Carby's critique explains Jones's complaint and Wright's dismissal; however, it is important to put this image of language in the context of the heroine who takes responsibility for the narrative (though not absolute authority over it). Despite Minnick's point about the lack of differentiation, linguistic analyses of Hurston's work (including Minnick's) tend to otherwise support the accuracy of her dialect representation; in both the grammar and sound representation, it does correspond to actual speech, so it is not the minstrel facade of eye dialect that Jones claims. It is the fertilizing reciprocity that Bakhtin avers; the real dialect invigorates and legitimizes. Wideman argues that the specificity of Hurston's usage diminishes the external frame, so that its context of superiority framing inferiority is challenged, and the depths of the dialect can be plumbed ("Framing" 36). In the novel, it is not anthropological; it need not record, but as a literary image of Blackness it must sound. Wideman writes: "Authenticity of character, of experience are related by Hurston to the connection of the word and the act" ("Framing" 36). Janie is the first character to speak directly. In the connection of

58 For Hurston, the direct speech does not necessarily change even when the race does; Washington notes: "The intent may have been admirable, but all the white characters in *Seraph* [*on the Suwanee*] sound exactly like the Eatonville folks sitting on Joe Clarke's front porch" (Introduction 21). Washington calls this last novel Hurston's worst (Introduction 21).

the word and act, Janie's link to the real world in her sound suggests the relevancy of her narrative themes.[59] The sound is the metaphor for the act; it authenticates the written image.

Janie's first vocal acts are to welcome her auditor(s) and to tell her story so that the reader encounters a fully developed self-consciousness in the initial direct discourse. Janie's assertion of presence and agency with the oral makes the sound resonant; it deepens the image, as Wideman suggests. The goal is not authenticity, per se, but complexity. When Janie's friend, Pheoby, comes over to learn about her time away, Janie begins telling the story of her life: "Ah know exactly what Ah got to tell yuh" (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 20). Her authority, however, is balanced with uncertainty; she finishes: "but it's hard to know where to start at" (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 20). In the dialect, her interiority is assertive, but not fixed. It rejects the confinements of that language and seeps into others.

Framing the dialect, as in the originary frame, is the standard narration—in this case, in third-person omniscient. The third-person narration is key for performing similarity and difference in the staging of *Their Eyes*. The third-person narration is contrasted to Janie in its omniscience, but the conceit of the novel—that she is narrating a tale—puts her first-person and the third-person in oscillation as shared functions in her act. Not only does it repeat the dialect, its standard performance frames her dialect one, but in repetition of that dialect performance. With boundaries present but flexible, the third-person narration reveals the extra-capability of direct speech while supporting its own variegated functionality. The presumed objective rationality of the third-person standard is disturbed by free indirect discourse. Interestingly, though Bakhtin's language images are fixed, he argues that there can be no authoritative

59 Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that the structural realities of Black women's lives may inform the ambivalence of Janie's vocal power (108-109).

distinctions of narration and speech: “the boundaries are deliberately flexible and ambiguous” (308), which the free indirect discourse proves. Gates writes that free indirect discourse is “an implicit critique of that ancient opposition in narrative theory between showing and telling, between mimesis and diegesis” (*Signifying* 208). In that traditional contrast, “[o]nly actions or events can be represented, in this sense, while discourse here would seem to be overheard or repeated”; in free indirect discourse, these are mixed (Gates, *Signifying* 208). Michael Ginsberg describes it as mimesis which tries to pass for diegesis; and conversely, diegesis that tries to pass for mimesis (qtd. in Gates, *Signifying* 208). Gates’s analysis of Hurston’s free indirect discourse helps me to map the translanguaging. I use him as the Virgil to my Dante as I explore Hurston’s demonic ground.

Gates defines the free indirect discourse as a mediation that resolves the tension between the direct dialect and the indirect standard (*Signifying* 191); however, he claims that Janie’s free indirect discourse is in the standard language of the narrator, not her spoken dialect, which suggests the alienation of this diction. Gates describes it as the narrator having a “proprietary consciousness” over Janie (*Signifying* 211). A resolved tension implies one language has overcome; the narrator’s proprietary consciousness suggests it is her triumph. The contradiction between these statements is resolved by translanguaging. Rather than diverging from a language system like standard or dialect, the speaker (writer) has access to a potentially variable set of resources within the named systems unconfined by those systems. The third-person narrator’s standard proprietariness seems less subsuming when considered as part of the text’s larger repertoire. In fact, Gates notes that “in several passages, it is extraordinarily difficult to distinguish the narrator's voice from the protagonist's” because the narrator uses the diction of

the direct speech (*Signifying* 191). In this doubled expression of translanguaging, Janie can be both the narrator and not the narrator, in a tension mediated but never resolved.

Most analyses of Hurston's linguistic variety engage the free indirect discourse as the site of hybridity.[60] *Their Eyes*, however, is not only free indirect discourse; there is a performance of difference in the movement through the different narrative possibilities. Gates describes Hurston's narrative voice as "oscillating as representations among direct discourse, indirect discourse, and a unique form of free indirect discourse that serves to privilege the speaking voice" (*Signifying* 131); Jones also uses the word "oscillation" to describe Hurston's linguistic movement (qtd. in Lemke 78). Oscillation underscores movement, in this case an encompassing of language binaries through the repetition of function in traditional oppositions. The consistent similarity of the direct discourse across characters highlights the visibility of the oscillations, which from the binary develops into a process of hybridity—a moving translanguaging. The designation free indirect works in the levelling of indirect and direct discourse; and in their juxtaposition, a theory of movement is expressed. From there, maintaining their distinct representations, the flexible and ambiguous boundaries of narrative positions undermine the hierarchies of standard and dialect, of writing and orality.

Keeping the constitutive elements visible, the third person is a stage for the mutability of the image—the dance of translanguaging. Jones concurs with Robert Hemenway that the shifts between languages, standard and dialect, first person and third, are awkward (*Liberating* 137). What feels awkward could in fact be part of a deliberate strategy to make the moves obvious—a shout, not a whisper, thus impossible to ignore. As Burrows argues, it is not simply about the

60 Hathaway observes: "What seems more remarkable today about Wright's critique, however, is its implication that novel's entire text is written in dialect, a view that totally overlooks its very complicated blend of dialect with free indirect discourse" (178).

visibility, but how it is used (444). Ralph Ellison claims that third-person narration allows for broad and deep resources of American vernacular speech; it accommodates multiple narrators and wide variety of characters (qtd. in Gates, *Signifying* 193). Gates argues that this narration is "concerned to represent the sheer multiplicity of American oral narrative forms and voices" (*Signifying* 193). The oscillations between binaries becomes an accommodation of plurality. In *Their Eyes*, the third person narration offers a proscenium for a performance of permeating distinctions between repeated speech and represented events, creating a changing indexing of Black women's bodies, literature, and orature.

With the grease of free indirect discourse, the text translanguages through shifting and intersecting positions. Gates argues:

> the voice of the black oral tradition—represented here as direct speech—as well as... Hurston's use of free indirect discourse [are] the rhetorical analogue to the text's metaphors of inside and outside, so fundamental to the depiction of Janie's quest for consciousness, her very quest to become a speaking black subject. (*Signifying* 181)

Explaining that free indirect discourse "is a dramatic way of expressing a divided self" (*Signifying* 207), Gates distances these positions of direct and free indirect discourse, and inside and outside. Janie's interior being that split self-consciousness and her exterior the spectacle of the Black woman's body, he suggests that recognition of the distance is the prerequisite to becoming a subject. In this analysis, Gates focuses her awareness at the brutal moment of distinction when Janie's second husband, Jody (Joe) Starks, slaps her for the first time; Janie says that she has learned how not to mix her interior and exterior (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112). The slap suggests that the difference between exterior and interior are violently enforced; as in

the brutality of the Plantation, the juxtaposition is made visible by its imposition. The violence of the revelation suggests Bakhtin's dialogic battle or Basu's conflict; however, the novel's free indirect discourse stages Janie as both aware and unaware, placing this moment in the intimate oscillation of difference.

Repeating Saussure's unidirectionality, Gates's argument suggests that the resumption of Janie's interrupted passage entails representation through dialect speech, the undivided version of free indirect discourse. For Gates, her narrative quest is the exterior as speech pushing all the way in, healing the division through its singular language takeover. Barbara Johnson takes the journey in the other direction. She suggests that Janie's quest is to externalize the split by communicating it. Johnson argues that Janie must learn that she is not "one unified identity" (that of mayor's wife) in order to acquire vocal power; she must identify her divided interior and express it externally ("Metaphor" 49). Johnson, like Gates, assumes a teleological journey, depicted in the relationship between self and language; however, in her case, the interior subsumes the exterior. In highlighting the split, however, I think that Johnson comes closer to Hurston's movement ethos than Gates. Johnson uses Roman Jakobson's poetics of metaphor and metonymy—a distinction of space and time, selection and combination—as exterior and interior respectively to explain the maintenance of difference as the precondition of the speaking subject ("Metaphor" 49). Though Johnson claims that metaphor and metonymy are "incompatible forces" ("Metaphor" 50), this does not prevent her from identifying "an externalization of the inner, a metaphorically grounded metonymy" and "an internalization of the outer, or a metonymically grounded metaphor" ("Metaphor" 49). In this seeming contradiction between incompatible but working forces, Johnson's analysis repeats Hurston's

integrating oscillation. As Johnson observes in another article, Hurston is "a commentator on the dynamics of any encounter between an inside and an outside, any attempt to make a statement of difference"; there is always motion even in apparent fixity ("Thresholds" 130). Hurston's movement is in the reciprocity of difference.

The free indirect discourse begins much earlier in the novel. (Perhaps undercutting his own argument?[61]), Gates writes that:

> Long before [Janie] becomes aware of her division, of her inside and outside, free indirect discourse communicates this division to the reader. After she becomes aware of her own division, free indirect discourse functions to represent, rhetorically, her interrupted passage from outside to inside. (*Signifying* 207)

If, as Gates argues, Janie's developing self-consciousness is represented in the free indirect discourse (*Signifying* 191), its early appearance suggests the awareness that precedes the explicit recognition of the split in the narrative. In fact, the interaction of interior and exterior is being communicated. The palimpsest of her narration and the already aware narration of the discovery (in alternating primacy) presents the difference as an oscillation among repeating images, depending on the view.[62] Hathaway points out that since "the entire novel is presented to the reader as one long, uninterrupted storytelling performance, in which Janie relates her life story to her friend Pheoby," Janie has learned how to productively mix her inside and outside (179).[63] Basu suggests that interiority and exteriority are a continuum along which identity continually slides and that the different languages allows this movement ("Oral Tutelage" 171-174). Through repetition, the linear violence and progression to awareness laid within her

61 Johnson sees in Gates a discussion of boundaries "transgressed and preserved" ("Metaphor" 57).
62 Stuelke describes the novel as having a "palimpsestual drive" (768)
63 Dale Pattison concludes that the whole narrative is the process of Janie making her interior public (23).

already existing and welcoming awareness structures Black women's literary linguistic experiences as oscillations between these linear and recursive realities, a translanguaging of ontologies.

The oscillations are not random; they have their own rhythms, generated by specific experience. Janie arrives in the novel with unfriendly observers commenting on her unexpected return to town through observations on her body. In this doubled arrival, a return and an introduction, the novel becomes territory that is hers and not hers. The townspeople's cruel commentary is described as "[w]ords walking without masters" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 10). The narrator explains that in their unfettered chat, they are reclaiming their humanity after dehumanizing work (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 9-10). The language becomes metonymic for the people, but their free dialect denies Janie her interiority as the dialect detractors fear. This seeming contradiction, played out in the Black woman's body, orchestrates the metapragmatics of Hurston's text.

The townspeople view Janie as flesh—the empty body—as they are rendered in their work, but that does not define how she sees herself. In the same move that makes the townspeople now "lords of sounds," Janie too balances their observation with her own narrative authority. While the townspeople's cruelty is the first instance of free indirect discourse in the text (and Gates claims collective free indirect discourse is Hurston's invention [*Signifying* 214]), its oppressive use suggests the violent misogynoir of history. Its reinhabitation by the object, Janie, emphasized by the different linguistic form, demonstrates the oscillation of violence and tenderness in this language of intimacy, arranging the themes of the narrative as a positioning and re-positioning of self. In her study of code-switching, Janet Fuller argues that its

strategic presentations are a way of performing identity that positions not only the speaker but also the audience in relation to that speaker (126). Similarly, Johnson writes that, for Hurston, "questions of difference and identity are always a function of a specific interlocutionary situation—and the answers, matters of strategy rather than truth" ("Thresholds" 135-136). This translanguaging strategically deploys its elements with the pragmatics of the code-switch. The text depicts images changing through language changing in repeated images; language constantly shifts from one scene to the next, the way that figures move in a flip book or film. Hurston moves the image of language to depict Black women's sense of self against her societal objectification; she is empowered through the synaesthesia of the oral and the written, not just the intrusion of the oral. Amidst the contractions of the community and the expansion of her repertoire, translanguage offers a revelation and a protection. Within this porous and mutable frame, the possibilities of Janie's identity can breathe and move.

In *Their Eyes*, there is individual language that is also generalized, and general language that is individualized, moving from standard to dialect, used by the third person and the first. In the oscillation between interior and exterior, metaphor and metonymy, standard and dialect, there are contaminations. These reciprocities transgress their binaries, starting, perceptively, with the frame. The novel begins:

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail on forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to

> remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 9)

John Laudun writes: “The outermost edge of the frame is the very formal speech, as indexed by diction and syntax, that begins the chapter with an abstraction” (51). The term “outermost edge” is only relevant if there is movement in the frame; it expresses awareness of the potential to change the reader and writer’s orientations to the frame. Hurston’s frame is activated with a perspective shift; the parallax view sets the theoretical practice. The shift that demonstrates the active constitution of the frame is signalled by the active interjection “now,” which highlights its contrast to the prior declaration in its actual definition and familiar usage respectively. Its particular signification both denotes and connotes immediacy. Lemke argues that this use of “now” has a colloquial flavour (66). He argues that the colloquial imparts a more informal and immediate feeling; with a “straightforward and profane touch,” the language switches from a philosophical register to a psychological one (65). This passage begins as if it is a humanist sentiment, but then changes to reveal that it is actually gendered (Lemke 65). From a conventional standard, almost aphorismic, formality, Man as human, suddenly, retroactively, disenchants to become the intimate man as male in a narrative of différance. The inclusion of women’s perspective demands a translanguaging through registers that deconstructs the word.

In Hurston’s deconstruction, the tenor changes and so does the rhythm. “Now” cues up the polyrhythm. The novel begins at a distance in the abstract teleology of time and death—the expected linearity of the novel—the “now” reorients that teleology into the specificity of the moment. A statement of fixed position and external sight turns to one of ongoing internal management, moving onto the constantly shifting terrain of demonic ground. Asserting the

present as presence in a frame shift, this moment of diction, like the communal free indirect discourse, gestures to universality, though not a static universality. It is a universality that repeats the differential possibilities of the specific. Laudun connects the immediacy of the "now" to speech, given that it is more commonly a spoken interjection. He writes: "the narrative and quoted voices are conflated through a mixing of speech registers" (51). Echoing Gates' description of the free indirect discourse, Laudun's conflation places the free indirect discourse in the frame, beginning before there are any characters. There is a subjectivity prior to consciousness that belies any objective abstraction: the narrator self prior to the self narrating. In this chiasm, teleology is diverted into an always already: an oscillation. When Janie starts her tale, the reader could reflect back on the start of the novel and its division of creation as a framing of her narrative ideology. Lemke argues that the forgetting and remembering women who introduce the novel "construct a 'truth' that allows them to retain their sanity and to take action" (65). He frames truth in quotation marks because it is not objective. Glissant explains that Relation's "always approximate truth is given in a narrative" (27). In taking action, the women position and reposition themselves in a moving subjective relationship to a changing truth. Framing Janie as active agent in the tale being told, the opening presents the rhythm of Black female desire as the strategic language of a disenchanting narrative.

The narrator third-person narrator is repeating to the reader Janie's tale, which she tells Pheoby. In the entwining of the narrator and the character (and reader and character) is the experience of Relation: connection and disconnection, knowing and unknowing, movement, and the inescapable linearity that directs the energy: the revelation of strategy. In this repetition, the commingling presents as if some ink from a different sheet in the palimpsest ran through to

the one on top (as opposed to the spaces opened by the free indirect discourse). The word is the ink stain, revealing the existence of information hidden underneath—though not necessarily revealing that information, able to hide in the falling darkness that accompanies the beginning of Janie's tale. The smallest whole in the translanguage, words are localized sites of permeability in named languages, which can display the reach of the individual. Laudun's expectation of a certain formality of diction in the third person narration leads him to ask, "But what should we make of the of the sudden appearance of a word like *monstropolous* when it does not appear in dialogue?" (52). It appears when the narrator describes the scene of Janie and Pheoby's talk: "Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 19). Gates identifies the appearance of *monstropolous* as one of the moments where the provenance of the diction is indistinct. The word is the sign of a sharing of subjectivity.

Laudun notes the appearance of this strange word right before Janie's direct discourse narration starts, so that it signals the edge of a narrative frame (51). Patricia Stuelke defines the word through this placement: "Introduced just as the narrative frame of the novel ends and Janie's storytelling begins, monstropolous-ness is the function not just of the passage of time but of the passing on (or passing away) of history" (769). Difference, then, is a sharing of narrative that depends on the change of time. Time produces the change, but the change produces the narrative, an oscillation between a kissing darkness and a monstropolous one. Difference encompasses difference in a polyrhythm. Stuelke continues: "Monstropolous-ness comes about through the historical production of narrative; the book itself (Janie's telling) produces the 'monstropolous old thing' that is darkness, darkness that is both the atmosphere of

the telling, and, more obliquely, the transnational racial community the novel reflects and inflects" (769). The latter is quite oblique, but it suggests the inclusion of intimacy and invention that the frame proposes to generate the narrative. *Monstropolous* moves through a sharing of narrative and form, both as creator forming the tale and creative in its expression.

Laudun sees the *monstropolous* as moving from Janie to the narrator (52), introducing her narrative authority before she starts narrating. The sound that fills the image, Janie is the act that confirms the word. Laudun writes: "My suggestion is that Hurston is signaling to the reader that the two narrators ... are not to be assumed distinct just as Pheoby's later narration of Janie's telling will not be distinct" (52). He explains that repeating a story often takes on the flavour of the original story, so that just as Pheoby's telling will have some recourse to Janie's phrases and diction, the narrator's story is also absorbing Janie's diction (52). The word leaks. Bakhtin writes: "The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background" (282). In this sharing, the word diffracts, extending itself through its possible associations. As we see, Bakhtin refers to the variations which appears in this process as aliens; he writes: "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way" (279). It is the formation of racialization. The word knows itself in the same way the nation does, but it does not abject the alien, it embraces it. The word is born in Relation and develops in Relation, informed by and informing heteroglossia. The word lives because of its sharing in human variety.

The word changes in extension and internally. Bakhtin is interested in the larger difference of socio-ideological bodies, but the individual expressions within those bodies contribute, too. The alien word is possible because of the interaction of *parole* and *langue*—the word's breath. It is akin to the metaphoric replacement, in that it is understood within a structure, but the subjective interpretation—the desire it is bred from—contributes to its shaping. This subjective interpretation involves both producing the word—the internal alien described above and absorbing the word—an external alien Bakhtin also identifies. The audience's context for the word is akin to metonymic replacement in the lateral orientation of the structural movement. (Working with Johnson's interpretation of Jakobson, it is a moebius strip of interior and exterior that Hurston would probably enjoy.) The dual alien presences as a differentiation within similarity gives the word a narrative of choice and relation. In repetition, the relation of the choice changes. In the second appearance of *monstropolous*, losing some of its alien-ness, it is able to perform those alien possibilities moving beyond Janie.

Integrating frame and narrative, *monstropolous* implicates perspective in desire. Moving into the narrative of linear violence, the word is authenticated by the act. Its second (and last) appearance is in the description of the hurricane near the end of Janie's tale: "The monstropolous beast had left his bed" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 239). The second appearance does not close the frame; the hurricane is the climax of Janie's tale, so that the word enters the narrative at its most intense. As a repetition, it loses the unfamiliar heft of the first (frame) appearance, yet it gains that heft in its application as the description of a hurricane arriving, a rarer and far more dangerous event than night falling—its propulsion now driven by the impending arrival. Hurricane season is a rhythm shared by the southeast coastal United States

and most of the Caribbean; it links those diasporic Black populations in their particular vulnerability to its disturbance. Each storm is potentially another abyss, a rupture between the past and present. *Monstropolous* offers a connection between these elements that displays their difference.

The word is then changed by the experience of the movement when it is repeated. In the image, its adjectival function changes from intensifier of magnitude to description of magnitude, shedding much of the frivolity of the first. In this second appearance, it is tied to "beast," suggesting a medieval designation for nonhuman (perhaps a demon). It is weighted down with not just history, but also Romance, so it is both elevated and irrational, reminding that there have been other constitutions of authority in Western culture. *Monstropolous* announces the individual in the frame with a friendly wave, but in the image as a wild force asserting the imposition on the subjective, each illuminating the other.

Strange, yet familiar (uncanny, Sigmund Freud would name it), the word offers up a key to the text, the encoding of its racialized and gendered arrangements. In "Characteristics of Negro Expression," published a few years before *Their Eyes*, Hurston writes of the Negro "will to adorn" when applied to language: "he has made new force words out of old feeble elements" (32). *Monstropolous* is a forceful word.[64] The Greek suffix adds an epic, heroic flavour to the stem of 'monster,' but it also adds a sense of difference that is different than that of dialect.[65] Mary Bucholtz identifies the existence of "superstandard": "a variety that surpasses the prescriptive norm established by the standard" ("Whiteness" 88); it is marked, but for a higher

64 Perhaps even the "almost embarrassing power" of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), from one reviewer's comment (Wideman, "Framing" 36).

65 In "Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," Patricia Stuelke makes a connection between the similar sounding -polis to make an argument about community building. Significantly, Stuelke's interpretation, which depends on the echo, not the spelling, excludes the visual, an omission that Burrows is trying to correct over ten years before Stuelke's article is published.

status than the lowering of dialect. In English, the features of the superstandard include "formal-register polysyllabic variants of Greco-Latinate origin over more colloquial Germanic monosyllables," which have "the indexical effect of making speakers sound smart or learned" (Bucholtz, "Whiteness" 93). A more elite difference, the Greek association weights the word with its classical history, a centripetal force, but its particular use here, its newness, adds propulsion, a centrifugal force. Though Greek suffixes are often added to scientific or technical words, in this application, its elevated status is incorporated into informality with its clearly non-objective use, a little unfamiliarity added to a standard word for adjectival affect. In its difference, sound elements are heightened. The unexpected strangeness diverts the horror of 'monstrous' into something a little ridiculous, or humorous in its popping sound—something entertaining. Hurston enacts what she discusses in "Characteristics," presenting "Negro Expression" in the dynamism of Relation. *Monstropolous* is a grand entrance, trumpets blaring while Hurston skips nimbly as Bojangles down the tapping syllables.

Significantly, Laudun provides no evidence that this word is Janie's. *Monstropolous* does not appear in the direct speech of the novel, nor is it a common literary dialect word—neither spelled to emphasize pronunciation, nor a common term in the Black vernacular. Yet, it is not a standard dictionary word, or in any way explained in the text, except in context.[66] It is, then, a Zora word, a sign of her individual linguistic authority, the absolute liberation of her translangualism. On the liminal space of the back porch (Pattison 13), the author presents herself—joining the narrator and the main character in this boundary-blurring storytelling—with a single word (only the hint of herself). Right before Janie begins her tale, the supposed

66 The sole appearances of it outside this novel appear to be in a turn of the twentieth-century dictionary of American regionalism, which cites only *Their Eyes* for usage, and in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000).

objectivity of the third-person omniscient narrator shifts to reveal a more individual register. The vernacular speech becomes a standard and the standard narration becomes an idiolect, the individual expression, pure *parole*. The author will not be killed in this text.

The sign of the author's entrance to the free indirect discourse, *monstropolous* announces a porous frame, presenting the trace of something that has passed through. Self-consciously strategic, it offers the mutability of interiority and exteriority beyond the text. Laudun lists narratives and frames as two representations of blurring or fusing in Hurston (46); *monstropolous* demonstrates a hybridity that keeps them distinct in its moves through both. *Monstropolous* plays with separation presenting a split between the author and the narrator where the revelation of the split is also the performance of their connection: the oscillation of sameness and difference. The combinations suggest Hurston's own powerful plurality as the trickster anthropologist. In a study of status and language, Bucholtz observes how high school students use language to perform their social status, which is tied to their understanding of race ("Whiteness" 86). Bucholtz describes how popular white students might use AAVE terms to indicate coolness (with a continuum of lexical items which have entered the mainstream and those that remain racialized), while the white nerds avoid AAVE for a "hyperstandard" form of English to indicate their valuing of intelligence and sophistication ("Whiteness" 92). Positioning herself as an agent of language variety, Hurston's neologism erases the racial separation that these practices reinforce. *Monstropolous* signs both the verbal play from which the cool derives and the educated access to classical allusions. A sign of both ethos and logos, it demonstrates the breadth of her linguistic repertoire and the expertise of her play with it. *Monstropolous* is the metonymic presence of Hurston, whose Black woman's identity is then

self-same to the word: various and mutable. Mackey argues that language is symbolic action, addressing deprivations (268); neologism in particular, he writes, “initiates a break while remaining overshadowed by the conditions it seeks to go beyond. The shadow such conditions cast make for a brooding humour that straddles laughter and lament, allows no easy, unequivocal foothold in either” (Mackey 273). *Monstropolous* is Hurston doing tap dancing wings with waving arms onto demonic ground, doing her translangual dance to the polyrhythm of linguistic variety in the shadow of an oppressive hegemony.

From the binary of violence and tenderness, this tension of similarity and difference, the competing forces of centrifugal and centripetal, generates presence. The second use of *monstropolous* is also near the point where the title phrase is used. As the “monstropolous beast” of the hurricane approaches, the narrator observes, “They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 236). The darkness that descends as Janie begins her tale is linked to the darkness that has fallen over the bean pickers, so there is a relationship between the narrative and the hurricane: the utterance, the quotidian darkness of night, is also the image, the infinite darkness of God, the shadow. Still, in another point where a frame, the title, repeats within the image, the narrator provides a parallax view. In this story, an act of God provides a synaesthesic, parallactic perspective; God’s presence confirms the possibility destabilization. Correcting the bean pickers’ perception, the repetition of the title again highlights Hurston, the author. It is she who corrects the characters, with the declared authority of her authorship. This is her parallax view (with the transcendent vision taking primacy in the image, while the grounded one forms the frame), as is the perspective shift of the opening paragraph. John Callahan argues that the narrative privileges neither Janie nor the

narrator, “weav[ing]... the woof of Janie’s speakerly dialect” into “the warp” of the narrator’s “writerly vernacular,” forming a polyrhythm (qtd. in Lemke 76). *Monstropolous* is the textile created by this loom, with Hurston as its conductor. In the strategic positioning of access to this view and sound, Hurston’s repertoire plays against the presumed standard the text begins with, the attention to dialect speech that takes on its own pretensions to standardization, and that speech’s interrelation in the written standard in a tongue-twisting game that demands acknowledgement of her subjective authority inserted in a purportedly objective one.

Hurston’s strategy ties language to the sensual experiences of Black women’s bodies, another binary of interior and exterior. Andrea Davis observes that, by embodying their process, the metaphor of birth has been a useful one for the Black woman writer (176). It is a tricky analogy though; part of the significance of the woman’s body is in its presumed ability to get pregnant, but this source of power and vulnerability excludes women who do not give birth. Though Hurston is clearly interested in female creation, she completely avoids that parallel—the topic of children never comes up in the story of Janie and her husbands—and instead the text positions orgasm as the filling of Black women. This individual experience, which can be shared between all women and even beyond gender, underscores translanguaging as a subjective process that incorporates others.

Janie’s self-consciousness truly begins as she dreams under a pear tree. It is spring, the time of blossoming. The narrator notes that Janie had been spending all her free time underneath the tree “ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 23). Her vision inspires her other senses, expanding

the bodily experience: “It stirred her tremendously” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 23). This beginning grows into a moment of total sensory experience: the dream becoming action. Gazing on a mystery leads to remembered, but never heard, music, and imagining the permeating smell of roses. These sensations combine with other “vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her flesh” to emerge and quest “about her consciousness” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 24). The experiences oscillate between mind and body; imagined sensations embed themselves in her flesh and then are reconstituted as mental fodder. This oscillation engenders a synaesthesic moment. Hearing bees, feeling the breeze and the sun allows “the inaudible voice of it all” to come to her and teach her about embrace, ecstasy, and delight (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 24). The sensual embrace of nature culminates in a physical experience—she “felt a pain remorseless sweet” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 24)—that initiates her education. The pleasure of orgasm does not deny pain (associated with birth) or vulnerability, but it does avoid the subsumption of the intangible by engaging both physical feeling and imagination. The external is internalized then externalized again. Clevis Headley argues that immanence is integral to Glissant’s conception of singularity (77); in this way, Glissant avoids the exclusionary universality of European subjectivity, for a specific, experiential ontology (79). Janie’s experience is transcendence as immanence, bringing together the mortality of the body and the eternity of the infinite, each influencing the other. The specific experience is the truth of the dream; so, as the novel’s frame declares, it must be accessed in acting and doing: now, the ongoing present.

The orgasm is not an end. In concert with the change within, Janie looks outside of herself for answers. After her experience, the questions of her indirect discourse, “What?,”

Where?," How?," join with the narrator's description of her searching her surroundings (the questions not asked are when and why). The dream breeds questions; a subjective truth is never complete. Janie must move to understand her experience; it is relevant only in Relation. The narrator finally explains that she "was seeking confirmation," and at the same time, there was "an answer seeking her" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 24). Her Relation is also dependent on this dialogic interview, offering an oscillation between the body and language that perpetuates her seeking. Janie seeks down the long road in front of her house, which, in its promise of new people, also offers linguistic novelty. Though her Nanny tells her, "Ah said Ah'd save de text for you" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 32), Janie is more interested in new words for new experiences (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 55, 124, 173). Katherine Link points out that this interest is expressed before each new relationship (33). Heteroglossia is the experience of other people; language and act integrating and proliferating. Insisting on the presences of Black women through a multi-dimensional linguistic repertoire, synaesthesia demands heteroglossia, which then produces synaesthesia.

Instead of the difference of dialect, the text foregrounds this ecstatic experience within a certain visual similarity. Lemke lists repetition and alliteration as ways of indicating the oral without phonetic spelling, so that the free indirect discourse blends the "silent" narrator and the "heard" Janie (69). The narrator absorbs Janie's sound without orthographical difference, suggesting the subsuming some critics fear, but this foregrounds the narrator's experience of Janie's rhythm. The punctuation emphasizes this shared sensuality. Lemke observes that "[t]he frequent use of exclamation marks conveys a sense of immediacy that is otherwise characteristic of direct speech" (68). Often part of free indirect discourse, these marks indicate

the character's exuberance overtaking the narrator, so that within presumed silence there is an impression, the reminder of a body. Though the orthography in the pear tree scene remains in the style of the narrator, the typography literally punctuates the similarity with viscerality—its impression made proximate by the shared space. Janie tells Pheoby: "'Naw, 'tain't nothin' lak you might think. So 'tain't no use in me telling you somethin' unless Ah give you the understandin' to go 'long wid it'" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 19). In the second chapter of the novel and the first of Janie's tale to Pheoby, the pear tree revelation is a performance of this experience, using sound to evoke a body that the narrator should not have, suggesting the communion between Janie and Pheoby, which is also that between the reader and the text. Wideman argues that Janie's language is grounded in lived experience, and the lived experience is validated by the language ("Framing" 36). Experiencing the hybridity possible between Janie and the narrator, in the ecstatic moment, the reader experiences not only the bees and the sun, but the "inaudible voice" as the text they are reading.

The text is always narrating the link between body and language; in fact, its very literariness—the performed frame of the novel—ensures the link. The doubled inaudible voice demonstrates the power of repetition. The intimacy of this experience is explicit in kissing (another one of Laudun's representations of blurring or fusing). Kissing appears in two forms near to each other at the beginning of the novel. First, Janie refers to Pheoby as her "kissin'-friend" to indicate Pheoby's right to hear her story (as opposed to the cruelly curious townspeople). Then, as she begins her tale, the narrator describes the "kissing, young darkness" (Hurston *Their Eyes* 19). Lemke sees:

> a semantic contradiction and tension between the narrative voice expressed in AAVE in direct speech and in standard English used in the presentation of indirect speech. The offbeat relation between the vernacular and the standard challenges the reader to resolve this tension by unwinding the semantics to uncover the implications of 'kissin' and 'kissing'. (68)

The two 'kissing's are applied differently and look different, suggesting Gates's theoretical coining of signifying and signifyin(g),[67] inspired from Derrida's différance (Gates, *Signifying* 48), and corresponding to Jakobson's metonymy and metaphor. Gates explains that the standard definition of signifying lies on a semantic axis, a chain of signifiers that align horizontally, so syntagmatically (*Signifying* 48)—the contiguity of metonymy. The parenthetical 'g' presents another definition, a Black vernacular use that lies along the rhetorical axis, vertical and paradigmatic (48)—the similarity of metaphor. With the second version, the silent 'g' becomes conspicuous in its absence; the contingency of its status made obvious by its parenthetical presence, it is an ironic statement on the markedness of race. This play with markedness as normative structures Hurston's strategic positioning as inclusionary difference.

The multidimensionality of her synaesthesia moves around the axes in the ontological oscillation of her racialized and gendered discourse. Jakobson, identifying historical swings from metaphor to metonymy, correlates them to Romantic poetry and realist narrative respectively (Johnson "Metaphor" 43).[68] As with *monstropolous*, Hurston's play with kissing depends on both the poetic substitution and the progression of narrative. "Kissin'-friend" is a

---

67 Gates's distinction between the one word with different meanings is to bracket the 'g' in signifyin(g) when referring to the African American usage to indicate its attendant sound difference: "replacing with a visual sign the *g* erased in the black vernacular" (46).

68 Interestingly against Gates's racialized axis, Johnson argues that in the Western tradition, metaphor has been privileged over metonymy; it is given the power of "revealing unexpected truth" ("Metaphor" 44).

vernacular form that signifies on Pheoby's relative positionality through a metonym, the logical move from kissing as closeness to the closeness of friends; the signification of "kissing, young darkness" depends on a metaphor, intimate stirrings symbolized as early twilight. Lemke identifies these two usages as a place where the "signifiers do not refer to the same signified" (68), but the signifiers are not quite the same either because of the final letter. The presence (or absence) of the 'g' initially operates on the rhetorical axis, signalling the particular flavour of the word. In its first appearance without the 'g,' in the dialect direct discourse, its nonstandard form sounding, the vernacularity directs the word's meaning and application, just as 'now' does. Both dropping a letter and tying the modifier to the noun in the place of that absence—losing a 'g' and gaining a hyphen—the first appearance is a kissing one, visually emphasizing the connection of 'kissin'-friends.' In the second iteration, 'kissing' takes its metaphorical representation in another direction, so that shifting along the rhetorical axis by changing the letter causes shifting along the semantic one too. Outside of quoted speech, the 'g' remains, and the adjective joins another to specify the quality of darkness: fresh, nubile. It lyrically refers to a temporal position, rather than an interpersonal one—presenting the crossroads of the alternate opening perspectives. Where the word stands on its own having gained a letter, the kissing closeness is temporary—the "kissing, young darkness" against the "monstropolous old thing"—perhaps adding a sense of uncertainty to the interpersonal closeness, while the dropped letter iteration undermines the teleological temporality with its sense of deep friendship. The movement from the first to the second—from agency to setting—detaches the object from its verb; 'friend' is jettisoned from 'kissing,' losing the concrete in the image (who is being kissed?). Lemke describes this as a semantic contradiction, but it is a semiotic agreement

between narrative and body. Lemke's offbeat is Callahan's polyrhythm. This is the rhythm of Janie's pear tree revelation. In the groove of the polyrhythm, the oppositions incompatible in hierarchy oscillate with the resolution of the semiotic, difference and sameness.

The narrative of one to the other (not a contradiction but a shift) is only possible because of the poetic confluence. In both usages, the verb is made an adjective to emphasize close proximity; the nouns relate in metaphoric replacement. The reader has been given the concrete by the phonic "kissin'"; the audience is primed for the friendly tongue-sharing that will be the narrative, prepared to accept the experience themselves. Gates explains signifyin(g) as "the redirection toward sound, without regard for the scrambling of sense that it entails" and that this "defines what it means by the materiality of the signifier" (*Signifying* 58). Hurston's use, however, suggests that the materiality, the body, is not just in the sound, but in its particular resonance—the meaning, or feeling, of that sound. The play with the signifier *is* play with the meaning because the appearance of the signifier is filled with meaning. The scrambling of sense is only the initially dizzying reorientation of positionality.

Signifying and signifyin(g) kiss through the desire of the alien word (the racialized body)—to relate the metaphor within the metonymy and the metonymy within the metaphor, neither incompatible in their sharing oscillation. In the exchange, the alien word is excised and placed next to its host, insisting on separation that is connection—this illuminating process promoting growth and change. Burrows claims that, according to Hurston, if words have an inside meaning, they must also have some visible outer form (440). The text suggests that meanings can be transposed within these forms through the chiasm of sameness and difference. If the outside form is variable, then the inside meaning must be too. If metonymy foregrounds

the signified and metaphor the signifier, then this doubled use of kissing foregrounds the oscillation between signifier and signified. These metonymical and metaphorical shifts rely on the same action, variously interpreted, moving through Relation. Working the oscillating paradox of the novel, both uses are deployed in connection with (the) narrative—first in reference to agency over the tale, in direct speech, and second in establishing its setting, in narration. As with the free indirect discourse, the sound authenticates the act, while its literary deployment destabilizes the singularity of that agency. The same action (kissing) performs different functions while the same function (connection) appears in different forms. There are differences, but in this case the nature of the separation presumes a connection. The tensions power the movement between so they are different, but not apart. The kissing-cousin proximity, so to speak, encourages the relation both different and difference deferred, as Derrida defines différance. The kissin(g)s—here I use the parenthetical 'g' to indicate the deployment of both forms—are simultaneous in the frame, contextualizing the process of Janie's Black woman's tale: the intimacy of sensual sharing in the synaesthesia of heteroglossia.

Underscoring the text's language play in its corporeality, kissin(g) is not only a figure that comes from the body; it becomes embodied within the narrative. The moving figurative use in the frame changes form within the tale as the act informs the rhythm of the narrator-protagonist. Aggregating the chiasm of Gates's significations and Johnson's Jakobsonian swings, the event of Janie's first kiss produces a perceptive difference in the inverse to that of the opening paragraph. Janie identifies this kiss as the beginning of her "conscious life" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 25), exemplifying Dale Pattison's language-space argument: "The body provides the material space of discourse" (19). The kiss is the first expression of her discursive

desire. Janie's own identification places her awareness of interior and exterior much earlier than the violent interior exterior disconnection. She finds herself in the synaesthesic orgasm and is immediately drawn outside of herself to another person. Janie, seeking confirmation of her pear tree revelation, fixates on a man she sees walking along the road (which foreshadows her first encounter with her second husband), and kisses him over the gate. She thinks: "Through pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up the road… the gold dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 25). Her perception of the scene has a fairytale hue, Romantic and ideal, but the actual kiss is not described from her perspective. In this enchanted moment, the reader must imagine her sensations, internalizing her physical experience while observing her new consciousness. Janie's grandmother, however, sees it very differently—literally, from her distanced position witnessing the event through a window, and figuratively, in hue. Nanny describes the kiss as a laceration, a wound (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 26). The Romantic metaphor of poetry creates and the realist metonymy of narrative scars. The first experience is in the imagination, Romantic subjective creativity as the metonym of Janie's awakening to nature, whereas the second is made visible as a scar, the realist narrative as a metaphor for the violently diminished Black woman.[69] Rhetoric and meaning overlap in the action of the kiss—the kiss of the forked tongue of *parole* and *langue*.

The narrator makes clear the shift between the two perspectives. After the kiss, when Janie "extended herself outside of her dream and went inside the house. That was the end of her childhood" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 26). The end of her childhood is learning of her Nanny's perception of her experience. Bakhtin defines novel heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language" (324). Nanny's version of the kiss doubles the voice of the tale and it

69 Similar to Julie Kristeva's construction of the foreigner's foreignness remaining as a scar (97-98).

changes Janie. Against Janie's tenderness is Nanny's violence, adding an axis to make the cross. Janie leaves the ecstasy of her dream for the mundanity of her house and this marks a progression to a new stage in linear time. From the immediacy of the pear tree experience, she goes through a cocoon moment, dissolving and reconstituting as a different Janie: "[Nanny's] eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 26). Nanny penetrates Janie's narrative to tell a story about her and her daughter's brutal sexual experiences. As Carby observes in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, the slaves who bore the masters' children had no escape from the reality of interrelation. *Their Eyes* follows this nineteenth-century representation: Janie is the product of her mother's rape by a (white) schoolteacher; her mother is the product of her grandmother's rape by her master (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 33, 36). Janie's presence comes from the historical violation of intimacy and her translanguage is an intimate violation of tradition.[70] Without denying Janie's perception, which is grounded in the pear tree scene, the text gives Nanny's weight and authority through her narrative control. Burrows argues that Janie's glamouring suggests that the narrative does not trust sight (447), but the inclusion of Nanny's vision suggests the strategic positioning of truth. The two perspectives rest together at the meeting point of the axes, crossroads and confluence, setting Janie on a path of oscillation between violence of teleology and the intimacy of immediacy.

Recalling the "laceration" of shiftless Johnny's kiss, the novel's kisses culminate in a bite—providing another twist in the image, the flick of the serpent's tongue. Bitten by Tea Cake, her great love, who had been bitten himself by a rabid dog, Janie is forced to shoot her third husband, which she had been reluctant to do despite being warned of the inevitable danger.

70 Placing Hurston in Carby's genealogy of reconstructing Black women novelists (though not as foremother).

With his final “kiss,” Tea Cake penetrates Janie so that she may incorporate him—from violence back to intimacy. Janie realizes: “Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 286). Tea Cake’s ship has come in—he is eternalized in Janie, but so has her dream become the truth—she knows where to find answers. His death wraps up her adventure with only a quick scene of her self-defence acquittal, in which Janie’s direct speech is absent to the consternation of some critics (while others have noted that she still successfully speaks in her own defence), before the reader is returned to her first appearance in the book, her reappearance in town after the trial concludes. The repetitions fold in on each other. Tea Cake’s bite is the dangerous iteration of the kiss Janie’s Nanny so rightfully feared, but in its narrative repetition, change is possible. The body’s kiss with language reveals its potential, rather than reducing its humanity. Janie’s tale performs a recuperative repetition on generational trauma, making intimacy democratic rather than autocratic, reframing the image and the sound.

This sameness and difference may come together at the crossroads, but Janie’s specificity creates a confluence—the signification slipping around the axes. In oscillation, the dualities proliferate. Laudun chooses his representations judiciously; kissing is a sign of the mutable body, therefore “multiplicity of human subjectivity” (56). With kissin(g), the repeated term of intimacy is the sign of the multi-dimensional intercourse of language. It is another intimate penetration decoupled from procreation, but with its own generative consequences—a pollination and a blooming. Laudun connects the mutable body and individual subjectivities through kissing (56); kissin(g) is the transitive process that links the two. In its spotlight on language variety, the text invests in the strength and vulnerability of the pregnancy analogy, but

through the ecstasy of conception not the trial of birth. The porous body is the kissin(g) word, metaphorically and metonymically. In kissin(g), one does not supplant, one continually exchanges.

The movement of language from one body to another is also the movement of language within the body. Janie emphasizes kissin(g) when she offers an intimate metaphor to encourage Pheoby in repeating her story: "Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 17). With her kiss, Janie is filling Pheoby with her sound, authenticating the act of transmission. Pheoby gets in Janie's groove listening to her story, saying, "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 284). Miriam Gyimah argues that her feeling confirms the transmission of the lessons of empowerment Janie has learned (42). Pheoby's growing body analogizes her mental expansion, embodying the growth of her self's capacity. Pheoby's experience sends the heteroglossia in the errantry of the sharing tongue. By putting Janie's tongue in her mouth, Pheoby appropriates the authority of her language, as the narrator does with the author, and the protagonist does with the narrator—another's speech in another's language. In this sharing, the process spreads relationally from speaker to listener, who then becomes another speaker and so on, so that the feeling may extend beyond the two of them. The story is a seed that grows rhizomatically. With the facility of repertoire, translanguage is the dancing tongue.

The tongue is the word, the penetrator of boundaries; as a pollination, it exposes the permeability and mutability of the body. The metaphoric figure Janie uses insists on familiarity, beginning with "same as me," then doubling "mah" to connect "tongue" and "friend" (rather than 'your' or her name). Just as the possessive "mah" both calls the familiar in its

possessiveness and remembers its difference, not me: friend, the tongue-penetration joins them while remembering their separation, all that is not tongue. Mackey's visceral image of polyrhythm is "cutting yourself in half" (276). Not only is it the another's speech within Pheoby, when Janie splits herself to put her tongue in Pheoby's mouth, that tongue becomes an Other within Janie, too. Bakhtin claims this "double-voiced discourse" is then "always internally dialogized" (324); the alien is within and without. For both Janie and Pheoby, the incorporation of another's speech, the other tongue, changes her and therefore changes the language again. While emphasizing the Relation that is understanding, the many possible iterations of Janie's tale express language's ability to change through its connection to the living body. Through the process of sameness and difference, the sharing of tongues spreads the translanguage, penetrating the Other with the performance of subjectivity.

There are other sharing tongues. Characters other than Janie enter the free indirect discourse individually, though they do it in dialect. Janie's abusive second husband is introduced with dialect free indirect discourse (Gates, *Signifying* 211): "Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin' for white folks all his life" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 47). Gates argues that Joe's dialect appearance in the free indirect discourse is the narrative relinquishing "proprietary consciousness over Joe" (*Signifying* 211). From "workin' for white folks" to exploiting the power of his voice, Joe is positioned like the townspeople from the beginning, with his words also being freed from the master. (This should alert us to how his relationship with Janie will go.) Joe's free indirect discourse demonstrates his particular power, but the townspeople also take over in long sections of dialect discourse, much like in *Contending Forces*. Cathy Brigham argues that the destabilizing significance of

vernacular is in the disruption of a linear narrative by “boisterous tale-tellers” (qtd. in Lemke 77). With other characters telling stories within Janie’s narration, the frame is expanded by its interior multiplicity. Gates writes that “these embedded narratives, consisting as they do of long exchanges of direct discourse, often serve as plot impediments but simultaneously enable a multiplicity of narrative voices to assume control of the text” (*Signifying* 196). Laudun points out that “while narration occurs richly in Hurston’s text, the place of its [narration’s] address is constantly exchanging hands and voices” (51). Rather than plot impediments, these are investment in narrative. Each narrator is given control of a framing device, wielding their context on the image. Displacements are linguistic manipulations necessary for parallax views. Rather than a disruption of the linear, the narrative displacement is inherent to linguistic plurality. The dialect spreads the visible and audible sharing of linguistic authority.

The proliferation of authority upends the hierarchy of the originary frame, promoting difference within the structure of a genre, but also around a kernel within the image, the centre point of the centrifuge, the tongue, demonstrating the relativity of translanguaging, subjective but still communal. In *Their Eyes*, an important tongue shared between characters is the mule. Sharon Davie identifies the mule as “a multivalent symbol,” a metaphoric anchor for the novel (Hathaway 176); it “is tied to moments of displacement that build on one another through repetition and transformation of key words and imagery” (Davie 448). As an image of burden turned to agent of play (one of différance, a moving image), the mule performs the oscillation of violence and intimacy that makes it the fulcrum of the shared narrative authority. A chapter about a mule occurs at the centre of the narrative. This chapter presents much of the boisterousness described by Brigham. Hathaway, building from Davie, claims that this mule’s

wretched existence "offers the linguistic opportunity for a kind of festive misrule," as the town's porch-sitters exercise their rhetoric on the mule's poor state (176). It becomes "a focal point for community storytelling" that imagines improbable agency on the part of the mule (Hathaway 176). In the improbable agency of the mule is the actualized agency of these townspeople—expounding on their initial untamed talk.

Their linguistic play with the mule demonstrates the authority over language that promotes them as narrators, but it also contains the violence that accompanies this authority. Davie makes a connection between the big bellies of Joe, whose death of kidney disease means his formerly big belly deflates, and the mule, on top of whose distended belly Joe stands to make "arrogant gestures" at the mock funeral; and she notes that the buzzards name the (dead) mule, man (451, 453). Tied to the problematic authority of Joe and all men through the diseased imagery, the mule is also tied to the denied authority of women through burdensome associations. From the violence of her perspective, Nanny tells Janie that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 29). Of course, her daughter is a mulatta, making Janie a quadroon in slave classifications—a designation that marks her as different, sometimes better and sometimes worse, in the Black community. Appropriately then, Hathaway points out that Janie's realization about how Joe's abuse has detached her inside and outside comes in the seemingly "disposable" chapter on Matt Conner's yellow mule (176). In experience, the mule relates to Janie's racialized and gendered physicality.[71] As a manifestation of the manipulation of space she has been seeking, the mule's mutable visibility is then also a linguistic opportunity for Janie that does work in the world. Glissant writes: "This experience of the abyss can be now

71 Ellease Southerland argues that the mule's yellowness is meant to suggest mulattoes generally (and also currency); Julie Haurykiewicz agrees, specifying Janie particularly, whose valued light skin colour is often mentioned (Haurykiewicz 56).

be said to be the best element of exchange" (*Poetics* 8). The mule's tropic centrality offers a way for Janie to enter that community from which she had been excluded by Joe through his reductive elevation of her as (light-skinned, silky-haired) status object, rather than relationship partner.

Janie's manipulation of this community symbol enters her in their narration, so that she is the lead in the plot, but the others take the lead in the symbolic. This time, they put their tongues in her mouth; it is a communal skill. Sharing their linguistic authority, the speech that Janie makes declaiming Joe's magnanimity when he frees the mule also externalizes the community mind (Link 29): one member comments, "She put jus' de right words tuh our thoughts" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 58).[72] Maria J. Racine claims that the speech is the catalyst for her voice acquisition, while Link disagrees that she is simply reclaiming her voice in that speech (Link 29). They agree, though, that it relates to linguistic agency. The oscillation of play and violence in narrative authority is underscored when Joe is silenced for good, after trying to silence Janie by preventing her from joining in on the rhetorical games of the porch. The mule also offers a way for her reduce Joe so she may present herself. Link notes that during their big fight, Joe begins to stammer (31); later, stunned into silence by Janie's insults, the narrator observes that "Joe Starks didn't know the words for all this" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 80). Without access to heteroglossia, he is ejected from the free indirect discourse. Joe, the "big voice," who uses his authority to demean others is stripped of vocal power and then his life, implied by his almost immediate death. As she does with the kiss, Janie is able to turn her grandmother's oppressed metaphor to her own ends, oscillating from exclusive violence to inclusive intimacy

72 Link notes that Janie also achieves this with her first husband, Logan Killicks, who, towards the end of their relationship, sees her as "as the articulator of *his* thoughts and feelings" (26, emphasis hers): "There! Janie had put words to his held-in fears" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 30).

through her linguistic agency and then move it the other way, as with killing Tea Cake, turning from the friendly porch play of intimates to a weapon against abuse. Much like *monstropolous* in the play between author, narrator, and protagonist, the mule is an element of transfer in the play between individual and community that allows language to display its binaries as plural possibilities.

Monstropolous plays with authority over language; the mule's death plays with the semiotic, moving from one symbolic association, woman: object (mulatta) to man: death (which could be Man: death). Once the town's ritual of burial is complete, the symbolic shifts again as the narration goes to its furthest authorial extreme. Demonstrating the infinite extensions of this alternating power, becoming delightfully demonic in the showy manner of *monstropolous* with a wake of buzzards. Stuelke observes that Joe prevents Janie from attending the mule's funeral, so "we are somewhat at a loss to account for the way in which she is able to account for events she did not witness" (764). When the townspeople have left the scene of the funeral, buzzards take over both the site and the narrative—much like Janie's (re)appearance in town begins the narrative. The buzzards, in the performance of their collective noun, conduct a wake that parallels the rituals of a human one. It is a scene that no human in the text witnesses, neither Janie nor the townspeople; yet, it is included in the novel without any explanation—without its own frame. The buzzards are ostensibly the farthest from Janie in the tale—she is not at the funeral, not at their wake—and perhaps furthest in ontology since she is not a buzzard; however, the buzzards' abrupt appearance assumes intimacy despite that supposed distance. Davie writes: "The inner [buzzard] text seems eerily beyond proper boundaries, somehow out

of control" (452).[73] The buzzards support the image's ability to exceed the frame through a penetrative différance. Davie writes that, in this section, "the narrator goes on to tell the story in a discourse similar to that used to bring the reader into Janie's life," arguing that this means the Black folktale "achiev[es] an equal status with the novel" (452). Hathaway agrees that the inclusion of this segment and other "authentic and inauthentic" folkloric material, as she calls it, dissolves the hierarchy of narrative (177). The trope of the buzzard suggests the vernacular, but this use of the buzzards destabilizes the position of the vernacular. Difference is framed by the familiar in their language and their behaviour; they become the mulatta of the novel.[74] The buzzards are alien subjectivities allowed to share in a colloquiality, a community of language that acknowledges difference. The mule continues being exchanged; the buzzards, too, can participate in the play. At the end of their ritual, the buzzards consume the mule so only its "bleaching bones" are left (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 97). Body and narration linking play and language, the now skeletal mule is returned to the human community as a site of adventure; exposed as structure, it is now child's play, its legend remaining a source of tale telling (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 97).

Creatures of demonic ground, the buzzards' biological-cultural link to death offers an interhuman access that displays the slipperiness of the mule. In the oscillations of these mise-en-abyme narratives, the most alien returns the symbol to the familiar through the movement of language, consuming the tongue and regurgitating it. Gates recounts a call and response between a line in Robert Penn Warren's poem, "Pondy Woods": "Nigger, your breed ain't metaphysical" and critic Sterling A. Brown's rejoinder: "Cracker, your breed ain't exegetical"

73 Davie argues that the buzzards also mock human hierarchies in their mimicry of rigid rankings and propriety (454).

74 In the title of her article, Haurykiewicz cleverly plays on the rhyme of the first syllable so that the mule which becomes mulatta can also become muliebrity, being in full possession of womanly powers (45).

(Gates, *Signifying* 122). Warren makes a (negative) signification, and Brown signifies on that to redefine the opposition; they kiss.[75] Warren's line is delivered by a buzzard from bird's eye view, presumably objective; almost a decade earlier, Hurston precedes him in putting the buzzard's view, not overhead and distanced, but intimately, immanently, deep: intersubjective—another axis.[76] Through this embodiment of language, the authority of translanguaging is possible. Gates writes of signifying/signifyin(g): "The play of doubles here occurs precisely on the axes, on the threshold or at Esu's crossroads, where black and white semantic fields collide" (*Signifying* 49). Their collision allows the shifting semiotics that is the discourse of demonic ground. In *Their Eyes*, biracial Janie stands at the crossroads delivering a confluence, through her embodiments offering everything in and out of the text access to the translangual tongue.

Hurston's translanguaging presents a moving Relation. She asserts the oscillating energy of Black language in "Characteristics." Beginning the piece asserting the performance of this racialized expression, she writes: "His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act is described in terms of another. Hence the rich metaphor and simile" ("Characteristics" 31). The integration of the act in the word deepens the metaphor and simile, complexifying the image, which illuminates through its relation to other images. This is the path of *monstropolous*, the transmission of kissin(g), the sharing of the mule: Bakhtin's fighting utterances, hybrid, and direct dialogue respectively—an oscillation of sameness and difference.

---

75 Lemke also names the kissin(g) as call-and-response (67).

76 In theories of objectivity, intersubjectivity suggests a group understanding, rather than an external and singular one. In praxis, this understanding depends on the interaction between individual and group, depends on communication. See Friedman and Reich for further discussion of intersubjectivity's applications.

Hurston is clearly interested in a “black vernacular tradition” (Gates, *Signifying* 183), but hers travels on an errant rhizome of language features, rather than sitting in an ethnolect collection. It moves; it does not contain. The free indirect discourse promotes the inhabitation of the standard and dialect binary through their oscillation among specific bodies individual and communal. This permeability gives interiority to the direct discourse to deny its minstrelsy speakerlessness, and (Black) skin to the third person indirect discourse to deny its objective neutrality. The words may “walk without masters,” but their movement relies on bodies as subjects. Gates argues that in Hurston’s linguistic mediation, there is a transcendence of the body (*Signifying* 214) because the free indirect discourse “is literary language meant to be read,” and “is speakerless,” and the direct speech “can never be spoken” (*Signifying* 215). In his own seeking for a Black literary language, Gates sees Hurston’s expression as tending to a written standard, thereby reading it as authoritative and general; though he mentions the individual as a component of language expression, ultimately he reads her language as approaching the nameless, selfless, impersonal, and anonymous (*Signifying* 214). Hurston, though, seeks to maintain the specific alongside the abstracted as the experience of a racialized and gendered self.

The discourse of the novel is also its experience and in this repetition is the key to the process. Lemke notes that Hurston uses “repetition... to produce a rhythm” (69). Repeated elements become percussion, keeping time, keeping the other elements together. The use of rhythm aids in creating a particular space: ‘in the pocket.’ This informal musical term comes from the blues to indicate that the rhythm section is in a groove, the bass and drums locking into each other in complementary play. Drummer Bart Elliott writes that when musicians are in the

pocket, "it feels like the music is playing itself, as though everything has merged together." The pocket is not automatic; it requires a certain skill and compatibility. It is about a feel, a sense shared among players. It is no accident that the pocket comes from the swung rhythm of African American musical traditions. These syncopated rhythms inspire the pocket, drawing in both the players and the spectators.[77] Lemke feels the rhythm of language variety as "an offbeat relation" (68), finding the play of the "riffs on denotative and connotative meanings… paradoxical and even confusing" (67). Lemke finds Hurston full of linguistic contradictions (69). This is perhaps how polyrhythm sounds to the uninitiated.[78] The plurality of oscillations between violence and intimacy, sometimes violent intimacy or alternately intimate violence, along with those between standard and dialect, sometimes vernacularized standard with the standardized dialect, and between first and third person, sometimes indirect(ly), disrupt any standardized grid of beats. In the science of acoustics, the oscillator is the element in a synthesizer which generates sound (the speed of oscillation determines pitch). The oscillation of language makes writing sound, and sound amplifies the variety. The polyphony of the oscillations creates the off-beat: syncopation in the groove: demonic ground.

Like musicians in the pocket, sensory play blurs the individual boundaries of the participants, and also engages in carnivalesque play that blurs the categorical boundaries of spectator and participant. The Black woman's body in art and literature has long been one of abjection, rather than inclusion.[79] In the text's amplification of her presence, Black womanhood

---

77 For instance, when Hurston describes the feeling of hearing a jazz orchestra: "It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies" ("How It Feels" 154). The feeling of the groove also moves from a corporeal throat-tightening to metaphorical heart-splitting. Johnson points out that Hurston racializes this capability ("Thresholds" 134).

78 Hurston claims in "Characteristics" that "[i]t is the lack of symmetry which makes Negro dancing so difficult for white dancers to learn. The abrupt and unexpected changes" (35).

79 See Sander Gilman's article, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature."

becomes a universal celebration of specificity and difference. Refusing transcendent disembodiment, the text presents a re-embodiment that can and must be shared: the rhizome relating through the dialogic of the word. In the pocket is in the body, engaging all the senses in its instinctive welcome. In *Their Eyes*, what is meant to be seen and heard is also meant to be felt and shared. *Monstropolous* introduces Zora as the alien without, while the mule reveals Janie as the alien within, establishing a relation between Zora and Janie as individuals, not just as author and protagonist, and therefore allowing them each the privacy of the interior alongside the desire to externalize.

The rhythm of moving positions plays a beckoning beat. The repetition of the off-beat is meant to inspire movement, a dance to its irresistible beat. In "Characteristics," Hurston writes: "That is the very reason the spectator is held so rapt. He is participating in the performance himself—carrying out the suggestion of the performer" (35). The reader is called to play. This play might be call-and-response, the performance of sameness and difference, putting one's function in another's mouth. Call-and-response names the oscillation between performer and audience that is found in so much African continental and diasporic performance culture, from music to spirituality. In call-and-response, the multiplicity of narrators does not impede the plot—just as a solo does not impede a song, nor an amen impede a sermon. They are part of the fractal of call-and-response as Janie leads one perspective while they lead another. This is the recursive and accretive journey of the Black female body in the text. After enacting her journey, in telling her tale, Janie visualizes this process and sounds it, continuing in the reading of the novel. The insistence on this complex body is a call from the author embedding itself in the reader. *Their Eyes* frames a Black woman's image, but it does not fix it so that the body might

exceed the text through the text's own linguistic performance. The call is *monstropolous* and the mule the response; once the kissin(g) begins, we are in the pocket: the crossroads and the confluence.

The polyrhythmic call-and-response of these images is a form of ornamentation. After Drama, Hurston discusses the Will to Adorn, "the second most notable characteristic in Negro Expression" (32). The will to adorn expands on the linguistic performance. In this section, her examples move from metaphor back to the action word (another chiasm), which she names "verbal nouns" and "nouns from verbs" (33). (Chiasms abounding!) This excess is insistently subjective; the will to adorn is tied to a need to communicate—the ornamented palimpsest pokes at its audience. Hurston thus claims that "the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics" ("Characteristics" 32). Lemke defines her hieroglyphic as "an allegory for competent listening" (72); Maria Tai Wolff argues that reading is normally passive, but that Hurston demands "sympathetic, active listening" (226). Wolff explains that *Their Eyes* combines the visual and sensual to break down the opposition between reading and experience (226). The synaesthesia of the oral hieroglyphic makes it active—not just an image, but a moving talking image (a sound gif, perhaps). Clarke argues that "[i]n Hurston's hands, looking... becomes a linguistic performance which affirms bodily presence" (611). In this way, the text's "big picture talkers" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85) invite Janie to their play, as Janie invites Pheoby to hers, and the narrator and the author invite the reader to theirs. Their racialized language expression is ornamented to integrate the audience in their display.

The reader is provided more than Janie's experience. She is expanded by the reception of more material. The punctuation is the penetration of the tongue—the typographical iteration

of Pheoby's aurally inspired growth from evoking the sound of that transmission; it repeats in the reader, increasing their internal capacity—showing the effects of Hopkins's reaching excess from desire. Péter Gaál-Szabó notes that Hurston's language use depends on spatialization to emphasize the body—the ways that bodies cause talk, and talk influences bodies, but also the ways that physicality is a kind of language (85, 86). If Janie's act is language, the body speaks prior to the voice; literally doubling the voice, the act sounds within and without the text.

Hurston's ornamentation penetrates through its reach for the grotesque. Not ugly, Basu explains Bakhtin's grotesque as embodiment in the material (though not individual) body, and in this way a dissolution of boundaries ("Black Voice" 93). The emphasis in the text of the functioning body—determinedly not intellectual in its gobbling, pissing, shitting, fucking—reminds of the body's ability to intake and output; in this case, the body transmits through language, as in the pear tree ecstasy and subsequent kisses, combining sensation and storytelling to move between bodies via the excessive word. Pattison argues that Janie's development as a character is dependent on her participation in space, the ability to move between her interiority and exteriority (9, 11). When Janie's first husband, Logan Killicks, says, "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever I need yuh" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 52), in response to Janie's categorization of gendered spaces, this assertion of his control over her body propels her departure from him in the search for a new place beyond either of their conceptions, continuing the movement inspired by her pear tree climax. In the relative rarity of a novel by a Black woman, the text highlights the synaesthesic sensations of a Black female body, particularly in moments of pleasure which would have been uncommon for a Black female character at that time. In her grotesque, Janie seeks authority over space—the ability to place

herself in unexpected and unconventional breaches of the conventional places of gender and race. David West Brown argues that expanding repertoires can change ideological contexts (607); Janie's body adds to the linguistic variety, expanding the repertoire to include the grotesque. Hurston offers an interior design example of the will to adorn that she sums up with "It was grotesque, yes" (34). She is using the adjective as an acknowledgement of excess, but in its indexicality to race in this article, the corporeal insistence of Bakhtin's noun is applicable. The grotesque is a material performance of ornamentation that penetrates like a kiss.

Hurston proposes hieroglyphics to bring together looking and listening, language and body, to penetrate a discourse which excludes Black women. Action in the word leads to action in the world; it makes a body to impact a body, visceralizing the permeability of boundaries. For Pattison, *Their Eyes* attempts to produce the space to "dislodge discourses of race and gender," and invite the reader "to creatively engage the text" (24). Pattison reads the "ten feet higher" Pheoby "done growed... from jus' listenin'" as a particularly spiritual or transcendent use of space as opposed to the connotations of "taller" (25). This is a corporeal transcendence, bringing the physical body into that space since the vernacular usage does in fact connote taller. Mackey reminds that the syncopated beat has to do with fragmentation (276); it is fragmentation as synaesthesia. A cornucopia of sensuality, the synaesthesic excess of the text's racialized and gendered writing challenges the discrete and tidy intellectual authority of the conventional mainstream to reveal the anti-oppressive translanguaging of demonic ground.

The showiness of the repetitions, the play with language, the intertwining of first and third person, serves to engage but not fully reveal. Hurston does not really figure in Houston A.

Baker's *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, his recuperation of that era through recapitulation of its racialized modernism (her absence is perhaps ironic since, as with the recuperation of Hurston's reputation, Baker finds success in what had previously been read as failure) (13). This absence might be due to her seeming straddling of his duality of mastery of form and deformation of mastery:

> The mastery of form conceals, disguises, floats like a trickster butterfly in order to sting like a bee. The deformation of mastery, by contrast, is Morris Day singing "Jungle Love," advertising, with certainty, his unabashed *badness*—which is not always conjoined with violence. *Deformation* is a go(uer)rilla action in the face of acknowledged adversaries. (Baker, *Modernism* 50)

In Hurston's strategic language use, she both wears a mask and presents a "gorilla display" (Baker, *Modernism* 50). Her code-switching is like a hologram card that alternates images depending on its angle—a modernist daguerreotype. The depths of the hologram are "contingent, external, and illusory" (Bakhtin 365), but indicate the real-world analog and highlight its strategic presentations. The (dis)play insists on specificity, but the diversity of that specificity can also protectively veil the individual self. Hurston both shows and hides, and the show sometimes diverts from that hiding.[80]

It is a performance that recalls spectacular opacity. Dash claims that through "the recuperation of the idea of exoticism and *pensée sauvage* ('savage thought')," Glissant "frequently insists on what he calls 'the right to opacity'," "[i]n order to prevent the drift into a kind of postcolonial meaninglessness" (Dash 41). Dash sees this expressed in Glissant's novel *Tout-Monde* (1995) as a "delirium of the crossroads" where "drifters represent a resistance to

80 I use *divert* particularly in its sense of amusement.

erasure, a kind of wild sanity, and the writer takes his place symbolically beside these figures"; "strategic primitivism" builds not around the "festive or carnivalesque but [rather around] an unpredictable world of light and shadow" (42, 41). Similar to dialect (and demons), primitivism has been negatively iconized. Michael North discusses the way white modernists' approach to primitivism associated it with blackness, and denied the individual creativity of the racialized (65), but he argues that Hurston remaps the modernist relationship to dialect (181-182). She takes the modernists' fear of fragmentation and from the experience of the abyss turns it to enjoyment in the fiction of the Black diaspora. Mackey (mildly) objects to Hurston's (occasional) attribution of the dynamic Black language to primitivism; he counters that it is a strategy directly related to oppression (268). Glissant, via Dash, brings primitivism's pejorative iconization together with its strategic promise—the violence with the intimacy. An unreadable code in Western humanism, it can resist the subsuming sought by the standard, but it also engages with that standard in acknowledgement of its social authority. Gates finds Hurston's modernism in the text's consciousness of difference, which it "underscores, preserves, and seems to celebrate" (*Signifying* 208). Resisting differential erasure, the novel remains defiantly present and complex in its opacity.

In *Their Eyes*, the opacity foregrounds the strategy of the act, allowing Hurston to play the trickster. Johnson explains:

> If, as Hurston often implies, the essence of telling 'lies' is the art of conforming a narrative to existing structures of address while gaining the upper hand, then Hurston's very ability to fool us—or to fool us into *thinking* we have been fooled—is itself the only effective way of conveying the rhetoric of the 'lie.' To turn one's own life into a

> trickster tale of which even the teller herself might be the dupe certainly goes far in deconstructing the possibility of representing the truth of identity. (Johnson, "Thresholds" 139, emphasis hers)

Hurston deconstructs *the* truth; her novel presents a world of many truths. The strategy is the approximate truth of Relation; the content is the ornamentation. Hurston suggests who she is without fully exposing a private self. Hurston's tricksterism presents an excess that veils—a burlesque seduction that never fully reveals.

Her text therefore delights in unpredictability, inspiring a robust critical corpus. Certainly, academic scholarship builds itself on delivering new interpretations, but Hurston's texts seem to be particularly fertile ground for making apparently contradictory arguments, all attempting to expose Hurston through Janie. As part of the debate over Janie's narrative authority, there is disagreement over the meaning of the dramatic conclusion to Janie's third and final (in the novel) marriage. Though Link claims that Janie ultimately takes control when she chooses her life over Tea Cake's (35), Washington argues that his bite is the beginning of a profound silencing for Janie ("I Love" 105). Darryl Hattenhauer describes Tea Cake as a vampire who wishes to take Janie with him into death, arguing that he succeeds. Washington agrees with Tea Cake's supremacy in that he has far more direct discourse than Janie ("I Love" 102), but she also argues that the text frustrates a conventional happy ending with Janie's self-defense against her "perfect" lover ("I Love" 106).[81] In a different reading of the import of direct discourse, Hortense Spillers structures Janie's post-death return to the cruel words of the community as a loss, an acquiescence to confinement; she writes that "Janie is stuck in the

81 Washington's article is called "I Love the Way. Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands," seemingly ironically since it is mainly about her disappointment with Janie's "heroic outsiderness ("I Love" 107).

limitations of dialect" ("Hateful" 73). Diane Matza orients the return positively, arguing that "Janie is eager to become involved with the people and life around her" (49), as shown in her willingness for the townspeople to "come kiss and be kissed" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 18), the same expression as her welcome to Pheoby (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 49). Critics' ability to convincingly argue such opposed conclusions suggests the integration of the postcolonial linguistic binary: tainted by oppression and free to be appropriated by anyone. Hurston's text performs both options. Johnson writes: "If 'unification and simplification' is the privilege and the province of the man, it is also, in America, the privilege and province of the white" ("Metaphor" 51). Hurston presents the privilege and province of the Black women's plurality through her deliberately confusing (dis)play of language use. She can wield language to both reveal and protect. Her linguistic variety accommodates diversity, acknowledge oppression, and protect vulnerabilities through a refusal of certainty.

The novel begins with a perspective shift, so it may (or may not) end with the porous intimacy that the shift allows. After Janie has sent Pheoby off with her tongue in her mouth, the novel ends: "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 286). Like Washington, Johnson reads the ending as an extreme isolation: "self-division healed over at last, but only at the cost of radical loss of the other" ("Metaphor" 50). Except, as we have seen, the narrative avoids such conclusions. Janie has also put her tongue in Pheoby's mouth, sending a key part of her self out and beyond. Not only has Janie passed her story on, escaping interiority, she tells her story again to herself after she wraps herself in the horizon, creating otherness. To return to the

opening lines of the novel, making the relation to the truth and to memory relative declares the intentional construction of narrative, not just action, on the part of women. We do not know what will be remembered and forgotten in the untold future stories. Christine Levecq points out that Janie is the source of the conflicting perspectives on her journey (95), so she has already performed this recursive veiling. The Janie who reveals so much protects herself.

This intentional construction does not have a teleological end like the men's wait for the ship; it is an oscillation between the dream and the act. In this, it supports the subjective and the specific, infinitely vital, but also the ambivalence of blending into the community—protective and constricting. Hattenhauer observes that Janie's image of her grandmother wearing a shawl turns into Tea Cake with the sun for a shawl (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 48); and though Janie accuses her grandmother of turning the horizon into a garotte to strangle her (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138), Janie repeats this gesture by wrapping the horizon around herself, except this time in comfort. As with the kiss and the mule, she has come to know her own horizon alongside her grandmother's, translating her ideology into an act that works her for her. The porous and mutable horizon is the changing frame, which makes possible the recuperative repetition. It is the same, but it is not. Arming herself against violence with its material, she presents a translangualism that disturbs oppression.

The text is in oscillation between approaches, vulnerable and protected, intimate and separate. Lemke interprets the opening of *Their Eyes* as "Women repress unpleasant memories and remember only the positive aspects of their past" (65). He assumes remembering is about the positive and repression about the unpleasant, but Janie's tale does not support these associations. The recursiveness of the end perpetuates the unfixedness; the text searches for

searching, creating questions out of answers. In the way that the body moves between different poses to dance, the narrative crosses the abyss.

In her narrative, Janie has appropriated the horizon, which does suggest a totalizing wholeness. Earlier in the novel, she describes it as “the biggest thing God ever made… for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138). In her penultimate act of the novel, the ungraspable boundary of the horizon, the utmost exterior, is made proximate, changing the orientation to these qualities. Bakhtin suggests that this access to the horizon is implicit in the reading of a novel:

> What is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know someone else's language, coming to know one's own horizon within someone else's horizon. There takes place within the novel an ideological translation of another's language, and an overcoming of its otherness—an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory. (365)

This otherness is the hologram, opacity retained, but its adjectives are challenging each other. Contingency suggests a strategy that undermines the positionality of the external, both of which solidify the perception of the illusion. It is “contingent, external, illusory” in the same way the boundaries of the body are—functional on a macro level, and porous on a micro. Laudun notes that the self *is* split when Janie calls “in her soul to come see” (53), so even in this “peace,” there is still a self-division that can be absorbed and yet retain its difference. This tension between levels allows Janie to read herself, then invest in her otherness while entwining with others. She has brought in the horizon, not as a blanket encompassing, but a holey shawl, so that the overcoming is also contingent, external, and illusory. The trawling simile implies many

things not caught in the meshes; it is "so much of life," but not all, never all.[82] The novel's horizon is the frame, while its kiss acknowledges the permeability of its constituting mesh.

In this repetition, Hurston's novel frames the dance of confluence at the crossroads, the moving in the groove. Beginning with Janie's return to a home that is also not home, all the way to the hurricane, and beyond the horizon, her experiences are represented in the frame-bending of repetition and interpolation: sameness and difference that does not ignore oppressions, but suggests an escape from them in subjective movement (even if only momentarily). In her last major published piece, "What White Publishers Won't Print," Hurston worries about the restrictions imposed on Black writers by the market's expectations. She wants to encourage the possibility of sharing different feelings, but seemingly doubts its probability: "the majority will keep right on believing that people who do not feel like them cannot possibly feel as they do" (Hurston, "What White" 171). Johnson concludes: "The difference between the difference and sameness can barely be said. It is as small and as vast as the difference between 'like' and 'as'" ("Thresholds" 135). The similes are as incompatible as metaphor and metonymy—that is, they are and are not. The smallness and vastness is the proximity and depth of Relation, which continues searching and combining, challenging the unbreachability asserted by hierarchical structures. In this last article, Hurston retains her belief in the power of the novel. Though she writes generally of publishers and literature and their exclusions, all of her specific examples of existing, challenging material are novels. She ends the article: "Let there be light!" (Hurston, "What White" 173). She ends with illumination, the imperative of a supreme being announcing an unveiling. She ends with a beginning.

---

82 Johnson catches this too: "Narrative, it seems, is an endless fishing expedition with the horizon as both the net and the fish, the big one that always gets away. The meshes continually enclose and let escape, tear open and mend up again" ("Metaphor" 57). Hattenhauer describes it as reeling in Tea Cake's corpse like a fish (48).

Hurston's illuminating imperative works with the heteroglossia of novel language. Bakhtin describes the linguistic process of the novel: "[the words of the author] separate light from shadow, create the situation and conditions necessary for [the image] to sound" (358). As when Hurston's title appears in the text, the double-voice is an act of God that invokes synaesthesia, a multiplicity of senses. Dash similarly ties illumination to synaesthesia in Glissant's "unpredictable world of light and shadow" (41) that "voice[s] the torments of past and present" (42). Dash rejects the notion of "carnivalesque rejoicing, of celebrating the crossing and recrossing of things, of believing that contact and polyphony are inherently liberating" (40). Hurston's text suggests that with the protection of opacity, a liberating penetration remains a possibility (though not inevitable). Laudun writes that "it is dangerous to take Hurston at face value, not for what lies beneath the face (that would suggest that the truth lies inside) but *because* so often that face is pressed up against another, intertwined, or lacerated as Janie's grandmother would say, in a kiss" (57, emphasis his). The face is a false front, but from the imprint of a kiss, faces pressed together, comes a movie projector—connection powering the moving image of language: let there be light. Burrows notes that Hurston calls the visions epigraphed at the beginning of this chapter, pronouncements (438). Catalysts for her journey, they are a synaesthesia of vision and voice much like Janie's own projection at the end of the novel: "The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 193). Intimacy is illuminating. Let there be light!

Hurston is engaged in the dance of difference; one cannot hope to fix her, only join in on the constantly shifting terrain, as if standing on a hurricane, on demonic ground. Though Lemke suggests the oral hieroglyphic is oxymoronic (70), which presumes incompatibility, Hurston's

own definition presents the oral and the image as a crossroads that produces the confluence of action (Lemke acknowledges that it is also synaesthesic [70]). As translanguagualism proposes, it is a distinction that exists in theory, as an abstract standard, but is much more porous and complex in practice (in mulattas, for instance): contingent, external, illusory. Hurston fills "Characteristics" with this play, explaining: "So we can say that the white man thinks in a written language" in contrast to the Negro's hieroglyphics (32); against the picture of Black thought, she juxtaposes the text of white thought. Though Ong's structuring would suggest that Hurston perpetuates racial hierarchies in upholding this cultural distinction, the oscillation of sound and image in Hurston's text illuminates the illusory contingency of the hierarchical opposition. She has integrated the two in her demonstration of Black women's subjectivity. The oscillations which create opacity form a sphere in their translangual multidimensionality, refusing certainty to suggest the place of resistance.

Moving pictures tell a story in the accumulation of images; in the novel, words work as cinematic slides do. The narrative strategically links the fragments, with the words as the connecting elements. Hurston's nonprocreative feminine creation does not end in a static product, but rather continues as a process that acts and does things in the world, which returns the impact, coming in like the horizon. The face is an ornamentation that offers a kiss. Not a singular entity with a singular ontology, the face exists in Relation, and therefore, exists with the plurality of possibility. This is Hurston's measure—not taken at face value, but at kissing regard. In this intimacy, Hurston's Black woman can assert an authority over language that destabilizes its totality. This is the possibility of demonic ground, which retains the violence of the real, but presents tenderness as a dream that may be acted on as truth.

chapter four: double exposure

She has taught me well. I have the language pat, idioms in place.
Erna Brodber, *Louisiana*

Zora Neale Hurston demonstrates the illuminating transitive process of a previous generation's translanguaging. In *Louisiana* (1994) by Erna Brodber, the desire for a diasporic connection grounds the conditions of intimacy in a movement of time and space. The geographical history of the diaspora is the literal ground of the demonic's process of exchange; the dispersed homes of the Black diasporic peoples are a centrifugal force while their connections across borders and seas maintains a centripetal pressure. Putting Hurston, the figure, in her novel, Brodber embodies Hurston's theorizing on language as a Black diasporic condition.

The novel depicts Hurston's entwining of theory and practice as a political process of institutional dehierarchization. Towering over Black women's fiction, Hurston also wrote important nonfiction with her anthropological works. Having studied with Franz Boas, she graduated from Barnard College, Columbia University with a BA in Anthropology in 1928 and continued to do ethnographic work with the financial support of Harlem Renaissance patron Charlotte Osgood Mason after graduation. After her break with Mason, Hurston received funding from the Guggenheim foundation to do research in Jamaica and Haiti, writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) during the Haiti trip. In 1939, Hurston was hired by the Federal Writers Project (FWP) to gather ethnographic information for her home state of Florida's historical and cultural collection (Hemenway). Hurston's scholarly biography clearly influences that of *Louisiana*'s protagonist, Ella Townsend. A teaching assistant at Columbia in the 1930s, Ella is approached by an unnamed anthropology professor to do field work for an unnamed nationwide project. She is given leave from her teaching job and made a fellow of

Anthropology for the duration of the project (Brodber, *Louisiana* 47). Ella is assigned to record an oral history, the content and import of which she is not told, in St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana. Noting that Hurston begins *Tell My Horse* (1938), her study of voodoo in Haiti, in the same St. Mary's, Vera Kutzinski argues that "it is crucial that *Louisiana* as a text affiliate itself more explicitly with Hurston's anthropological writing than with her novels" (70). Kutzinski describes Hurston's anthropology texts *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* as "early examples of ethnographies that question disciplinary constructs of scientific objectivity and anthropological spectatorship, what Hurston playfully visualizes as 'the spy glass of Anthropology'" (71). Hurston includes her own stories amongst the folk lore without acknowledging authorship. Her play declares the eye behind the spy glass, presenting a version of the observer's paradox that considers the effect the observer has on the interpretation of the behaviour.[83] This play, however, has not always been regarded positively; Hurston's presentation of her field work has also been read as a failure of scholarship (Hemenway, Anderson). The observer, the unkillable author, is considered an unwelcome and obfuscating intrusion into the research. Gesturing to the real Hurston in the fictive protagonist, *Louisiana* presents humanism's transhistorical objectivity as impossible through the translanguaging mutability of Black women.

Considering the Black woman's historical position as object of study (if she is even acknowledged), Hurston's approach underscores the rarity of her position as observer. The negative response to Hurston's scholarship reads as an uncomfortable reaction to that reality. In terming the new paradigm of Black women's increasing literary presence demonic ground, Sylvia Wynter leans into this discomfort ("Beyond Miranda" 366). Black women's authority

83 A sociolinguistic term for how observation may alter behaviour (Labov 209), from quantum physics.

over discourse is a discursive reorientation that endangers Western rationalist assumptions. The Black woman scholar's dual position as object of study and scientific observer provides a parallax view on knowledge; the spy glass is now a two-way mirror—reflecting and revealing from both sides, the double daguerreotype. In this novel, the ethnographic connection is perhaps more explicit, but the fictional strategy is also linked. Ella, it should be noted, is a teaching assistant in writing; she comes from a creative field. Engaging Hurston as both anthropological and creative reorients the humanist analysis of the Other as an inclusionary and incomplete process. With protagonist-narrators, the role of storytelling in both *Their Eyes* and *Louisiana* figures language in Black women, then plays on that figuration to validate alternative perspectives.

Louisiana performs the observer's intrusion into the research through the research's intrusion into the observer. Ella's anthropological practice, based on Hurston's example, allows Ella to discover a new culture—herself. The observation also changes the observer. The reorientation of perspective changes the function of scholarship, not to objectify but to place limits on the study of the subject. Furthermore, there is a significant third party in the play between Hurston and Ella. Growing up and eventually returning to live in St. Mary's, Jamaica, Brodber has done ethnographic work in her homeland, reporting on the memories of workers who lived through the labour rebellion in 1938 (Brodber, "Oral History" 20). From the doubling of the two (any two: Brodber and Hurston, the ethnographic novelists; Zora and Ella, the Columbia folk; or even the two St. Mary's, which play a part in the novel), Brodber's inclusion as a third element in the text demonstrates that the truly destabilizing force in the reciprocal relationship is the articulation of the process—the sound of diaspora is the ground of the

demonic, which synaestheses the individual and communal demonic oscillation. The diverse space and time of the Black diaspora, its inherent dispersion and connection, grounds the reorientation, empirically proving its interactive plurality.

The Bermudans in *Contending Forces* (1900) and the Bahamians in *Their Eyes* gesture toward a diasporic connection; *Louisiana* integrates that connection into the text's translanguaging. In a time that Pauline E. Hopkins could only dare to desire, Brodber's insistent geography exposes a Relation of translangualism that continues a record of Black women's experiences. Brodber's translangualism encompasses the creation of a Black diaspora.

In all these novels, different registers, dialects, and voices are used as the Black female protagonists convey their own stories and offer space for other narrators. Ella's experience with the observer's paradox is performed in her own linguistic repertoire, her "fluid set of linguistic resources" (Benor 160) increasing through spirit possession: a reciprocity that extends beyond the grave into the abyss. In the practice of her research, recorded by her tape machine, Ella's possession involves a conversation in her mind, each voice accessing a different English variant —AAVE, standard Caribbean English, and even standard American English inflected with AAVE. The translanguaging of the Black women characters in Hopkins and Hurston becomes a literal inhabitation of other names. The novel is a report of these interactions, purported to be a manuscript written by Ella, both host and participant, and (presumably) sent by her husband, Reuben, to a Black Press in the Second Renaissance. Echoing Gates's description of *Their Eyes*'s modernism, Kezia Page writes that "Brodber's project is the recognition, and even celebration of difference" (59). Emphasizing the crucial role of language use, the text performs

the intimacy as an errantry that can reveal or obscure knowledge, shine a light or throw a shadow. *Louisiana* does this through Ella's nonstandard research experience of possession.

Examining difference is the basis of anthropology, but authority over the display of difference within the ethnography (within the ethnographer!) is not standard practice. In line with Hurston's linguistic cleavings, the text offers two terms for the experience of possession. The parishioners of St. Mary's, where Ella experiences her first (unconscious) possession, call it "getting over"; when Ella understands and embraces what is happening, she suggests the term "hegemony of the spirit" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 98). Ella's re-naming juxtaposes the authoritative standard (is there anything more academic than 'hegemony'?) with the vernacular (like one of Hurston's oral hieroglyphics, "getting over" is a verbal noun); the former describes the state on demonic ground, while the latter is interested in the action of the shift. The former underscores sameness, the latter difference, the former static and the latter moving. In this reciprocity of signification (each signifying and signifyin(g) as Henry Louis Gates describes white and Black linguistic ontologies; kissin(g) as I describe the confluence), the two terms work together to drive an oscillation between language and bodies that repeats the text's depiction of possession. Ella is "getting over" to demonic ground through a manipulation of time and space that demonstrates the subjectivity of spacetime, the "hegemony of the spirit," identifying the differing possibilities of its physical position. Planting multiple roots in different lands, the oscillation among these engages the particular ability of translangualism to permeate somatic classifications, filling the object of study with subjectivity—or in this case, with subjectivities—to display the destabilizing properties of diaspora.

The play of *Louisiana*'s frame which purports to be extra-textual, but is actually intra-textual, changes the image as if adding a transparency to a projector plate, seeing two images superimposed: a double exposure. In a game of language and authority with the original frame, the revelatory repetition is used to humanize humanism. John Wideman's germinal article on Black literary language argues that critics reinforce the hierarchical frame of standard interlocutor and dialect informant by ignoring early works by Black authors that eschew this frame. Citing mid-nineteenth century novelists and activists William Wells Brown and Martin Delany, Wideman claims that their works are only analyzed through historical criticism, a distinction which perpetuates the inferiority of Black speech ("Defining" 80). Black language is rendered anthropological, not creative.[84] It is a transcript, not an invention. Like Black women, it is object of study, not author of investigation. In *Louisiana*, the presumed rationality of the frame exposes the permeability of these distinctions; playing against the frame's history, the text revalues the irrationality iconized with Blackness.

The novel begins with a prologue entitled "Editor's Note." The "Note" suggests the historical genre of the verification of African American authorship. Many early African-American texts, from Phillis Wheatley's poetry to slave narratives, include an introductory letter written by one or more white persons with community standing, thus authority. The letter is the flourish of the spy glass, posing the Black writer's text in its lens as an object of anthropological, not literary, analysis. The letter essentially guarantees the Black writer, a necessary certification in the context of presumed inferiority, thus incapability. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the frame creates "a dialogizing background" for the content (358). He is referring to the author's own speech against the character's, but in this text, both his and Wideman's

84 Gates notes that Hurston's "most vocal critics... call [*Their Eyes*] an anthropological text" (208).

definitions intersect. Just as the author's speech frames the characters', directing the dialogism, the letter frames the inner text. The presence of the epistolary preface establishes a hierarchical relationship between it and what follows, while reinforcing the status of the guarantor, who becomes the Bakhtinian framer carving an image (357) of a subordinate inner text (in cases like Nat Turner's "Confessions," this framing could cast doubt on troublesome aspects of the tale). The explicit fictionalizing of the traditionally non-fiction works to suggest that purported non-fictions are always already narrative, therefore constructed. Linda Hutcheon notes that making the artifice of paratextual material obvious is "calling attention [to]... the ex-centric, the marginal, the borderline, all those things that threaten the (illusory but comforting) security of the centered, totalizing, masterly discourses of our cultures" (*Postmodernism* 82-83). The historical significance is the gesture to the known—the authoritative and hierarchical divisions, the histotextual surface, while its destabilizing presentation of subjective agency engages the unknown, the depths below, to distribute authority among its creative presentations.

Once within the text, the play with the frame against the play with what is framed reveals the standard language of the frame as a deployment of the code-switcher, a strategic positionality of speaker and audience (Fuller). Patricia Saunders writes: "*Louisiana* brings historical texts into our line of vision as inherently questionable in their truth value" (153). Positioning the stakeholders as participants in the oscillating system of "getting over" and "hegemony of the spirit," masterly discourses can be turned to reorienting ends through throwing one aspect then another of their process into relief (Bakhtin 302). Saunders argues that, in its framing, "[t]he 'Editor's Note,' therefore, works effectively to create a distance between the writer, the reader, and the distributor of this narrative. This distancing device both

invests the project with a historical significance and situates the authority of the project in the hands of the historical subject" (153). The distance is the space of the frame, the necessary contextualization; but in this construction, its corollary intimacy is equally asserted. Just as Bakhtin finds the relationship between the author and their language a "continual shifting of distance" (302), the relationship to the paratext oscillates between the distance and intimacy, known and unknown, to change the image. *Louisiana* questions the objectivity of truth through highlighting its inescapable framing in shifts of perspective.

In the deployment of the prefatory letter, the genre's presumptions are revealed so that knowledge derived under its auspices is recontextualized as creative alongside its anthropological use: data as narrative and narrative as data. The "Editor's Note" is attributed to E.R. Anderson of The Black World Press in Florida, dated March 1978; so the publication is set in the rise of the Second Renaissance on the swell of identity politics. Anderson writes: "Our small black woman's press, like all other publishing houses was looking for works on and of black women" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3). A Black women's press named Black World Press is the flag of demonic ground, its name evoking the nominal trends of the independent Black presses emerging in the seventies (and beyond). Sited in a body that could never have authenticated the traditional prefatory letter, this fictional version plays with both authority and body as performances as real and contingent as history and fiction. Bakhtin worries that self-conscious narratives "open up the possibility of never having to define oneself in language, the possibility of translating one's own intentions from one linguistic system to another, of fusing 'the language of truth' with 'the language of the everyday,' of saying 'I am me' in someone else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other'" (315). In this text, the Black woman's

simultaneous binary of object- and subjecthood is inherently self-conscious because it says "I am me" in the other's language and "I am other" in her own. Adding an element to the African American double consciousness, the double exposure is a reciprocation of identification that can diffract infinitely through its translanguaging.

Though the "Note" is attributed to one person, the text of the "Note" uses the first-person pronoun we, so that the sharing of authority (under a single name though) inherent to this context begins in the frame.[85] The different perspective this offers is supported by the text finding the Press (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3), rather than the expected directionality of the Press finding the text. It arrives in a package with "a Chicago post mark. It had been recently posted. There was no other identifying mark" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3). The only explanation for the arrival is the fragment of a letter attributed to Reuben that accompanies the manuscript (Brodber, *Louisiana* 4-5). This textual instability disrupts the traditional authority of the prefatory letter; in its hint of openness to the nonrational, it establishes an equally useful context. On the ground of collective responsibility, they do not hesitate to participate in speculation: "It was our feeling after reading this manuscript and still is, that Ella Townsend's husband who may or may not go by the name mentioned in the work, deposited it with an attorney, possibly a friend, with the injunction that it should be sent to the 'right' publisher at the 'right' time. He did well" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3-4). Their conjectures are interspersed with questioning the text's assertions, as if their voice is more authoritative than the content—an entitlement due to their position as framers. The "right"s cohere in the presence of Press, which could have existed. The "Note" is written a few years after Hurston was rediscovered and hailed as literary foremother by Black women, which is not the later time that Brodber's novel is

85 Glissant writes: "['The Name'] is not the sign of an 'I' but of a 'We'" (qtd. in Degras 616).

published nor the earlier time that the manuscript is purported to be written. The speculation against the rightness depends on the play between their credible presence and Hurston's real one. She serves as the text's own authentication of its unexpected. The unsolicited, incompletely marked, package is rationalized against the always already uncanny demonic ground of Black women's experiences.

The inversion of authenticating detail twists the frame as it carves its image, charging the oscillation between real and fiction. Anderson explains that in the Press's attempts at authentication, they only verify Ella; no other (fictional) personages mentioned in the text receive the same guarantee. They claim Ella was a "writer employed to the WPA" and published in *Crisis*, vol XLVII, 1935 (Brodber, *Louisiana* 4). *The Crisis* is a real journal founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and published by the NAACP, but the prologue lists a volume which would not correspond to the purported date in the real journal (Kutzinski 70) and drops the "the," the de-specification further destabilizing the association. The detail of the WPA and the volume of *Crisis* are not found within the manuscript, making those details part of the separate framing/authenticating fiction of the prologue; their fictionality, however, establishes them as character development, part of the novel. Though Hurston wrote many articles, she did not write for *The Crisis* (Kutzinski 70). Hurston did, however, write for *Opportunity*, the more sociological alternative to *The Crisis*, which Ella lists as another place where she has been published (Brodber, *Louisiana* 40), but which Anderson does not mention in the "Note." The supposed research provides the publisher's ethos to underscore the authentication, but it also plays with the information that comes from the manuscript. They both function within and with-out the narrative, as the details function both within and with-out history and fiction.

E.R. Anderson calls Ella a “promising writer, for whom they [a generalized unreferenced authority, presumably the university] had even procured a fellowship in Anthropology to upgrade her fieldwork skills” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3), going on to claim that “Neither recording machine, reel, transcript nor manuscript was submitted” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3). This situation is addressed in the narrative in a manner that seems to exculpate Ella of theft. Anderson, however, goes on to ask if “she was a petty thief, incompetent” and refer to “rumour” of her end, a “descent into the unknown” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3). In an inversion of their earlier, less relevant, speculation on a name, despite the Press’s claims of support and promotion, they, too, are subject to the impositions of conventional authorities. These questions of character support a perspective that the Press’s very existence challenges. Page argues that Brodber is “self-conscious” about the “the material restrictions blacks face in the diaspora” (60). The doubt included in the authentication supports this claim. The unflattering interpretation of Ella’s character and end suggest the arc of Hurston’s (lived) career. By the time of her death in the St. Lucie County Welfare Home, Hurston’s visibility had faded; her own poverty (and that of her neighbours) meant she was buried in an unmarked grave. The suspicious questions are grounded in the real that the frame acknowledges. The frame is itself a material restriction; however, its ludic appearance here challenges the rigidity of that constraint; it is as constructed as this text’s reality. The novel’s play with the paratextual destabilizes the security of that authority, while acknowledging the power of masterly discourses. It is the histotextual layering of the palimpsest. The discourses are accounted for, but put in context. With this revelatory usage, the function of that frame is exposed, but not delegitimised.

With much the same conditional authority as the letter, the Press offers a reading of the manuscript's themes through its chapter titles: Prologue; I heard a voice from Heaven say; First the goat must be killed; Out of Eden; I got over; Louisiana; Den ah who seh Sammy dead; Epilogue. Listed in the prefatory letter, the titles enter the text as data-narrative, highlighting the play with both offered by the existence of the letter. More than descriptions or cues for the content, these interior chapter headings can be taken together as a narrative or, at least, a plot summary. The Press's "Note" explicitly does this: "Is there a message in these titles, we asked" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). They insert parentheticals to explain their interpretation of the message: "I heard the voice from Heaven say, 'first the goat must be killed (and you get) out of Eden and get over (to be) Louisiana'" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). The parentheticals work in the same way as their question about message—suggesting their perspective but presenting it as contingent. Their authoritative framing is continually undermined, not only by its fictionality, but also by the Press's self-consciousness around narratives. Jenny Sharpe argues that "[a]lthough there is a logic to the sentences constructed from the chapter headings, it does not deliver the full meaning of a story that does not unfold chronologically, which interrogates the grammar of the master's language" (93). The logic of the chapter titles exposes the gaps in the master's grammar, revealing a structure that can be manipulated once it is acknowledged as mastery.

The standard register of the traditional descriptive headings, Prologue and Epilogue, against the vernaculars of the manuscript chapters, underscores the separation between those frames and the text of the manuscript set up by the prefatory letter. In its translanguaging, however, it establishes the integration that dehierarchizes these oppositions. The register shift from the framing titles, Prologue and Epilogue, to the other chapter titles acknowledges the

expectation of the standard authentication, but the relative banality in the titling of the authenticating chapters offers a stark contrast to the allusiveness of the interior chapters. The Press includes a break in the sentence for the sixth chapter title, which quotes a song integral to Ella's revelations in the plot: "Den a who sey Sammy dead, (if this can happen)" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). The Press suggests the period after the fifth chapter title to indicate their interpretation of the plot summary: who can confirm this death, if the process of the previous statement made by the titles can happen (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). It is set off from the other titles as a new sentence, they suggest, to emphasize this question. Its different syntactical form also emphasizes its difference as a language variety. It presents linguistic possibilities beyond the binary.

E.R. Anderson also notes that the sixth is the chapter where Reuben appears to enter as contributor to the manuscript. The sharing of authorship leaves its mark. Drawing attention to their own interpretations, the Press draws attention to themselves as another creator in the text. Though they have "subjected it to little editing" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 4), they have framed the manuscript for its audience. In their attention to the metapragmatics of this framing, they also include that their own interpretation of the meaning of the chapter headings is "A hypothesis" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). Deployed as its own sentence, the term becomes a kernel within a narrative, the interaction of science and art as is Ella's writing and anthropology. Additionally, as its own sentence, the relation of this classification to the content preceding it—the chapter title message with parentheticals—and that following it—naming the epilogue "Coon Can"—is ambivalent; "hypothesis" could go in both directions, past and future. The category heading, "A hypothesis," becomes a metonym for the manuscript. Hypotheses are now narratives; narratives

thus are frames. Narrative and frame are revealed as self-similar, like narrative and data, in a repetition that destabilizes conventional authority. The frame and the manuscript are a moebius strip of fiction and non-fiction, inside and out, that distributes authority among observed and observers, as these also switch positions. There is a distinction, but also a connection that presents a narrative of perspective through linguistic positionality, emphasizing its relationality, its contingent authority, to legitimize alternate rationalities.

The other side of the frame, the Epilogue, offers more play from the Press. With its alternate name, the epilogue is not quite linguistically distinct from the interior chapters. Bracketing the space opened by the prologue, the Press notes that they have given the epilogue a subtitle: "We called the epilogue, our appended note from Ella's husband(?), 'Coon can', ...entering by this act into the community of the production" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). Reuben has a somewhat contrapuntal role in the novel. His collaboration is established in the Prologue with this information on his appearance, which is played with throughout the text; at one point, Reuben writes that he will "collate the bits of paper on which she has hitherto done her transcriptions and organise these in the sequence in which I think they were revealed to her, along with her commentaries" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 143). In addition to midwifery, his hand has also shaped the manuscript. In acknowledgement, the "little editing" the Press does includes this one "major intervention [of titling], mandated we think by the distinctly communal nature of this offering, an approach which is most obvious towards the end of the manuscript. Here a voice, which we presume to belong to Ella's husband, appears" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 5). Including his "part of a letter" as the Epilogue, Reuben's authority is placed in counterpoint to theirs and, therefore, is equally as conditional (Ella does offer her approval of his work

[Brodber, *Louisiana* 150], which links to the Press's rightness). The Press then allows Reuben to name the frame.

"Coon can" is Reuben's term for the process of sharing authority that creates the manuscript. Appropriately, its etymological history parallels that of the traditional frame. "Coon can" is generally agreed to be the oldest of the rummy games, a card game in which players must work through the deck in order to end up with a specific set of cards. From the Spanish *conquian*, the pronunciation of the name runs through its own history of colonization and travel through the slave diaspora. Game historians debate whether it came from to Spain to Mexico and then to the US, or whether it originated in Mexico, but it is first mentioned being played by US citizens as early as 1860, and is first described in text in 1887 ("Conquian"). The turn-of-the-nineteenth-century card game authority R.F. Foster, whose monograph seems to be the original source of official information on the game, argues that the name is "simply a mispronunciation" of the Mexican word, but there are certainly racial implications alongside the foreign ones. James Dormon writes that *coon* as a pejorative term for African Americans came out of the popular minstrel songs of the Gilded Age (it developed from a comparison to raccoons, which, while dehumanizing, was used more affectionately than the diminutive) (452). Unsurprisingly given the game's popularity, there is more than one African American folksong with *coon can* in the title (or the lyrics). The songs are generally about losing money at cards, with added troubles in subsequent verses—the game becoming a metonym for a roguish lifestyle. Dormon locates the first "coon song" in the early 1880s (a craze, he notes, by mid-decade) (452)—the start of the same decade that the game entered the written record. The game's negative inferences seem to originate in the coon song. Despite Foster's simplifications,

the game and the slur enter American culture together. Comparing the *coon* to the *darky* of earlier periods, Dormon writes that "blacks began to appear not only as drunken and ignorant, but also devoid of honesty or personal honor, given to drunkenness and gambling, utterly without ambitions, sensuous, libidinous, even lascivious" (455). The slurs support the confining power of linguistic image. This metaphoric image of the coon corresponds to the negative iconization of the dialect language of Black people, a negativity that spreads to their music and games.

Wynter's use of "paradigm shift" retains the discourse of Western modern progression, but her theory rejects the racist outcomes of that discourse. The characters in *Louisiana* similarly reorient pejorative inferences as Black Power did "Black." When "clearing up details" near the end of the manuscript (Brodber, *Louisiana* 115), Louise, one of the two women who possess Ella, takes on the racial implications of the game: "She laughs, 'Coon, can. Can you see it?' Patiently. 'The coon can' and laughs again" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 115-116). Ella exclaims: "What a difference punctuation makes!" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 116). The comma, as Louise places it, is a split that is both there and not there, in a twisting state like the frame. The punctuation separates the words, so she may put them back together in a new way, changing the image. From the falling trochee to the rising iamb, from straight to swing, changing the rhythm with the pause in the middle changes the meaning. The homonymic possibilities of *can* changes the noun to a verb phrase, one of ability—as Nathaniel Mackey argues for shifts from noun to verb, one of revolutionary change (266).

Maintaining the fragmented distribution of information in the text, in a later chapter, Louise's reorientation of the phrase is given a context. The phrase is repeated, and in this

doubling its action is explained. In the first months of her emigration from Jamaica to the US, Louise's boarding house neighbour, Silas (who marries the other possessor, Anna), plays popular music for Louise on the Victrola. There is a song that also uses the noun: "Coon! Coon! Coon!" This song, called the most popular of 1901 (and showing up in the musical *Show Boat* [1927]), is based on a common "coon song" motif of "transmutation," the ability of black people to become white, to take on the privileges of that colour (Dormon 462-463). Silas rejects the transmutation but asserts the privilege: "If you are afraid of what people call you, then they have power over you. They call you 'coon', then call yourself 'coon'. You now have power over the name. When next you hear that song, say to yourself, 'the coon can'" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 145).[86] Silas is explaining how to embrace Bakhtin's heteroglossic possibilities; Bakhtin writes: "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (293). Silas makes the impossible and offensive biological transmutation positive and possible in the assertion of linguistic agency through repetition; the real magic is in translangualism, which offers a transmutation not of the colour but of the image.

Louise passes this magic to Ella with the alternate rhythm, bringing in the moving Relation. Dormon traces a line from the popularity of the coon song through ragtime to jazz, suggesting the pejorative associations are eventually reoriented as Black artists develop these forms (467). Like the appropriating use of "coon can," jazz acknowledges the scar of history and makes it creative; the demonstration of culture is the assertion of agency. Sharpe writes of

86 Silas begins his critique by quoting William Cowper, "The Negro's Complaint" (1788): "Fleecy locks, and black complexion/ Cannot forfeit nature's claim."

Louisiana: “The novel's integration of black vernacular culture into its narrative offers a glimpse into a racial sentiment passed on from one generation to the next and, in doing so, exposes the debris that the forward march of Western modernity leaves behind” (97). With “coon can,” the forward march becomes an oscillating jazz dance. Black speech had been framed in the image of an agency-free statue, thus fused to hierarchical dichotomies of the literary and the oral, narration and speech. Power over discourse can reorient the relationship of Black speech to these categories, reframing the image, causing it to move. The abjected plurality of the debris is revalued as matter that clarifies, treasure to be shared—the experience of the abyss as the most fruitful element of exchange.

While Silas plays the song, Anna plays the game. Anna is the first (in the interior text) to allude to “coon can,” when her first chapter monologue becomes something of a dialogue with Ella, who is waiting to record her memories. Ella’s recording device reminds Anna of a Victrola, and she recalls listening to its records with Louise (whom she often conflates with Ella) (Brodber, *Louisiana* 12-13). The record she remembers is “Coon Can.” In her second reference to “coon can,” Anna begins audibly speaking to Ella by inviting her to play the card game, which she thinks to herself is not Ella’s whist (the more conventional rummy game) (Brodber, *Louisiana* 18). While Ella seeks to “pick through those brains and put what’s in them in my hungry black box” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 18), Anna seeks to draw Ella’s story out from her; thus, the game of pick up and discard mimics their linguistic play—the challenge to make the other speak, reveal her cards, we might say. Through her facility with the game, Anna succeeds in making Ella the first speaker. Louise says: “Child could have saved herself planning and thinking for Anna continues to pull tricks from her sleeve” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 19). Ella wants

to pick through her brains, but Anna pulls tricks from her sleeve. Anna escapes objectification by appropriating authority from Ella through the game: “the coon can.” The Press seems to be referring to Anna’s second version of “coon can” in their explanation of their own use; it is the game that leads to sharing stories: play and collaboration. The object of study becomes a subject; the narrated become narrators.

Reuben’s letter fragment, and so the novel, explicitly connects both usages, the game and the expression. Reuben, who would be aware of the various inferences—game and ability, collaboration and empowerment—as the “coon can” moves through the speech of all the main characters, deploys the expression as the Press does: “A hypothesis.” His letter fragment ends with a three-word sentence: “The coon can” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 166). On one side of the sentence, the incomplete provenance of the manuscript (read after by the Press, who reorients the manuscript prior to the letter for the audience); on the other side, the invitation to collaboration it introduces in the unfinished fragment of the letter (the placement unintended by Reuben, but in line with his ethos). The repetition of this expression as heading and final sentence fragment itself repeats the Prologue and Epilogue frame—each with an unfinished side. This side oscillates with the informal register of its other title “Coon can.” In this changing repetition, they are complementary, not correction. Through the metapragmatics of the desire to connect, *Louisiana* attempts to make the familiar sound, the obscuring of exclusions, apparent as a veil so that the unfamiliar can make itself known in its echo-shadow. Recognizing the Other’s agency over language is integral to honest intimacy; this distribution of authority requires a reciprocal respect. *Louisiana* acknowledges the informant’s control over information and their potential to knowingly or unknowingly misrepresent. Originating from a tension with

that control, the frame can be used to veil or unveil narrative authority. Through the same word in different contexts and different words for the same context, dispersed among characters, the oscillating power of sameness and difference performs the flexibility of language, offering it as the instrument of reciprocity that can attack or inspire.

With its Black woman as main character and symbol of language, *Louisiana* plays with the same protagonist linguistic displacement as *Their Eyes*. Reading *Louisiana*'s highlighting of community, which she argues has been overlooked (103), Rae Ann Meriwether writes: "I further argue that the tropes of translation, transcription, voicing, and multivocality in the narrative stress *discourse*, rather than the individual subject, as the possible site of agency" (105, emphasis hers). Meriwether proposes that Ella is *only* a conduit, not a subject, all *langue*, no *parole*. Using Houston A. Baker's blues matrix, a theory of fluid Black expression, to describe *Louisiana*'s theory of language, Meriwether argues that the text's linguistic expressions exemplify what Baker describes as 'language (the code) speaking' the subject... [, a process whereby] the subject is 'decentered'" (105). Ella's death at the end of the novel when the relevant tales are all told supports this decentering. Meriwether attributes the sickness that precedes Ella's death to the pressure of the shift from traditional Western assumptions to a new black diasporic paradigm:

> Brodber carefully elucidates the pain and fear attendant upon this process for such a Westernized subject. ...[T]he processes of soul transference and prophesying represent such a violent break from Ella's prior sense of self and world that Brodber portrays them as physically traumatic; Ella goes into convulsions, screams in pain, and over the fifteen

> years of waiting for Mammy and Lowly's stories, her health gradually declines. Then, on finally hearing those tales, she dies. The violence of these experiences, I argue, allegorizes the movement of the subject from an individualist positions to a collective one and demonstrates her dissolution into the blues matrix. (110)

The paradigm shift destroys Ella. In Meriwether's argument, the linguistic displacement of the individual is necessarily the destruction of her body in a "literal decentering" (110); Meriwether reads Ella as increasingly enervated over the course of the novel. In this connection between language and body, centring the Black voice is then an elimination of the Black woman's physical presence; she is dissolved into the abstracted language, fixed in the system.

This corporeal discourse displaces the individual utterance and, diminishing the individual body, Ella's physical pains are rendered the unfortunate, but unavoidable, effect of this communal promotion. Ella becomes a community cypher at the expense of her life. Meriwether does not dismiss the body altogether; she writes: "Brodber goes further than discourse to assert the centrality of the woman's body in forms of agency as well" (110). In "these alternative forms of agency," Ella's body is "a figurative repository of several cultures, and... a conduit for the renewal of those cultures" (110). Meriwether, therefore, reads a material body, but as in Bakhtin's grotesque, there is no individual body; it is only a vessel of culture—as Meriwether calls it: "a vehicle for the community's voices" (110). Community subsumes the individual. Kutzinski agrees that "a severe strain is placed on Ella's physical body. In the end, the kind of remembering that she calls 'hegemony of the spirit' renders the individual material body unnecessary" (77). Kutzinski reads "hegemony of the spirit" as a rejection of the material (perhaps appropriately given its classification as standard, the abstracted ideal). In this

abstraction, the specific manifestation of the body is rendered “a firm representative of scientism, rationality, and individualism” from which Ella moves away (Meriwether 110). Despite Meriwether’s rejection of these icons that have supported Western oppression, her construction of Ella’s move also empties the body of its agency. Similarly, arguing that the “radically unlocatable, unhomely” movement of voices means bodies are stripped of “the constraints of assigned identities” (77), Kutzinski claims that bodies, “instead of grounding identities, function more as animate effigies in a collective memory play” (77). The “animate effigy” might describe Ella’s perception of her body prior to her possession. Ella suspects she is meant by her academic employers to be a conduit; she thinks that she only receives her assignment because of her colour (Brodber, *Louisiana* 21), that she has slipped into the field of anthropology sideways on “the experience clause, ably supported by the absence of others of my race to step forward” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 34). It is her generalized body and not her individual mind which recommends her for the project, she thinks, supporting Meriwether and Kutzinski’s analyses. The incompleteness of these analyses is revealed when Ella moves beyond this doubt (she gets over it, we might say). Engaging a tension between the voices of the dead and the bodies of the living, Ella’s possession oscillates between the intellect and the body to produce an idiolectic heteroglossia that allows her to participate in community building. The matrix becomes repertoire and she can translanguage. Ella oscillates between her own corporeal language and that of the voices, and learns to convey the movement beyond herself. Possession allows a specific body to be intimately connected to a multiplicity of narratives, each individual herself; the development of this collective is concomitant with Ella’s growing awareness of herself.

Ella's material individuality is located in her personal history. She explains that her parents "don't say very much about the place they came from" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 19), and finds it embarrassing to admit "how little she knows of the land of her parents" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 19). Bereft of this information, Ella feels a dislocation. Though she was also born there, she separates that homeland from herself in describing it as the land of her parents. Ella defines her own origins as "Nowhere really" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 19). The birth country existing as an aphasia, she is ungrounded; she is empty. It is in ignorance that she is decentred and de-specified—rationalized as object. Depictions of possessions often involve the overriding of the subject's control of their body (in either something like the gothic horror of the film *Get Out*'s sunken place, or the sacred honour of a religious ceremony, or both together, attacking and inspiring, but still ultimately overwhelming). Ella's emptiness beckons, making her more vulnerable to zombie-fication. Anna, whom Ella is sent to interview, could be perpetuating the subjection of Ella when she invites her dead friend Louise to Ella's possession with the question, "This is the horse, will you ride?" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 17); she is asking if Louise wants to tell her horse. Ella as horse suggests the physicality of the discourse and seems to construct it as discourse domination. The possessors substitute the authority of the academy for their own. Under the mastery of either, though, Ella as individual is disregarded, as the critics above suggest. Ella's death would then be the result of an oppressive authority by these women, telling their story in disregard for their medium of expression. Anna and Louise, however, are very deliberately not a simple inversion of the shadowy academic authority. The text asks that we reconsider the horse. Anna complicates the horse and rider analogy by insisting on Ella's subjectivity. Reuben writes: "It is the story of the conduit, the scribe as much as that of the

actors" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 165). The communal body does not replace the individual body; they work together. As "coon can" suggests, this text's version of possession is a collaboration, not a mastery. She is filled as subject and recognizes others as such in the reciprocity of this possession which insists on the specificity of the body—material, temporal, and most importantly, experiential—alongside the immersion in the communal.

Ella's first experience of possession, when she is unaware that the process has begun, is focused on her body. Anna tells Louise: "Who can't hear bound to feel" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 23). The women note that it is Ella who first initiates the process with the touching of hands (Brodber, *Louisiana* 24). Anna then guides Ella to a memory of her early care by her grandmother, who died unexpectedly in that task; her history begins composed of physical sensations. While Granny unplaits, combs, and replaits Ella's hair: "withered muscles make a warm blanket that falls around you, caresses you, not pressing you like meatier thighs do. Soft, pliant, warm"; "a sea of penny royal perfuming the air" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 24). Her grandmother cares through the somatic rather than the verbal, but this physical language grounds a verbal exploration for Ella: "Granny wordless, giving her space to wander" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 24).[87] In this memory, the repetition of her past experience, Ella is primed for further repetitions of this body-word-land process.

The physical sensation is the first step of her possession. This experience is narrated by Louise, who ably articulates Ella's unconscious experience (or subconscious, Ella cannot decide [Brodber, *Louisiana* 31]), adding bodies to it: "The girl walked home with your smile Anna. And then it might even be 'in'. 'With', 'on', 'in', they were all in there. Your puckered lips were her grandmother's knees" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 24). She translates the gesture from the past to

87 This silence suggests the inverse of Janie's Nanny, who wants to impose her text on her granddaughter.

the present (from the knee to the lips), and across space, which then again gives Ella's mind a region to wander, to encounter beyond her rational imagination, to expand beyond her existing repertoire. The proliferating prepositions demonstrate the expansion of positionality; she can now be in all these places, facilitating her translanguaging. Ella is far more than a community vessel or an animate effigy, because it is her specific somatic experience that drives the discourse.

Though the first (conscious) experience is jarring, the shift is subsequently salutary and empowering. For a decade, Ella's experience with possession affects her body in non-fatal ways —changing her diet and her dress. The gradual enervation Meriwether describes only occurs at the end of novel; Ella's physical decline is more precipitous than Meriwether suggests and really begins after Ella confesses that she wishes to join the women more fully (Brodber, *Louisiana* 137). Significantly, this confession comes after Ella has fully excavated her own history (and returned the tape machine), and she is focusing solely on the history of the two women. "Coon can" proposes that Anna's primary task is not to provide information—to acquiesce to objecthood—but to reinvest Ella with a history and language she has lost.

Once she has been marked by this personal physicality, Ella's first conscious experience of possession does seem to align with the common depiction of possession. Ella is overwhelmed—a saddled horse, a conduit; she calls herself in the moment, a "weak no-go body" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 89). She, however, is able to describe her body:

> I felt my head grow big, as if someone thought it was a balloon and was blowing air into it. My shoulders rocked like a little paper boat trying to balance itself in the sea. You

> need feet to help you balance. Mine had grown still and my body slid from my chair to the floor, fluttering like a decapitated fowl. (Brodber, *Louisiana* 88)

Ella draws attention to her body in the present, further emphasizing body language. It is a language of movement, with her head growing, her shoulders rocking, and her body fluttering. This corporeal action is fostered by the synaesthesia of her earlier expansive experience, so it is also tied to increased intellectual activity. Sharpe writes that, in this moment, "words are communicated to Ella telepathically, which is an activity that suggests a language even beyond the emotive sounds of laughter and sighs: a language in silence" (95). Sharpe relates this to the affective, "which does not designate 'feeling' so much as a visceral response" to silences in authoritative history (92). While not emotive, this silent language is still expressive in its affective corporeality, and is therefore, not at all silent within the text—just as Ella's baby self is able to talk: "I heard myself talking to that company in a baby's voice, as if a nine month old baby can talk" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 88). The missing place Ella's parents have created—an impulse Ella ties to their own adherence to conventional expectations—interacts with Anna's silence to open Ella to the elements of another named language, affect. Anna turns the spyglass on Ella to reveal silence as a space of affect, not as absence. This, however, is not quite Grace's haunting in *Contending Forces*. In Anna's refusal to acquiesce to the project as Ella has been assigned it, Ella does not passively receive the hand, but senses silence as a barrier to be penetrated. Anna's silence invites a sensual experience that may impress itself on Ella. She calls Anna's original silence, "Full, thick, and deep" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 14). Revealing the subjected as subjective, it takes on mass, presents itself as an object to be touched. Ella thinks to herself, "I need braille to access these thoughts" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 14). Accordingly, once she

discovers her body she finds that Anna has not been silent at all and is able to penetrate the affect.

Possession breaches the barrier of silence by expanding the limits of the body. Learning the somatic language of affect—the feeling of her grandmother in the silence of her parents—allows Ella to reclaim her body, her history, and therefore herself, through her translangual narration. In recounting her corporeal experience in the first person, she reincorporates the displacement into her subjectivity and agency; it becomes part of her repertoire. After Ella's body collapses, she writes: "And I spoke" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 88). The desire to relate the experience of possession allows Ella to penetrate Anna's silence. Ella describes herself as an Alice-grown-aware: "I had eaten that little bit of cake, squeezed through, drunk just the right amount of that liquid, grown to their size, stabilised myself and was hobnobbing on equal terms! I had arrived" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 52). She is also Pheoby, "growing higher," with the incorporation of the other women's voices. Anna is Janie, putting her tongue into Ella/Pheoby's mouth and expanding her, but this Pheoby's story is also told; this Pheoby takes the written reins. Ella is only able to access Anna's information through possession, so that the nonrational experiences of Ella's body are made an integral part of her academic research. The revelations of Anna's archival material depend on Ella's translanguaging. Kutzinski writes: "The line between anthropologist and informant is virtually erased in Brodber's text" (71). Ella is an active participant, just as Anna demands active participation in the ethnography. Anna's strategy underscores that is it not only history, but always also subjective experience. The price of revelation is the intimate reciprocity of the double exposure.

The incorporation of Ella's body into her field work shifts the practice to demonic ground. In contrast to her detached and elevated academic observer position, the possessed Ella becomes entwined with the informant. In awareness of her marginalized body, Ella undermines her own credentials as an academic several times. She writes: "I'm studying, sort of, at Columbia (Brodber, *Louisiana* 34). Reuben, she claims, is "more authentic than I" as a student of anthropology (Brodber, *Louisiana* 34). Ella questions her status partly because of her attachment to the authority of the institution (hence her early resistance to the possession [Brodber, *Louisiana* 63]). This is perhaps the overcompensation of imposter syndrome, but it also informs the nature of the manuscript, which follows the technique of transcription and analysis that she would have learned from her assignors. Staying on task despite "the violent break," Ella's manuscript uses ethnographic methodologies, such as dating and transcription, to record her own transformational experience along with the information she is sent to discover. Sharpe argues that the text "is suspicious of institutionalized methods of inquiry" (93); however, it is suspicious of the singular authority given to those methods, not necessarily the methods themselves. These remain a part of the repertoire.

In this shared subjectivity, Ella, the trained scribe, plays with the labelling of her data in deference to her new relationship with authority. She comes to respect her own authority over the project as a shared authority. Kutzinski calls her "a vessel whose body is as broken as that of the narrative itself" (77), but in this comparison to narrative, Kutzinski identifies the text's insistence on that body's individual subjectivity—Ella's agency over the fragments, the fiction of the Black diaspora. Sharpe suggests that:

> One can read Brodber's novel metaphorically, as indeed critics do, by considering the voices that Ella hears as suppressed oral histories. However, I want to suggest that we read spirit possession literally in order to consider the effect her out-of-body experience has on an understanding of the materiality of the archives, whether they be textual, visual, or sound recordings. (93-94)

To read it literally also foregrounds the specific, experiencing body as the site of that materiality. In fact, Ella's possession is an in-body experience, turning the materiality of the archives into corporeal experience. The archives are not only "textual, visual, or sound recordings," but the bodies that encounter and interpret that material, which then can conversely make an impression on it. Ella describes her conversations with her possessors as "this phenomenon which had so boldly left its portrait upon the people's recording machine" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 45). The text's interest in presenting the material effect on the body of receiving and transmitting narrative serves to emphasize the experience of the individual body as crucial to the development of the collective. Reuben writes: "I know now what [Ella] knows: Mammy would not tell the president nor his men her tale for it was not hers; she was no hero. It was a tale of cooperative action; it was a community tale. We made it happen" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 161). Throughout the manuscript, information about Ella is followed by information about the possessors, and vice versa. Retaining the ethnographic conceit allows Louise and Anna to enter the narration in their own voices, giving them authority over what is revealed and what remains hidden. Contextual information is withheld, sometimes indefinitely as with Reuben, but often only until collaboration is achieved. In rendering translanguaging as possession, the material realities of the competing "social-historial agendas" are embodied; but

in the narratorial code-switch, the text dehierarchizes the traditional anthropological positions to challenge the authoritative power of any socio-ideological discourse.

Louise notes, as they begin to lay the bridle to ride Ella: “The thing is now personal and certainly unscholastic” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 22); Ella might suggest that the personal is scholastic. Hutcheon defines writing that plays with the institutionalized forms of knowledge as historiographic metafiction; postmodern writing that turns to the archive while contesting its authority (*Postmodernism* 77). This is naturally of particular interest for marginalized groups, whose agency is often denied in authoritative texts. Hutcheon observes that the technique destabilizes totalizing narratives (“Historiographic” 4). Playing with presumptions of objective authority in early anthropology, this text asserts, as Hutcheon’s postmodern historiography suggests, that pertinent historical scholarship cannot just be official and institutional, but must also acknowledge personal subjectivity—its own and its subjects’. A reciprocating histotextuality, the historiography in *Louisiana* claims the ethnographic project as both individual and institutional. The (Black) eye behind the spyglass is acknowledged then incorporated. Kutzinski points out that Ella’s methodologies are not necessarily as ordered as the academy dictates (71). Ella is a sort of-scholar because authoritative scholarship is itself challenged. With the intrusion of the othered and the irrational into the authoritative and objective, the scholarly manuscript challenges its own scholarly distance to show the value of such destabilizations.

While the Press attributes Ella as the writer of the manuscript in the prologue, the interior text begins with an unreferenced voice describing its own funeral. Despite the contextualization of the prologue, the beginning of the manuscript is decontextualized. The

decontextualization, however, is a significant recontextualization of the data. Ella eventually reveals that this opening is a transcript of the first internal conversation her machine records. The process of field work is made an experience of possession (and fiction) right from the start. The first chapter is only retroactively a transcript (a strategy that highlights the literariness, the constructions, of the ethnographic method). On first reading, it is clearly in first person, but whose and how? And how many? In this initial confusion of voice, text is possessed as much as Ella is, positioning anthropological analysis as narrative invention based on intimate experiences. The text is contextualized on the same demonic ground as the protagonist. Kutzinski notes that in possession, "the positions of spectator and performer are but temporarily assigned roles" (77). In the displacement of the anthropological spyglass for a demonic mirror, Ella switches between interlocutor and informant, inhabiting both positions of the traditional literary frame for Black speech. Anna tells Ella "You really do talk in two different ways" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 18); she translanguages. In the conversation of this possession, Ella learns to reclaim herself without obscuring others and she teaches the reader in the polyrhythm of understanding which Louise has passed to her.

Knowledge depends, not only on the actual data, but on mapping these moves. Saunders argues that "Brodber's novel denies the rigidity of narrative rules.... Her suggestion here is that the rules which govern narrative and performance shift, depending on the social-historical agendas at work in the construction of narrative identity" (157). This disorientating reorientation reinforces the contingent authority of the prefatory letter: it is real, but a fiction; it is a fiction, but real. As with the distancing of the Prologue, Ella is integrated, but distinct. Ella's narratorial code-switching gives the informant the agency of the interlocutor,

foregrounding the plurality of speakers and offering a parallax perspective that both confuses and clarifies.

In concert with the two-way mirror of anthropology and the present experiencing the past, the prophesying projects the past into the future. Édouard Glissant writes of the diasporic experience that "absolute unknown"—the rupture of the Middle Passage—becomes "knowledge," just as provenances and additional presences are revealed in *Louisiana*, but that the rupture is also "a projection of and a perspective into the unknown" (*Poetics* 8). The unknown of the past is the known of the present, but again the unknown of the future. In this flexibility, Ella's position as ethnographer is incorporated into a new career as past-telling soothsayer. In the translanguaging of known and unknown, Ella's guide to "getting over" is Madam Marie (a definite nod to renowned New Orleans "witch" Marie Laveau), who "told her tales in the speech and the accent of the teller" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 78). The text describes them as Madam's tales, but also as someone else's. Maintaining their original sound, they "[serve] two speakers," as Bakhtin writes (324). There are also multiple speakers in the same utterance in Ella's prophesying, which emerges from her possession. First experienced by the men, their experiences are retold to them by Ella, who reads them on their faces—from body to body to language and back to body.

The unfamiliarity of the possessive experience also contains the familiarity of the prophetic vision; repressed and forgotten histories are forecasts of scholarship. Her first session, appropriately, is the tale of her infant self. Once she has articulated herself into subjecthood, Ella turns her voice and vision on others, saying, "it was prophesying" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 89). This prophesying comes in a specific form. Ella explains: "I looked at the faces of the men

sitting around me and I saw stories. I saw long deep stories, stretching back and back on stacked, ruled, six by eight cards" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 89). The cards are presented in the manner of a card catalogue, the researcher's integral resource, establishing the ethos of the cataloguer: "stacked in age segments with data thereon written in such clear handwriting, it has to be scripted by a teacher of penmanship" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 114). It is Louise, Ella eventually realizes, with the accomplished script: "From the moment I met her, I knew that the clean clear cursive on those note cards is hers" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 115). Ella recognizes Louise in her writing and in herself. Again, Louise is the framer—the articulator of the process, the necessary third point that identifies the other elements. This inclusion of the third—the soothsayer of past and present, the body of the double-voice—is not the synthesis of a dialectic; it is the diffraction of a binary.

The observation which influences both the observed and observer destabilizes the expected order. At the end of the first chapter, when Ella is listening back to what she assumes will be silence, in with the unexpected voices of Anna and Louise, she also finds: "There is no question about it. Somebody spoke. A voice very familiar and it isn't her mammy. The ears are hearing other frequencies" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 28). Though claiming the voice is familiar, she does not name it as hers until the next chapter. When, early in the next chapter, Ella clarifies that it is her voice that she suddenly recognizes, she writes: "I had heard things that nobody said to me and that I had said what I could not have said but what I was about to hear myself say thereafter so often when they were about to make contact with me or when I needed to speak with them" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 32-33). The long sentence takes the reader on a journey through her revelation, carrying them over with her. The oscillations between hearing and not

saying, saying and not hearing, places her as a force inhabiting binaries, oscillating between unfamiliar and familiar to bring together and individualize. This raciolinguistic ethnography demands possession and produces prophecy, so that it is constantly oscillating between bodies and voices, repositioning itself in time and space through subjective narration.

The unknown charges the errantry of Relation, which maps the paths made known but never expects the map to be complete; Glissant writes: "The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation" (*Poetics* 18). In Relation, errantry offers a knowledge that uses the unknown. Glissant clarifies that the errant is "no longer traveler, discoverer, conqueror" (*Poetics* 20). Distinguishing them from these Western agents of oppression and their teleological ends, he writes that the errant "strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that it precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides" (Glissant, *Poetics* 20). The origin of this errantry is in the rupture from Africa (Glissant, *Poetics* 18). From this historic unknown, the diaspora is driven to endlessly seek for connection, forever repairing the rupture. Errant belonging is naturalized and given form in the rhizome, the structure of the diaspora. This errantry is grounded in the geographical diversity of the diaspora, creating a space where, as Kutzinski puts it, "national borders are as permeable as the borders that separate the living from the dead" (80). Kutzinski argues that "Bodies and Borders" are connected by texts. Stating that "[b]odies, individual and collective, stabilize not only political ideologies but also literary representations and ways of reading them" (Kutzinski 57), she wants to know: "what exactly happens to the assumed integrity of the identities of humans and nations alike when the bodies that are supposed to stabilize, or ground, each identity surreptitiously 'turn' into someone, or

something, else" (Kutzinski 58). Through analysis of William Faulkner and Brodber, Kutzinski defines the turning as "cultural equivocation": "a form of difference that resists classification and thus unsettles the very concept of cultural identity, never mind its specifics" (48), like the biracial bodies of Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*. "That is," Glissant argues, "very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation" (*Poetics* 18). Understanding ourselves and each other depends on this exploratory and unpredictable relational movement. Without fixing or destabilizing, *Louisiana* demonstrates these equivocating destabilizations with communal geography.

Despite Ella's relative geographical fixity over the course of the manuscript, her story brings together many regions. The novel is set in the famously multi-colonized state in the US where the immigrant protagonist, married to an immigrant, both with indistinct pasts in their countries of origins (Ella's revealed, Reuben's not), primarily interacts with spirits and sailors. Ella's initiation into life as a prophetic priestess has integral diasporic elements. She muses: "I couldn't get the shared experience of those two sets of negroes from two different parts of the world out of my head" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 86), much as she cannot get the possessing voices out of her head; and the shared songs of those "negroes" will allow her to access her own possession. In addition to the Caribbean sailors in a US port, the two women joined in Ella's possession are from these two regions. Ella eventually understands that her Columbia professors are interested in Anna because of her work with Marcus Garvey, a pan-Africanist born in Jamaica and, for a time, based in the US (Louise is a part of this work, too). (Ella opines that "the nature or extent of the influence of black American on the Caribbean and vice versa

has [not] been explored as it should" [Brodber, *Louisiana* 154].) Ella and her possessors perform the destabilization of body and border; they also articulate this destabilization. Remarking on their shared surname Grant (on Ella's mother's side), Anna says to Ella: "Two places make babies" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 16), turning a body into multiple borders and then back to bodies. Louise later echoes this idea to Anna: "Two places can make children," before suggesting they sire Ella (Brodber, *Louisiana* 17). Page writes that the statement "suggests that we take to task what it means for different geographical locations to create an individual" (65). *Louisiana* suggests that multiple territories produce variegated selves and this production is conceived in the movement of language. From two places with the same name, there is one child with different ones. I use the names Ella, Anna, and Louise throughout my argument because scholarly criticism demands consistency, but each of these characters has multiple names in the text (perhaps justifying the Press's hesitancy around Reuben's one name). As Ella unveils her ethnography, the text moves more often between the names in a developing facility with translanguaging. The linguistic flux in the bodies of diasporic citizens is the reciprocity of permeable borders, regardless of travel.

Translangualism is related to etymologists' questions on the singular root narrative of language, which does not account for speakers' possible linguistic encounters (Nelson-Sathi et al.). The rhizome of Relation reorients the family tree model of language development. Glissant begins his text arguing that, in the displacement of slavery, "African languages became deterritorialized" (*Poetics* 5). The uprooting of these languages (and cultures) is a sowing of the protean and permeable. These origin ruptures allow for continuous movement; if the body is a permeable land, it is also the equivocal word. Glissant writes: "the Creole language has another,

internal obligation: to renew itself in every instance on the basis of a series of forgettings. Forgetting, that is, integration, of what it starts from: the multiplicity of African languages on the one hand and European ones on the other, the nostalgia, finally, for the Caribbean remains of these" (*Poetics* 69). This is eponymized in 'Louisiana,' a title that is both the renamed protagonist, and places related to her in the US and Jamaica. Kutzinski notes: "New Orleans has functioned historically and imaginatively as link between the United States and the West Indies" (61). Ella, at first, only knows the name of her parents' hometown; and these words are the first conscious link between her and Anna. Anna tells Ella: "you ain't the only soul got a place called 'St Mary, Louisiana'" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 15). Naturally, it is another chiasm (crosses proliferate in the text): Louisiana, St. Mary, Jamaica, with the town and country reversed in the US. Even the name of Ella's mentor in spirit access, Madam Marie, connects to the doubled St. Mary's parishes (another trinity: two places centred in one woman). The voices are not only contained within the body of Louisiana (and the notably multicultural state), but also within the word, like the alien words within the name Sappho. The crossed place names repeat their axes of body and land in the character names. Ella writes:

> In me Louise and Sue Ann are joined. Say Suzie Anna as Louise sometimes calls Mammy. Do you hear Louisiana there? Now say Lowly as Mammy calls Louise and follow that with Anna as Louise sometimes calls Mammy. Lowly-Anna. There's Louisiana again, particularly if you are lisp-tongued as you could well be. Or you could be Spanish and speak of those two venerable sisters as Louise y Anna. (Brodber, *Louisiana* 124).

I could add that her given name “Ella” indicates a feminine form in romance languages, and its phonemes, ‘El’ and ‘a’ make LA, the state’s abbreviation. From change within a language to multilingualism, the duality of US and Caribbean is expanded, as it is within the text which recognizes not only the inheritances of African continent, but also Judeo-Christian traditions (Khokher 41). Referring to the interregional connections, Meriwether argues that “[i]n *Louisiana*, Brodber underscores the fact that this interrelatedness *always already* exists among the diasporic community, whether one realizes it consciously or not” (113, emphasis hers). The possibilities are manifold against the unity of Louisiana and this diversity proves the permeability of any container. Two places make an oscillating text. The colonizing languages of Louisiana, English, Spanish, and French, come together in this diasporic expression of the word (displaying the routes and roots that “coon can” has absorbed). Kutzinski writes: “That ‘Louisiana’ is not just a place identifiable of a map but a *word* created by the imagined merging of two characters’ names... calls attention to the sheer capriciousness of any border” (79, emphasis hers). Caprice is the ludic possibility of porousness, challenging the containing language with the mutable word on interrelated ground.

The names in Louisiana contain a communal plurality but also a personal one. After the destabilizations of the first chapter, Ella begins the second chapter with a statement of identity that is also one of ownership, revealing that the first is a transcription she has made of “her first encounter with her teachers”; incorporating the place into her identity, she attributes the text to “I Louisiana, the former Ella Townsend, now Kohl” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 31). The first phrase, “I Louisiana,” contains both the subject, “I,” and the possessed diasporic community vehicle, “Louisiana,” insisting on the oscillation between the two. Beginning the next phrase “the

former," suggests the discarding of a past self for "Louisiana," but she clarifies that she is also "now Kohl." Given that "Louisiana" does not displace her individual self, it cannot subsume "Ella," which can then also have two iterations. Of course, the second is not quite individual as it is the assumption of her husband's surname; however, each use remains relevant, each indicating a different desire of the protagonist. The authorship is tripled within one, challenging singularity even within that most championed of singularities, the self, without displacing that self. All her names, thus all her desires, remain in this statement—an ironic demonstration of the Press's judgment that she "disappeared leaving a blotch on her name" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 3). In this case, her experience is the stain of the palimpsest. There is a centrifugal movement of language from monolingualism to variety that remains centripetally tied to the body (human and geographical) of Louisiana. Language is deterritorialized in the singular and reterritorialized in the plural. There is a continual oscillation between language, land, and the body that allows for a moving identification and expression.

In the narrative, names in particular demonstrate the relations between the unstable bodies of the diaspora and the permeability of life and death, another iteration of travel. Within the US state of Louisiana, Ella and Reuben begin in St. Mary's and move to the port of New Orleans, known for its diasporic encounters. It also has a well-known connection to the occult; and Ella must make the move for the diasporic mixing that allows her to "get over." There is, though, another shared name in the incident which gets Ella and Reuben to the city. Reuben is mistaken for a white man who, a decade before, had attempted to organize workers in St. Mary's; this earlier Reuben was run out of town by "the owners and their lackeys" (Brodber,

Louisiana 67).[88] It is the denizens of St. Mary's who misrecognize Reuben first. They ask him directly if he is that earlier man come again. Reuben answers: "I am Reuben Kohl" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 67). Ella speculates that an intonation mistake makes the community hear confirmation instead of denial. The reader sees Reuben's denial because the other Reuben's surname is Cole. Reuben's auditors, however, cannot hear the distinction (différance). Furthermore, Ella suspects that, as a quirk of his learning English as a second language, Reuben has put the accent on the verb, seeming to emphasize the confirmation of identity, not the correction of surname (Brodber, *Louisiana* 67). As with "coon can," this rhythmic difference is one of meaning, too. Reuben, out of sync with St. Mary's, is in essential danger.

Ella, intimate with Reuben, tuned to his resonances, finds his linguistic replacement discordant. She writes: "they stripped my boy of his golden colour, his wiry hair, his youth and made him into that long gone union organiser whom I was quite sure was balding and wrinkled by now if not rotting in some grave" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 67-68). According to Ella, Reuben does not really look like the other man; the other man should not even have a body to be compared. She is told, however, that her Reuben would have been the same age as Cole when he arrived (Brodber, *Louisiana* 71); and that, other than skin colour, the Reubens do look the same (Brodber, *Louisiana* 72). Reuben is primed for this mishearing misrecognition by his own uncertain body. He is this novel's liminal biracial character. Ella, at points calling his skin "golden" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 40, 41), describes him as "neither white nor black-black" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 41). His body is equivocal; and his borders are equally so. Like Ella, Reuben does not know his own early history; unlike Ella, he has no way to access it. All he

88 In retaliation for this name-derived doppelgangering, Ella only refers to the intruders who threaten them in synecdoches of their body; in their appearance at her front door, they are just "[b]ig white feet" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 65) and "eyes and shoes" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 66).

knows is that he was "[b]orn 1908. The year King Leopold took the Congo (Brodber, *Louisiana* 71). Ella writes that, with this detail, "Reuben gave as full an answer as his priest/father had given him" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 71), noting that the priest "could find no story to hand him concerning his parents, black or white" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 41). He is found by this priest in the Congo in early childhood and carried back to Belgium when the priest returns from what is presumably a missionary trip (Brodber, *Louisiana* 40). Given the horrors of King Leopold's Congo, this aphasia may be a beneficial relief from trauma for Reuben, but it makes his origins impossibly obscure, much like the ruptures of slavery. Taken from Africa by a white man, Reuben's missing origins repeat the birth of the Black diaspora, just as his presence depicts its equivocation. He is mysteriously African, and also mysteriously not. At the end of the narrative, his whereabouts are unknown; the Press speculates that he has disappeared back into Africa (Brodber, *Louisiana* 4). For a diaspora forcibly removed from its homeland, Africa exists as the illusory centre of this interrelatedness. Reuben is then that centralizing trope, with his own intangible mutability beckoning Ella as the porous boundary, who is also a locus of flexible discourse. Their reciprocal relationship maps the routes of diaspora, developing a repertoire from its discourse of creation out of erasure and fragmentation. Sharpe explains: "Inasmuch as the dead who speak do so only to signal the incompleteness of the records, the novel is also about the impossibility of creating seamless stories out of the fragments of the past" (97). These stories are not seamless; however, in their porosity, they are flexible—errant. Reuben remains the deterritorialized character Ella feels she is initially, but in his constant search for connection, he is able to create a flexible boundary—to name and cohere, as he does for Ella. In their own oscillation, Ella and Reuben perform the intimate Relation of the diaspora.

Reuben is integrated into Ella's tale. Ella also knows very little about her time in the region where she was born. She does know, however, even as a child, that this (home)land separates her from her African Americans peers. She houses her disconnection in her mother's "West Indian Church." The parishioners there, she notes, are called "King George's Negroes" by African Americans (Brodber, *Louisiana* 58). They are a different kind of Blackness, one pejoratively tied to the elite in the person of the King from whom the US severed itself. Too Black for the standard, but too standard for the Blacks, Ella's racialized identity exists in an unacknowledged state. In her experience of the diaspora, Ella is doubly displaced, from mainstream culture and from the marginalized culture; instead of Du Bois's African American double consciousness, Ella experiences a sort of triple consciousness of the diasporic immigrant (reflected in the tripling of Brodber, Hurston, and Ella). Prior to her naming, this exists for her as the disorientation depicted in the first chapter. In writing the manuscript, Ella recognizes that she has misread people and situations. St. Mary's enacts the confusion of identity around Reuben as Ella starts to become conscious of her possession. Overwhelmed by the competing challenges to what she has assumed as stable, she admits: "I did not know what to do with this communal levitation of the senses. It was too much to ask a person to deal with her own private flight from reality as well as this public one, all in the same month" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 67-68). Her later self writing the manuscript realizes that the confusion around the Reubens gives the community the opportunity to send her to Madam Marie in New Orleans in order to help her "get over." The association with the unionizer alerts the same authorities who had run the earlier Reuben out of town, forcing Ella and Reuben to also relocate. She thinks the community has misheard Reuben's name, but it is she who cannot hear their true intent, since she is out of sync

with their errant oscillations. He, too, is Louisiana, as much as she is Kohl; but he is also absence as much as presence, clash as much as syncopation. Ella must engage her triple consciousness, as she does in her declarative naming, to tune herself to the specific sounds of double exposure. A crossroads of oppositions that oscillates into the confluence of multiplicity, the slippages of land, body, and word within these oscillations suggest the diversity of the disaporic is the demonic—a parallax view of knowing and unknowing that challenges the humanist hegemony.

Folklore is often read as a communal invocation, a nationalizing reach to the vernacular. In *Louisiana*, it is a point of diasporic connection *and* distinction. Ella's mentor in possession and prophesying, voodoo practitioner Madam Marie, "[takes] in and let[s] off stories" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 78) as part of her spiritual practice. The folkloric tales shared by those who patronize her parlour create a vernacular (and therapeutic) iteration of a high arts salon or an expanded display of Sappho and Dora's jewel box, the treasure chest. The manuscript tells one Anansi tale —stories of a trickster spider that originate from the Akan people of West Africa and travel across the diaspora—but the folk songs are given the most attention. Madam's practice also involves singing with sailors from the Caribbean, mostly Jamaica, who visit her for her occult knowledge. Page calls Madam's sing-a-longs, "arguments turned melody" (59), but Ella describes the experience as play: a "community game song" that she names "You can't catch me" (Madam and her Caribbean crew do not offer a name in this manuscript) (Brodber, *Louisiana* 87*)*. One party sings a folk song that the other knows, but attempts to take the song to places unknown to the other party. Madam's source of the unknown is the melody; she

"[carries] her notes over hill and dale, jumping in the sky and dashing into the sea, and they couldn't catch her" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 87). (Pre-possession, Ella would not be able to follow at all; she thinks of herself as "A truly tone-deaf lady!" [Brodber, *Louisiana* 33].) Referring to the song which primes Ella for her first conscious possession, Velma Pollard (Brodber's sister) writes: "The selection of sound, the sound of the voice, something one HEARS is key to this novel in which connections are made between this world and the other" (37, emphasis hers). The folkloric oral culture paints a picture for Ella, like Hurston's oral hieroglyphics, that evokes physical movement, a confluence of the senses that facilitates shared experience. As with reading *Their Eyes*, synaesthesia is an active process that supports intimacy. With its sailors, this novel underscores the errantry of this intimacy; their work and play highlights the geography involved.

This synaesthesia makes a game out of the search for the unknown as part of the performance of revelation (another version of "coon can"'s doubling). Concentrating their attention on the word, the sailors use a different source for the unknown: "Madam's stronghold was the tune. They couldn't enter that without the proper key and they didn't have that key. Theirs was the lyrics" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 87). Madam and Ella might know the melodies of the songs they sing, but elements of the language escape them: "[The men] loved to sing about John Crows" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 87), a popular Jamaican symbol for ugliness, evil, and death that the women do not recognize. John Crow has some aural familiarity in its similarity to Jim Crow, though they refer to different things—the former to a type of person with the low qualities of the buzzard (more Hurston resonances!), the latter to the tacit and explicit

segregationist laws of the American South.[89] Like Reuben's Kohl and Madam's melody, John Crow is another resonance that is near but elusive, another sound set up to be caught. Meriwether argues: "Clearly, Brodber stresses listening here, confirming that the recognition of enunciatory practices requires an adjustment in one's 'reading' strategies" (109). Meriwether's argument supports a synaesthesic mix; listening is chasing the melody and the word, which makes resonance a travelling connection that invites reading. Ella further describes Madam's part in vocal-geographical terms: "A signature she laid down. That's all they could hold. She had run far, far, far with the full name" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 87). The parlour game synaestheses the familiar and the unfamiliar as it oscillates the participants between the body, the word, and the land, braiding the three.

If the song is caught, the game ends in communion, offered by the narrative third element. When everyone knows a song: "Each of those men went into his past to tell us the circumstances under which he had learnt that song" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 86). In this shared synaesthesia, the song also brings forth the individual experience; a personal story is unveiled in the safe space of shared culture. The sailors go into experience, then articulate that experience, repeating Ella's reciprocal ethnographic process—or rather, originating it.

Ella describes a time when Madam seems to be winning the game and the men return with "Sammy dead, Sammy dead, Sammy dead oh" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 88): a Jamaican folk song about an industrious farm worker. The song first claims that Sammy's bountiful corn kills

89 A clear connection between the two has not been established. *A Dictionary of Jamaican English* finds that the earliest record of John Crow predates the earliest record of Jim by two years, but neither reference helps to establish their entry into the vernacular. The Jamaican John is the people's name for the vulture, recorded in a text written by an English-born plantation master, while the American Jim comes from a minstrel performance by one of its stage originators, who attributes his character to an old slave stable hand singing to himself as he swept. The website *Blackface!*, which details racist stereotypes in media, argues (plausibly, though without citation) that Jim Crow originates from West African animal folklore, while the blog *pancocojams*, which explores the history of diasporic music and dance, finds sources that suggest John Crow comes from the Ashanti for buzzard, yankoro.

him; in the next verse, the lyrics correct (or elaborate) that he is killed by the people grudging the bounty that comes to him from this work. The bridge, though, asks, "Ah who sey Sammy dead," questioning the entire premise of the song. It is a song that challenges and contradicts itself with ease, the verses' assertion of death sliding smoothly into the bridge's doubt. This experience is first introduced to the reading in the prefatory letter, so it frames Ella's experience of the song: "I now know that it is the refrain of a folk-song from home but I didn't know the song [then]" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 31). Except that she does know, without knowing that she does. When Ella hears the song in Madam's parlour, she shouts "Ah who sey Sammy's dead" and enters the strange and active state described above (Brodber, *Louisiana* 88). She has the caught the song. In the next chapter, Ella learns that something similar has happened before. During Anna's funeral in St. Mary's, she shouts this phrase and goes into a trance. The manuscript later reveals that this is the song Ella hears being sung as the Jamaican St. Mary's community prepares the house and the corpse for her grandmother's funeral. The phrase she shouts is in a Jamaican patois she once understood, so that she speaks in tongues both foreign and familiar, hers and not hers, in a place that she is and is not, articulating the dualities of the text, translanguaging across its fragmented Relation.

Her early experience underscores Ella as that song bridge—integrated but distinct, familiar but not. "Sammy"'s emergence here has been primed by the sensations of her infant self in the first stages of her possession. Grounded in these senses, her baby self speaks. Ella thinks of her infant self, observing the preparations: "I wanted to contradict, to respond to their call '*Ah who sey Sammy dead? Sammy no dead yah. Sammy gone a..*'" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 91-92, italics hers). In the description of her infant desire, Ella clearly alludes to call-and-response,

the oscillation of performer and audience, individual and community. In infancy, developing an experience she can share, she is already participating in the game she will learn at Madam's: listening and reading as call-and-response (or "coon can"). The language of her infant self is lost to the adult Ella, but the words still elicit an affective response, hailing her visceral memories. A bridge of Relation, whose foundations are not always visible, she is a response to the call that questions the statement of the song. For the infant learning of death for the first time, the performance of "Sammy" is a contradiction, but Ella's death-defying experience of possession suggests that each part complements the other. Meriwether suggests that it is significant that a folk song plays this role in her possession because of the community-building the text engages in (105); it is also significant against the subjectivity of Ella's experience. In an instruction to the reader, Ella writes:

> Stand if you will. Let your arms hang loose in front of you. Now put the tips of your index fingers and the tips of your thumbs together. Your extremities now form a diamond. Imagine the diamond to be solid, three dimensional. Now pierce a hole through the centre of this. That hole, that passage is me. I am the link between the shores washed by the Caribbean sea, a hole, yet I am what joins your left to your right. I join the world of the living and the world of the spirits. I join the past with the present. (Brodber, *Louisiana* 124)

Binaries are inhabited in call-and-response leading Ella as body and land to understand herself as a hole and a link. She is the abyss and the rhizome, relating between "you" and "I." She is the oscillation between oppositions in her instructions; so are we all. The vernacular performs their shared authority, but it works best in conjunction with the individual expression.

Another song playing a similar role is shared by the voices of the women who possess Ella. While thinking of Madam and the sailors singing similar songs, Ella adds these women to her marvelling: "I couldn't get it out of my head that Lowly and Mammy had been buried to the strains of the same song—Upon the hill the rising sun/ It is the voice that calls me home" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 86). The song is textually connected to "Sammy." The first appearance of the "Sammy" bridge comes after a description of one of the funerals. "Sammy" is a burial preparation song, while the other accompanies the burial procession; they are complementary. Though I was able to source the other musical material included in the novel, I was unable to find this song.[90] This may be because the procession song is fictional. Shared by the women in the text, it is familiar, but as a creation of the text, it is unfamiliar. The songs' relationships match the text's play between the real Hurston and the fictional Ella, which enacts the call-and-response of the community and individual, the inspiration and the expression, the ethnolect and the translanguaging. It is idiolect masquerading as vernacular, just as the Press's prefatory letter masquerades as authoritative, while "Sammy" and the manuscript are vernacular and standard made individual. The uncanny oscillations are reorienting and revelatory. In this relationship—an internal disjunction and an external chase—the songs as framed by the text spur a perspective change that reveals positionality, the errantry of the diaspora, its (w)holeness, certainty and doubt.

The preparation and procession songs suggest the significance of gender in this text. "Sammy" is sung with the male sailors, and the unnamed one is sung at the funerals of the

---

90 Pollard speculates that "[the funeral song] also resonates with the implied lines of a folksong made popular in a community song book of the forties: ...I'm going to Louisianna/ for to see my Suzyanna/ sing Polly-Wolly-Doodle/ all the day" (37). This song is linked to the residents of St. Mary's, Louisiana later in the book; Ella describes the explanation of Reuben's identity confusion as "Then the story came out as Southern as 'polly-wolly-doodle-all-the day'" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 66).

female possessors. Both of them contribute to Ella's "getting over," but the gender split is placed as a defining factor. Ella attributes the shift from spy glass to mirror to the assumption of conventional gender roles: "It was right there in the traditional division of labour that the change came" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 49). After the death of her informant, she stays in her rented home and cleans, so spends time with her tape of Anna's last live interview (Ella begins to record despite Anna's silence because, as she opines, "the surrounding environment speaks miles about the interview" [33]). Her husband Reuben goes out to acquire the necessities of living, so is able to meet (live) people. He is the public to her domestic (a very Victorian arrangement). Their performance of traditional Western gender roles emphasizes the body's role in their respective experiences. The material restrictions of gender are part of this seemingly regressive distinction between the women and the men. The communal which oscillates with their individuality is also a sign of the inescapable impact of societal impositions. Ella describes her communion with the voices in her head as a union of femaleness: "I was a woman among women" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 52).[91] In contrast, she writes: "Reuben had found black men" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 52). Despite this categorization, the associations which develop are perhaps as arbitrary as Saussure's connection between signifier and signified. Ella's female domestic is tied to linguistic expression, and Reuben's masculine public is tied to musical. Ella writes of herself: "I am becoming. Language is key" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 117), while she writes of Reuben's discovery of jazz: "The man was being made anew" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 53). She grows with language; he regenerates with music. Reuben, however, also makes anew with his

91 Louise observes that the delay of their full entry into Ella has to do with Ella thinking about Reuben, ruminating: "Man in the head Anna, but girls will be girls" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 26).

naming, while song is also crucial to Ella's becoming. Gender is another complementary force that enhances Ella and Reuben's diasporic mixing.

A gender synaesthesia is then part of the revelation. Anna's first impression of Ella is that she resembles a masculine Louise; perplexed by Ella's slacks, Anna asks: "Been crossing the sexes up there Lowly girl or managed to merge man in woman?" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 11). Ella does eventually change her previous style for more apparently feminine caftans as she unveils Louisiana, but she attributes the alteration to ease of assembly and comfort in the New Orleans heat, not a rejection of her previously ambiguous appearance (Brodber, *Louisiana* 99). Similarly, Ella describes asserting authority in her possession in the traditional language of a woman losing her virginity. She incorporates herself, however, as both the penetrator and the penetratee: "I had broken through that membrane and was in, ready and willing to be and see something else" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 52). In this gender fluidity, the text also subverts biological reproduction. Partially in response to Anna's question about horse-riding, and as a complement to two places making children, Louise asks: "Two women sire another?" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 17). Siring establishes a different relationship to the horse-riding metaphor, one of parenting—a type of loving domination that (ideally) gradually recedes. They are, however, going to father her, not mother, the ostensibly nurturing figure that would be expected when referring to women. Page argues that "Brodber sets up a careful network of hybridities which call into question ideologies of race and gender" (65). Black women's biologies are not destiny.

In a similar divergence from expected biology, Reuben jokes with Ella that "he was conceived by immaculate conception in the stomach of said priest [his adopted father]" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 40). The man performs the function of the woman. Not employing the

biological reproductive functionality of both sexes, Ella notes with calm bemusement that she and Reuben do not seem destined to have children; though they are not opposed the idea of procreating, neither are they worried about their child-free status (Brodber, *Louisiana* 106, 129).[92] In their specific experiences and expressions, the functions of these bodies are mutable. As with music and language, centrifugal and centripetal forces juxtaposed against each other generate the conditions for change. Observing that Ella only prophesies for male sailors, Meriwether comments in a footnote that "Brodber highlights women as the workers and men as the benefactors—in both the spiritual and material sense"; women do the psychic readings (similar to Baker's construction of Black women's writing), men are read (113). The sailors are certainly benefactors of Ella's nonrational experiences, but it is a clearly reciprocal relationship; Ella gets herself in return. It is their song which calls her home. Ben, the first one for whom she prophecies, aids her collecting of contemporary information about her birthplace and family. Ella's intimate relationship with her husband, Reuben, allows even more reciprocity. It is he, in the confidence of academic authority, who encourages her to stop resisting the pull of possession. Reuben performs the feminine task of (intellectual) midwifery—participating in the manuscript when Ella is incapacitated, and he (probably) ensures its publication. Reuben holds a necessary role in Ella's fostering of heteroglossia.

At Madam's, Reuben's midwifery is naturally united with his regeneration. He turns their folkloric practice into its modern expression, coupling jazz and the music in Madam and Ella's parlour games:

---

92 Kutzinski notes that it makes sense that Ella does not have biological children because "[c]ommunities, in *Louisiana*, are created not through biological reproduction but through repetition, across time and across space" (79).

> Madam and them continue to fight. They stole it, she says and insists on singing their 'Nobody business but him own', 'Ain't nobody business but my own'. I don't know if she or them know how well they sound together. A clash of sounds which is not really a clash – just an almost clash. I describe this for Reuben. 'Jazz', he says 'the sound of the cymbals' and he says the word 'jazz' in a way that makes me hear and see two hands, two circles and a sound as they strike each other. (Brodber, *Louisiana* 123)

Jazz is the oscillation of the two vernaculars in their syncopated repetition of the same phrase. The synaesthesic onomatopeia Ella describes syncopatedly repeats her own instruction to the reader to create a hole and a link—a clash which is not really a clash. Jazz, which will become an all-American vernacular and then refine itself into the category of minority elitism into which it pushed classical music, moves along a progression of vernacular-standard-superstandard. Its birth, though, is in the relationality of the diasporic binaries.

The reciprocity between Ella and Reuben does move beyond them to a third—not a child, but the reader—gender neutral. The constrictions of the material body are significant, but the expression of the individual body is variable. The recognition of this strategy makes reading translanguaging; the reader is on the chase, too. Ella's second person instruction to form a hole and link makes explicit the reader's inclusion in the game from the necessary third element in oscillation: the narration. In narration, a bridge is crossed, affect is penetrated.

The reader also experiences the unfamiliar familiarity of the song bridge. Its phrase "Den ah who sey Sammy dead" (and the variation "Ah who sey Sammy dead") appears in the unreferenced soliloquy of the first chapter as if it is a section break: italicized and bolded, separated from the paragraphs. The italics here emphasize the visual difference of the language

in addition to its nonstandard phonetic spelling. The visual and the aural are both intensified in this disorienting synaesthesia. Performing its position in the song, it spans the monologue breaks, but in the disorientation of the first chapter, it is unclear who or what performs this bridge. In the next chapter, Ella explains: "As you can see from the transcript, my other self entered their space as early as that – involuntarily – shortly after Lowly sang her song" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 33). Ella is the one speaking the bolded italicized lyrics that bridge and undermine; her dual function is even typographically related to theirs. The italicization also typographically connects it to her pre-linguistic infant usage, so its distance from rational utterance is underscored through that materialization. Their typographical difference highlights corporeality in the text. The reader experiences Ella's disorientation through reading the transcript before Ella hears the tape in their own unconscious involvement with the revelations of the narrative. In this recursive time, reading comes before listening; therefore, the process can go either way, but the revelation demands reciprocity. The text is the hole and the link, a bridge between actions and bodies, engaging the experience to propel the affective.

The reader must catch the difference, making visceral the experience of language to understand, to receive the story of plurality in binary. Not only orthographically different with the phonetic 'sey," the phrase begins "Ah who." This "Ah" is not the phonetic spelling of 'I' sometimes used in AAVE transcriptions (which Hurston attributes to the "lip form" [43], a hint for Brodber's "lisp-tongued" Louisiana). In Caribbean pronunciations, 'I' is pronounced with more of a dipthong than the flattened "Ah" common to the southern US. "Ah" works like John Crow, suggesting familiarity, particularly in its starting position, which could be the subject position of 'I,' and reminding the reader of relationships beyond the American binary of

standard and dialect. In “Sammy,” “Ah” is a sound of exclamation that precedes a question, calling attention to its emphasis of doubt. In the transcript, because of its difference and repetition, “Ah” works like the vocalization of a choir. Textually, the whole phrase seems more like a chorus, repeated after every verse as a summary of the song. The reader then is lulled into their own musical trance, possessed with their own affect. “Sammy” performs the parallax view in itself and for the reader, as it does for Ella. Eliding with the protagonist of the novel, the reader’s priority in this experience primes them to accept hers. In its initial unfamiliarity, “Sammy” is a hole, but it will also become the familiar link; a node of the rhizome, it establishes and performs affect. The reader is moved in Relation, sharing the intimacy of the process. Revelation of Ella’s possession is made a shared learning experience; reciprocal didacticism is the demonic knowledge transmission.

Setting the uncanny parallax of demonic ground, the manuscript begins with a first-person description of the speaker’s funeral. It is a soliloquy without any other context, which will match the description of another funeral described in the same chapter. Both services include a parade. The details of the participants and their banners, however, are described in reverse order; the first ends her description with a reference to new abilities of perspective (Brodber, *Louisiana* 10), while the second begins with that revelation (Brodber, *Louisiana* 36-37). The descriptions form a chiasm, with the demonic mirror glass at the crossroads, the foundations of a confluence. Of course, Ella first realizes the funereal similarities because of the parlour song play (Brodber, *Louisiana* 51). It is first in the synaesthesia of the game that she is given understanding, as Janie says to Pheoby: ‘tain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you the understandin’ to go ‘long wid it’” (Hurston 19). Ella, naturally in this text,

experiences this understanding before she is consciously aware of it. During Anna's funeral, after hearing the "voice that calls [her] home" and shouting "Ah who sey Sammy dead," Ella goes into a trance that provides a different perspective: "a place that had added something to it and had subtracted something from it, that had edited the St Mary bayou" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 35). Another image is added to the projection. With this double exposure, Ella sees: "Instead of the sleepy stream going on and on... here were rocks willy nilly in the water and a mound of irregularly placed ones as if hastily called upon to protect the mouth of a cave... and out of it came a wide rainbow... [Anna] climbed the ladder over the horizon and across the sky" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 35). Within the editing (or framing) of the bayou, the landscape maintains its oscillation of entry and barrier. The rocks add danger to the "sleepy stream" and contribute to the sense of something veiled; however, out of that sense of protection and vulnerability comes the multiplicity of the rainbow. Anna's ascent of the rainbow recalls Ella's description of Madam's songs in play, transposed into the visual. In the familiar unfamiliar perspective, Ella is called to chase Anna into death in order to learn her experience. She must follow her path. In this exertion, the previously inaccessible, intangible of the horizon becomes accessible material, as it does for Janie at the end of *Their Eyes* (perhaps supporting readings of that protagonist's death).

Appropriately then, through beginning the manuscript with a funeral, an ending that is a beginning, the voice's description of the funeral is also a resurrection, a return to the body. The speaker repeats the lyrics of the song sung at her funeral, "It is the voice that calls me home," to describe her experience. We are again chasing the word. It is a return journey: "into seventh heaven and back to fete[,].... [b]ack with every faculty – all hands, feet, eyes, ears a body could

need" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 11): the oscillation between the intellect and the body as travel. Complicating Kutzinski's argument about the "unhomely," the text suggests that the voice never truly abandons the body—just as the bodies thrown off ships in the Middle Passage never truly disappear as they ground the abyss (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 9). Being called home suggests a grounded, though fluid, beckoning as the function of the voice—a balance of centrifugal and centripetal. A metonym for language use, this voice is the diaspora in Relation, errant and interrelated, calling and responding, leaving and coming home.

The status shift from living bodies to voices of the dead is simply a different named language whose elements can be accessed in a travelling translangualism. Kutzinski writes that "'Getting over'—or being carried across—signals Brodber's interest in disorienting narrative by way of dislocating cultural identity" (74). Kutzinski takes the phrase literally, as I have been doing, but Geneva Smitherman defines "gittin ovuh," as she transcribes it, as "surviving" (Smitherman 73). Rather than dislocating, in translangualism, "getting over" embeds culture in the individual body, underscoring its life of movement within and between bodies. After singing the song, the speaker offers a description of the experience of death that evokes the linguistic: "Being translated is like that. You can see from every angle" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 10). In the context of possession, the continuous present of "being translated" relates to Ella's "getting over"; both suggest the hegemonic status shift as an ongoing process of porousness. Saunders writes: "The emphasis on translation for Brodber is in an effort to understand silence as a strategic positionality capable of signifying epistemological and ontological presence" (142). Translation suggesting fluency in at least two languages, strategic positionality underscores the metapragmatics in code-switching between those languages, an ongoing assessment of the

linguistic context, which changes depending on the relation between speakers and conversational content. The songs are an education in translangualism as a non-authoritative reciprocal process. With a repertoire derived from the perforations of possession, something added and something subtracted explains the process of Ella's translanguaging, travel through light and shadow. In her rhizomatic experience, each language offers material, and can be penetrated by the others. Ella's vision then provides more knowledge for her contextual assessment and the reader's contextual awareness. Accepting other angles forms the tilting parallax of demonic ground, where silence is another tool of knowledge.

The confluence of the crossroads mirror occurs in Ella's ethnographic instruments. Like any well-equipped ethnographer, Ella is sent to do her research with a machine that will record the oral histories she is told. Ella remembers: "I from nowhere was one of the first to be given this instrument, this precious instrument, first of its kind, donated to the programme by the manufacturers" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 32). The machine, like the Prologue, appears as a symbol of conventional authority, bringing together trade and scholarship in measurable value. With its authority, the machine can then authenticate an experience that Ella has not yet unveiled. Ella "from nowhere" begins by contrasting her groundlesness against the authority of the machine. In its putative objectivity, its authority supersedes her own. Her relationship to that authority changes as the machine reveals its openness to the nonrational. In accepting the unknown sounds on the presumably unadulterated tape, Ella accepts a reorientation of authority.

The machine performs multidirectionality. Ella describes the machine as driving the possession, writing: "Nevertheless, the machine pulled those words, that thought, out of me and

in my voice" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 33). The machine's exertion is not only to impress on the tape, but to pull the sound out of the noise-maker. It is no longer passive receptacle, but active seeker. In acceptance of this oscillating process, Ella is able to assert her own changing authority. She begins to relate to the machine as a body so that they may share in language. Ella describes "opening the recording machine gently as reverently as if I was cleaning my babydaughter's private region" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 50). She is a nurturing parent, much like the women who sire her. It is intimate, but desexualized—and she is now the authority that maintains the distinction. In its searching oscillation, however, the machine is not an inanimate body; living, its body is as specific and various as Ella's own. Their relationship can therefore continue to evolve. The machine matures so that their relationship is no longer the careful power dynamics of parenthood, but the equality of partners. Ella writes: "Having moved it, I began to feel like a lover pulling his love to him and asking why" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 50); and later, "I felt a softness in that box, the-about-to-cry phase and tell-all phase, and I could sense the reconciliation coming I, the lover, pressed on to opening and to fingering, to locating the essentials, the paper and pencil and to getting ready for the profound intimacy" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 50). Ella as machine-lover begins male and becomes gender neutral. This "profound intimacy" is the coupling of oppositions, the sharing of tongues between her body and the machine, which is recorded on the tape becoming hybrid. Her intercourse with the machine demonstrates the changing agency of language in changing perceptions of the body—a change that is only possible through nurture and comfort, a tender intimacy. The machine is the third element in the possession of text and body, the third consciousness articulating the experience, but this experience highlights the necessary intimacy of that third. In generating change, it

cannot be the distanced, objective observer; there must be a time for caring, an intimate reciprocity. Kutzinski joins Ella's body and the machine as "textual agents of equivocation" (77); in their synaesthesia, the reader feels the destabilization. The oscillation between the influence of discourse and the specificity of the utterance permeates the boundaries between body and language. The simultaneity of difference brings the body, the text, and the machine together.

Both permeable frames, as the body is breached by the voices, so the tape breaches the frame of the machine. Permeability is made a part of the machine's function. Sharpe footnotes that this tape is an anachronism; Ella refers to magnetic tape when the recording machines of the time would have used acetate discs (95). Eric D. Smith calls the tape a "creative anachronism" anticipating the future (qtd. in Sharpe 95). Sound technology has tended towards clarity, thus an anticipation of the future suggests the attempt to decrease the artifacts of the medium. Its openness to the nonrational suggests this clarity includes previously unheard voices; the future is a widening repertoire. When Ella first plays back the tape, she is struck by the contradiction between her lived experience and what the tape records; she writes: "I did not hear [Anna] speak or sing; I did not hear me think; I do not recall even feeling odd or that anything odd was going on" (33). She has had an otherworldly experience that she does not know she had; in this visceral experience, she questions her own senses, but she cannot question the tape. Reuben points out that "the voices on the reel were there for all to hear and verify" (31). The institutionality of the machine authorizes the anachronistic and ghostly tape, its projection into both the future and the past, but manifesting in the present; as Bakhtin describes heteroglossia: it "expresses simultaneously two different expressions" (324). Like Ella, it

speaks two ways. Sharpe notes the homonymic wordplay in the tape as medium of recording and its position as a medium to the spirits (97). The terminology of the mechanical and the spiritual performs a différance that exemplifies the oscillation between rational and nonrational, a repetition of function in different situations. I would suggest, however, that in *Louisiana* the machine is the recording medium ("getting over"), while the tape is the spirit one ("hegemony of the spirit"). In possession, they are split but also reconciled. The machine having pulled the voices out, the tape stirs them back in.[93] Performing ethnography as prophecy, Ella's tape expresses the fullness of self enabled by possession. In their play, the institutional can entwine with the personal as the individual entwines with the communal.

Listening to the tape reveals Ella's oscillating multiplicity, her heteroglossic rhizome. The oscillation is at first jarring to Ella (as Meriwether notes above); she writes: "I said those words that are foreign to me and I sensed that I was a party to conversation between others. I was more than just frightened. I was shaken to the roots" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 33). The words are foreign because they are in a patois she does not know she knows, from a place she does not remember being, but also because they are from a song she does not remember hearing, and also because she does not recall having spoken those words. Their plural unfamiliarity belies their belonging. Hearing herself with an alien tongue in an alien conversation, her voice is both her(e) and not her(e). Frightened by this demonstration of alienation, Ella is shaken to the plural roots, as if the trembling of fear has done the fragmenting. In awareness of her fragmentation, however, Ella penetrates the abyss. When she hears sound on the tape where she expects silence, she describes herself as falling "off the end of the reel right through those word holes"

93 Kutzinski notes that Ella's analogizes the machine with the magic refilling pot of the Anansi tale told in Madam Marie's parlour (71).

(Brodber, *Louisiana* 44). The tape and the word are illusory ground (like Bakhtin's definition of the otherness of language: "contingent, external, illusory" [365]) that demonstrate the distance and intimacy of diasporic connections.

Ella is referring to the holes of three words specifically (the magic number, of course), which she "met" at her mother's Episcopalian church.[94] She writes: "'Dread' is one of these words"; "'Aweful' was another and 'confound' another" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 43). After listing each, Ella gives a supporting quotation, presenting the words much like a dictionary does (she plays Louise for the reader). (The context is my research, though.) "Dread" is in the hymn, "While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks By Night," about the announcement of the Christ's birth; the verse "'Fear not', said he, 'for might dread had seized their troubled hearts'," describes the Angel of the Lord appearing to the shepherds. "Aweful" comes from "Before Jehovah's aweful throne, ye nations bow," the first line the eponymous title of the hymn. Finally, "confounded" is from a plea in David's Psalm 71: "Never let me be confounded," which appears in the Te Deum (generally used for special blessings or communion) (Brodber, *Louisiana* 43). These are not welcoming terms, which might explain her "fear that one day I would step on one of those rotten corroded words and go hurtling down into nowhere. Perhaps my body in the long drop would veer to the right or to the left and I'd be stuck crossways like rainstorm" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 44). In each usage she cites, the word indicates terror at the omniscience revealing itself. Ella's fear presents that omniscience as emptiness: "nowhere." In concert with her sense that she is from nowhere, she fears a return to the rupture of the abyss—that unknown emptiness filled with oppression. Ella adds: "These words – 'dread', 'aweful', 'confounded' –

94 The religious association suggests the holy trinity. Ella's own three-in-one statement of identity turns that image demonic.

were on nameplates in any path I had to read, rather like the iron grates over a city's sewage" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 43). They confront her at every turn, hinting at, but also protecting her from, a foul immersion. The word is unruly, surrounded by its changing frame, by the plurality of its possibility.

The words occur specifically in the contexts of hymns, presenting a comparison to the folk songs at Madam's. In lyrics, the words also function outside some of the rules of proper speech, but in more conventionally acceptable ways. Their archaic phrasings—often reversing contemporary word order—makes them variant, yet their biblical provenance gives them an authority that allows acceptable diversions from contemporary standards. The words are marked, but they exist in that rarefied zone of mainstream marginality enjoyed by elite variants (one might put academic language in this category); though they are marked as "superstandard" or "hyperstandard" (Bucholtz, "Whiteness" 88), their difference is not policed in the manner of lower status marked varieties.

Beneath the grate are their alternate interpretations, their alien words, which hold no such protected status. In her denuciatory language, Ella's feared space suggests Bakhtin's "dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents" (276)—for her, the agitating tension to be avoided. Ella explains that the words "belonged to another civilization and the modern day had not unearthed the key to their location. They were rather like the flaps on a letter box. Made of tin or enamel. And set in tin or enamel. And these you know can corrode" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 44). For Ella, the alien words are simultaneously inaccessible, locked away, and inherently accessible, meant to be opened, a container for sent messages—the key is there to be caught, if Ella joins the chase. Bakhtin

writes that “between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that is often difficult to penetrate” (276). With Ella’s monoglossia, the familiarity of the church words makes their alien spaces all the more difficult to access. She is not yet inclined to break this membrane. Bakhtin also describes his “elastic environment” as “an obscuring mist” (276). Ella worries that there is nothing behind the obscurity. Should the word clear its weather, she may get stuck in this hollow body—“crossways,” the way she slips sideways into anthropology or slides off her chair when she hears “Sammy” again.

Her fear of the ensuing nothingness contradicts an earlier description of the word holes’ environment: “Some words control large spaces. They sit over large holes. These holes might be dungeons with hairy half humans living in them. Then again they may be underground worlds with railway lines taking trains and neatly dressed people here and there” (Brodber, *Louisiana* 43). Underneath the words, there is space, but it is not empty. The word is a roof over dwellings diametrically opposed: the dungeon with its half humans and what could be the subway of an urban centre with its tidy commuters. When laid out as such, the contrast suggests each as a funhouse mirror version of the other, except the former are presumably punished and confined, the latter are free to go hither and yon (does it matter where?); they present language’s ability to liberate or confine, regress or progress. In the Schrödinger-like uncertainty of the hole, Ella reads the space as infinite emptiness rather than ongoing possibilities for strategic positioning. Ella’s hairy or neat holes exhibit the elasticity of the environments, so she does not specify which words cover which holes, suggesting the strategic positionality of standard and dialect. “Then again,” however, suggests an uncontrollable element underneath the veil of their

appearance. Either encounter is possible. She fears being dispersed in the centrifuge of possibility.

"Getting over" involves confronting this fear, travelling through these words to the foreign lands they hide, the alien hegemonic diversity of demonic grounds that demand active placement. The instability of the tape is a translangual reorientation that reveals the hole as the passage, a repertory link. The word is the mutable vehicle of perception in the specificity of the voice, the insistence on the body. Bakhtin writes that the frame "create[s] a perspective" and "create[s] the situation and conditions necessary for it to sound" (358). Similarly, Ella writes of Louisa's guidance on "coon can": "With the punctuation marks in the places to which she guides me, I am getting behind the words" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 117). Putting signs for Ella to follow in the holes between words, Louise is the frame as a map, creating the perspective and the sounding situation and conditions: focusing and tuning, reading and listening. Immediately after naming the obscuring mist, Bakhtin adds that it is also, contrarily, "light" (276). The frame allows this light to be focused, the dialogic highlighting particular relations (Bakhtin 278) as the word "weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group" (Bakthin 276). *Louisiana*'s trinities demonstrate working through these three possibilities. With Louise (another third element), Ella learns about words erased from her history, unknown words recalled by the play with the folk songs; in the contiguity of metonymy, she learns about her heteroglossic history, penetrating the obscuring mist; she learns to translanguage.

First, though, she must confront the presumed known, the light. Unlike Louise's intimate and cohering language, the church words present a public display of formality, hiding an unruly

disbursement. “Behind” against “below” places the church words on a different axis than Louise’s; the rigid hierarchy of the church sets up the vertical, replacing the word with the holes, while the familiarity of possession sets up the horizontal, relating the words with the break. Ella’s revelation of the hidden, the move to understanding, involves a descent of metaphoric replacements—the neat and hairy—which she may then use to climb out of the hole, seeking rather than falling. The sense, however, of a border to be crossed is the same. Translanguaging ensures the crossing over; and in Relation, the word establishes a trajectory through its hole. In Ella’s description, the material constitution of the words renders them particularly vulnerable to disintegration. The voices on the tape disperse the mist. Disturbed by the tape’s uncanny performance, Ella agitates the corroded covers and falls into the abyss. Ella writes:

> Today those three names plates in their most rotten and corroded existence came together. We fell down, down, down. We were lucky. There was a lot of space so no reason to be stuck. And the fall was fairly smooth. Perhaps because we were holding hands. And it was a bed of leaves on which we fell. Scented, pressed, thin, velvety leaves. They made hardly a sound when our bodies connected with them. (Brodber, *Louisiana* 44)

With Reuben’s help, Ella accepts what she is hearing on the tape, and together they breach the veil of the word. In the actuality of the hole, the whole experience is reoriented. Rather than hairy or neat people, Ella encounters the freedom of space and a bed of leaves. After recoiling, then merging, she can intersect. This experience of nature is neither half human, nor peak civility; it escapes the limitation of the opposition. The experience of the word is both the

repository of silence and the resonance of sound: the abyss as affect—as naturalized as the rhizomatic roots of Relation. Ella's triple consciousness offers another path through the environment of the word. She writes: "In awe and dread and totally confounded, we lay together" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 44). They survive. Louise's proliferation of prepositions could apply here in a clash that is not a clash; Ella can now be in, with, and on the word holes. The confluence of the crossroad lets her walk home along the orbit of the oscillating word. Her widening repertoire, her triple consciousness, facilitates the translanguaging of the reciprocal revelation. No longer fearing the word hole, Ella turns to bibliomancy, the practice of forecasting through random bible verse (Brodber, *Louisiana* 99), embracing the perspective of and projection into the unknown through these church words, now a part of her repertoire. She turns the authoritative to the subjective, the fragment to narrative; she reciprocates with the institutional.

Triple consciousness is particularly relevant to the Caribbean's place in the diaspora. Majority Black, like Africa, settled with forced migration, like the rest of the diaspora, the Caribbean's position as a significant hinge between the major continents of the slave triangle embodies the diversity of demonic ground, its archipelago a synecdoche of the diasporic experience. Comparing the Caribbean, land surrounded by sea, to the Mediterranean, a sea surrounded by land, Glissant argues that the discourse of the latter moves towards containment, thus monolingualism; he writes: "the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts" (*Poetics* 33), thus creolizing. With its parallax perspective dispersing, the Caribbean grounds the postmodern. Cuban Antonio Benitez-Rojo's postmodern

discourse reads the archipelago as instances of différance, “the repeating island,” as his book is called. The islands repeat the oscillation of similarity and difference with their land, linked and fragmented, and their name, land and sea.

The region’s identification in the novel as the “West Indies” exhibits a history of Western heteroglossia, as Columbus’s misidentification of India still dominates over the name of its indigenous peoples. Gay Wilentz argues that in the dominated, yet majority status of the Caribbean writer, raised with texts that represent an alien experience: “The break in the correlation of language and accepted reality—which is at once isolating and subjugating—necessitates revisionist metaphoric activity” (266). From the root to the repertoire, the text diffracts authority to disperse the obscuring mist and reveal the connecting rhizome. This is the process begun by the break Ella experiences between what she hears on the tape and what she experiences in life; her reaction is a revisioning of what the authoritative institutional can accommodate. Ella’s vision of Anna’s death-defying climb over the horizon, “something added and something taken away,” is the lesson of Janie’s drawn in horizon, something remembered and something forgotten. Bakhtin argues that the harmony of horizons performed in reading is language’s “becoming” (326); it process of both union and differentiation. It is a reciprocal process of en- and decoding. Possession viscerally places someone else’s language within one’s own, but the informant demands something of the interlocutor in recompense for revelation. Horizons touch in reciprocity, desire consummated.

Postmodern linguistic theories revel in the type of doubleness that underscores Caribbean thought (as Norval Edwards says of the Caribbean’s anticipation of dialogism [17]). Wilentz writes: “But what we have learned from deconstruction (as well as African and other

philosophies before it) is that not only does a word contain its opposite but language can be the basis for its own opposition" (262). Deconstruction underscores the integration of the postcolonial language opposition. The break Wilentz identifies means that Caribbean literature is "likely to be... more self-consciously concerned with the problem of expressing the new in the language of the old" (266). Saunders argues for Caribbean primacy in theories that complicate oppositions; she writes: "One such shift contemporary Caribbean writing has brought to cultural and literary studies is a movement away from the oppositionality of theory and creative writing" (142). Confronting oppositions is, unsurprisingly, also the condition in which the Black women writer finds herself.[95] Saunders argues that in considering the stakes of the imaginary, "the work of contemporary Caribbean women writers is particularly significant because the stakes for them are much higher as a consequence of their long history of marginalization" (142). *Louisiana*, the work of an anthropologist/social worker who is also a prolific novelist, tackles the new and the old in creolization, Glissant's term for language's inherent changing; the text turns existing structures to different uses similarly to its fellow Black women's texts. This novel uses its geography to ground the reorientation.

Ella's alienation within marginalization, her triple consciousness, allows her to affectively articulate that différance. The anthropology that Ella is trained in promotes the coming to know, but obscures the horizons of this knowledge. With her experience of language diversifying, Ella challenges the limits of constraint, the fixity of masterly discourses, by revealing those borders with her passage through them. In the acknowledgement of alienation, there is an investment in the utility of difference. The duality becomes more than opposition; it

95 Deborah E. McDowell makes observations similar to Saunders and Wilentz when she asks why Black women's texts have been excluded from theoretical considerations ("Black Feminist" 558).

promotes plurality. The necessary third element which propels the plurality of this encounter is the medium of sharing; language itself is the conduit of translation between the living and the dead, the individual and communal, the writer and the reader: the confluence of the crossroads. *Louisiana* suggests reading as a type of possession. The body, the machine, the text and the voice, the tape, the word together perform the axes of language: listening and participating. Dancing around the axes, Ella's manuscript presents language as ideal and real, experience and theory, history and literature, concealing and revealing. Double exposed like the Caribbean land and sea, these Black women's novels are both the word and the hole—refracting and diffracting.

chapter five: the photonegative
I raise hell—'til it's heaven.
Jay-Z, on *The Stretch Armstrong and Bobbito Show*, WKCR (1995)

Toni Morrison's Second Renaissance credentials suggest her as another real Black woman inspiriting Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* (1994). Morrison is at the vanguard of the Second Renaissance, publishing her first book in 1970, while editing and promoting other Black texts. She, like Ella, is "getting behind the words" (Brodber, *Louisiana* 117). If Zora Neale Hurston is a rediscovered foremother of this period, then Morrison lives Hurston's exhumed promise.[96] Diane Matza writes that "both writers teach us much about what it is to be Black and a woman in a world that makes it difficult to fully explore either of those identities" (54). There are parallels between Hurston and Morrison that suggest Morrison's works as a fiction-forward iteration of Brodber's use of Hurston; however, Morrison's unconscious tradition places absence as a crucial element of an equalizing reciprocity. In *Sula* (1973), Morrison translanguages through absence, incorporating the erasures which Pauline Hopkins, Hurston, and Brodber write out of and across. Morrison uses absence to engage a sorrow that indicts, defies, and invites.

Locating her works in a "black aesthetic tradition," and particularly a Black woman's tradition (McKay, "Introduction" 2), Morrison reorients the idea of tradition by engaging hers through play with absence. Morrison claims she had read "almost no novels" by Black authors, male or female, before she was published (McKay, "Introduction" 1). When Gloria Naylor tells her: "In a sense, Toni, you were the first widely accepted black woman writer," Morrison corrects her with Hurston and Paule Marshall, but explains:

96 Morrison was the first Black woman to be featured on an American magazine cover, *Newsweek* 1981—the coverline, "Black Magic"—since Hurston had appeared on *Saturday Review* almost forty years earlier to promote the publication of her autobiography (Gates, "Preface" x).

> they didn't have those books in my libraries so it was a long time before I had a thrill of being introduced to such women. It was a double thrill for me because I was introduced to them after I had written, you see. And many people who are trying to show certain kinds of connections between myself and Zora Neale Hurston are always dismayed and disappointed in me because I hadn't read Zora Neale Hurston except for one little short story before I began to write. I hadn't read her until after I had written. In their efforts to establish a tradition, that bothers them a little bit. And I said, 'No, no, you should be happy about that.' Because the fact that I had never read Zora Neale Hurston and wrote *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* anyway means that the tradition really exists. You know, if I had read her, then you could say that I consciously was following in the footsteps of her, but the fact that I never read her and still there may be what ever they're finding, similarities and dissimilarities, whatever such critics do, makes the cheese more binding, not less, because it means that the world as perceived by black women at certain times does exist, however they treat it and whatever they select out of it to record, there is that. (Naylor 213-214)

Morrison amplifies her excitement in encountering other Black women writers through her own work with the "double thrill," which works as a clarifying binary. Her ignorance makes the similarities all the more remarkable; the absence makes her presence all the more striking. Absence proves the tradition, which proves the connection of discursive desires.

In this absent-dependent *bios-mythois*, Morrison proposes that inhabiting opposition informs the tradition. Speaking with Claudia Tate, Morrison says: "Black women seem to be able to combine the nest and the adventure. They don't see conflicts in certain areas as do white

women. They are both safe harbor and ship; they are both inn and trail. We, black women, do both. We don't find these places, these roles, mutually exclusive" (Tate 161). Sylvia Wynter argues that Black women's texts offer a "vantage point outside the space-time orientation of the humuncular observer" ("Beyond Miranda" 346); in Morrison's novels, this expanded perspective includes dark matter, the primitive element of science, opposed to matter, present but unapparent. To encompass opposition, Morrison embeds racialized and gendered erasure in her demonic perspective.

Morrison develops a repertoire of absence in her coinage "rememory." Robert Grant defines rememory as the "synthesizing connector of the lapses, gaps, absences, discontinuities, and ruptures of time" and the "subjective method of communication with someone or something 'not there'" (100). Rememory is a strategy born of the erasures of slavery; it is an element of exchange that embraces the unknown, the repressed: the abyss. Édouard Glissant's abyss opens in the trauma of the Middle Passage—the voyage that hid African genealogies from the slave descendants. It is "the sea, never seen from the depths of the ship's hold, punctuated by drowned bodies that sowed in its depths explosive seeds of absence" (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 9). Seeds of absence grow into rememory—a Relation of absence and presence.

Reflecting the image of the tradition, there are many imposed absences in *Sula*, but the novel is also continually drawing attention to its decisions to absent. Though Grant elides all of *Sula*'s absences under the rememory bridge (96), there is a key functional difference in his definition of missing subjects and objects that play key roles, and missing subjects that are evoked in memory through objects. Each stages different relations between presence and absence. The first, the effective absence, I call the absent presence. Here, absence draws

attention to itself as a welcoming space to be filled by others. It causes the participatory action of call-and-response. It challenges mastery. The second, the sublimation of the absent, I call the present absence. The present absence is a substitution which denies the absence, in essence a silencing of that absence, the unwelcome gap. This sublimation sometimes presents itself as a haunting, like the murdered baby Beloved in that eponymous novel where the eponym is grievously absent. It invests in mastery. The duality of these absences is the linguistic binary, absent presence as creative expression and present absence as creator of expression—the former proffering possibility, while the latter restricts its parameters.[97]

Sula embodies translanguaging through both. Reading Sula as the absent anchor symbol of the novel neatly begins from what Grant calls "the puzzling yet crucial question of Sula's *placement*" (96, emphasis his). Sula, the main character, shares her name with the title; however, Morrison plays with the conventions of eponymity. The title is a present absence that allows for the absent presence of its eponym. Tessa Roynon writes:

> Morrison's choice of *Sula* as title misleads the unsuspecting reader to brilliant effect.... It plays on the expectation that those versed in a European literary tradition bring to the novel: that Sula must be the central character in a bildungsroman named for its primary focus on her. The author subverts this preconception by depicting a network of characters who all play key roles in the life of the Bottom. (22-23)

97 After I wrote the first draft of this chapter, I came across Daphne Brooks's use of this chiasm to represent the dilemma of invisibility and hypervisibility of Black women's sexuality that early twentieth-century dancer Aida Overton Walker confronts in her notorious dance of Salome. Brooks notes that Walker's negotiation "anticipates the discursive strategies of black feminist cultural producers who came after her," specifically naming Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones, whose "figuration of identity," as Madhu DuBey argues, is "a contradictory interplay between presence and absence, wholeness and fracture" (341). Brooks, however, does not apply the term to those writers, nor does she claim it as the crux of their discursive strategies as I have defined it here.

Centrally placed, Sula is also out of place. Deborah E. McDowell writes: “Morrison’s transgression ... implicitly critiques such concepts as ‘protagonist,’ hero,’ and ‘major character’ by emphatically decentering and deferring the presence of Sula, the title character. Bearing *her* name, the narrative suggests that she is the protagonist, the privileged center, but her presence is constantly deferred” (“Self” 81, emphasis hers). The text revalues the status of the protagonist among the cast of characters. Karen Carmean writes: “Sula’s delayed appearance also suggests the importance of all the precedes her in life: the Bottom, Shadrack, Helene, Eva” (153). The prominence of the others allows Sula’s eponymity to frame multiplicity; Sula’s place is that open space.

The novel is also centred around Sula’s ten-year absence from the Bottom, which occurs between Parts 1 and 2, and is expressed as a section break. Unlike conventional bildungsromans, the reader does not get to “experience first hand” this time when Sula “ostensibly challenged herself through experience” (Grant 95). After Nel’s wedding, Sula walks off, her back framed by a doorway, and unexpectedly returns with a plague of robins (*Sula*, Morrison 85, 89). The robins might indicate the renewal of Spring, but, as a plague, this newness is ominous. Sula’s disappearance into the unconfined outside as seen from the contained inside explicitly frames the uncertain content of the narrative gap between departure and return, with only her back to read. Her departure and return deploy the oscillation of her absences. Ella Townsend falls into her word holes, but Sula absorbs them as dark matter.

Going and coming are both calls awaiting response; the reader must imagine her face and her adventure, must decide the import of a glut of robins. Philip Page places Sula in these absences as “the locus for the creativity of the novel” (195). She inspires creativity through

oscillation with presence and absence. This ability is emblematized in Sula's birthmark. Its mark a metonym for her, it is a heteroglossic elemental. Page writes that "Her birthmark is..., like her and like the novel, open for interpretation, mediating between the external object and the internal subject. It, Sula, and *Sula* are 'free-floating signifier(s)'" (195). It is the complementary symbolic presence to her semiotic absence. The various interpretations of Sula's birthmark—a stemmed rose, a scary black thing, a copperhead snake, a tadpole—offer the changing positions of Sula. Depending on the observer's perspective, she is a snake—the dangerous demon—and so a scary black thing, but she can also be a bloom and a beginning—encompassing the ambivalence of demonic ground. McDowell writes: "Her birthmark, which shifts in meaning depending on the viewer's perspective, acts as a metaphor for her figurative 'selves,' her multiple identity" ("Self" 52). The metaphor works through the interaction of community and individual; the variety of selves that are interiorized in Sula are matched by an external diversity.

In her dynamic of presence and absence, community and individual, Sula never mentions the birthmark at all. Sula is silenced by her birthmark, subject to others' analyses, but her silence also enables a refusal to be fixed; in the absence of her own perspective, possibility breeds. The snake beckons. Her birthmark has her power of cohesion and fragmentation in its material presence and interpretative uncertainty. With her metaphoric and metonymic birthmark, she conveys both meaning and emblem, but the relations between these remain fluid because some of her aspect remains indistinct. The movement in Page's translation—from the novel, to the protagonist, and then her birthmark—is made possible through presences' room to

be free-floating in the open space of absences; the signifier—*Sula*, Sula, the birthmark—performs its inability to contain the signified from its inability to contain Black women.

Death is a different absence than the anticipation of arrival. Morrison says: “I wanted Sula to be missed by the reader. That’s why she dies early. There’s a lot of book after she dies, you know” (Stepto 15). The shift is facilitated by the centre gap, the text marking a space for the expansive absent presence of the first half to oscillate to a confining present absence in the second. Sula’s (brief) reappearance reorients the relation between presence and absence. The community introduced in her first absence is shown to have defined themselves against her disturbing presence, as a snowflake around grit. Nel thinks of her friend: “Sula never completed; she simply helped others define themselves” (Morrison, *Sula* 95). Her death then has a chaotic effect, eliminating the kernel which held them together. Carolyn M. Jones suggests that her “angry spirit” causes the tragic end to the first (and presumably last) town-celebrated (as opposed to the singularly-celebrated) National Suicide Day (147). I would suggest that her departure destabilizes the community too quickly, precipitating the landslide that entombs many of the residents. Regardless of the interpretation, it is clear that her absence in the second part of the novel manifests in perverted and dangerous ways. As the present absence, she haunts her best friend Nel, in particular, as a musty ball of unexpressed mourning that constrains Nel even before Sula dies. Sula’s absence is both an invitation and a rebuff in awareness of the utility of each position.

Sula is the photonegative of Caliban’s absent mate, her absence materialized as both Sycorax and desire. Oscillating between plurality and singularity in her shifting absences and variable presence, Sula is a grounded destabilizer, embodying the abyss. Sula’s incompletion is

a rememory of the original silencing that haunts all movement from the abyss. Morrison could be describing Sula's representation when she writes: "We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily 'not-there'; that a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum" ("Unspeakable" 11). Morrison is referring to the erasure of real African Americans from American literature; *Sula* depicts this as an ironic presence, explored through different absences, rememories of the pain and possibility of erasure. An Yountae defines abyss as "a sense of interdeterminacy in which the rigid boundary between the finite and infinite, presence and absence, no longer holds" (8-9). As frame and absence, Sula suggests a racialized semiotics of plurality that maintains guiding parameters but denies fixed associations in its shifting intersections. Wynter's paradigm shift is the proliferating errantry of Glissant's Relation, where links are both apparent and unapparent in the trauma of this ancestral silencing (Glissant, *Poetics* 11).[98] The shiftings of present absence and absent presence assert variety but acknowledge erasure. Sula embodies the promise and punishment of language; she lets Morrison's racialized expression dance on the shifting absences of the abyss. Morrison says:

> I always thought of Sula as quintessentially black, metaphysically black, if you will, which is not melanin and certainly not unquestioning fidelity to the tribe. She is new world black and new world woman extracting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively to found things. Improvisational. Daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female. ("Unspeakable" 25)

She links Sula's Blackness and femaleness to her differentiating newness; all her adjectives of change are bracketed by her race and gender. It is through these categories that Sula enacts her

98 Her article "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" is an excavating of the erasure.

paradigm-shifting desire, "extracting choice from choicelesness." Biman Basu writes that Sula "seems to function as the figure of the semiotic in the text. She is the semiotic constituent of the symbolic, or the symbolically represented semiotic" (92). She is both signifier and signification; her dual role depends on absence and produces plurality. Sula is another multiplying Black woman.[99] Her racialization does not fix her, her gender does not obscure her. "Uncontained and uncontainable," Sula emerges from categories which attempt to absolutely absent her.

Framing the novel as the title, while also initiating the gap at the centre so that she frames her own absence, masked and unmasking, Sula expresses diversity in the same play between signifiers that centralizes her. Sula's indeterminacy is repeated with other characters. In another oscillating deployment of absence, Eva, Sula's one-legged grandmother, refusing to confirm how she lost her leg, uses a withheld story to great effect. Grant writes: "the mystery linking Eva's absence with her missing leg becomes an 'open' space for communal storytelling, for oral interpretation and re-creation within the Peace family and the community at large. Thus indeterminacy becomes the site for fable-building" (96). The missing leg is also oppressive—both in the masked desperation of its loss and in the way Eva imposes this sacrifice on her family, a justification for her own terrible acts throughout the text.[100] From Sula's birthmark to Eva's leg, indeterminacy stages alternate relations to presence and absence, revealing a racialized and gendered relationship with language.

My reading of *Sula* is framed by my reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).[101] While both authors' first novels explore the development of a Black girl, their second

99 Morrison, in fact, describes the novel as a cross between four women, Sula, Nel, Eva, and Hannah, "each one a choice for characters bound by gender and race" ("Foreword" 5).
100 Correspondingly, McDowell notes that readers either want to applaud Eva's self-sacrifice or deplore her tyranny ("Self" 86).
101 Michael Awkward finds similarities of theme between Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1969) and *Their Eyes* (185). Interestingly, Morrison calls her second novel a version of the first with grown women (Stepto 20).

turns to the maturation of a woman. Janie from *Their Eyes* and Sula from *Sula* both return from mysterious sojourns[102] and are more talked about than to.[103] Outsiders, they are also child-free women, with absent fathers, who have distant relationships with their mothers and contentious relationships with their grandmothers. Both novels centre on encounters with these women who do not conform; while embracing their nonconformity, the protagonists must also engage with those who expel them. Both protagonists remain in discourse with the community. After her adventure, Janie is content to return to the community that judges her. A Janie taken to extremes, Sula is isolated by her individualism and blinded by her dedication to it. Grant points out, however, that despite Sula's iconoclasm, she still needs the Bottom as much they need her (98); he writes that Morrison "inchoately understands and responds to the process by which iconoclastic individuals and preservative communities define and 'identify' themselves *against* each other" (99, emphasis his). Grant argues that doing so demonstrates the dialogic diversity of the Black community (92), like the other novels' shared narrators. Unlike the humanist struggle between oppositions, the individual and the community form a symbiotic relationship: without one, the other cannot exist—within one is the other. It is possible to read this tension in much of both writers' oeuvres, but I use *Sula* because of the specific parallels with *Their Eyes*. The translangualism of Hurston and Morrison's difficult women theorizes the development of a racialized language from the tension between individual and community that all the novels in this dissertation explore. Mapping their metapragmatics encodes an expression embodied in the ambivalence of the Black female protagonist, which allows her to encompass oppositions and exceed their limitations. Whereas Hurston frames a presence, Morrison frames an absence.

102 Rizvana Bradley and Damien-Adia Marassa write that an "ambivalent patterning of departure and return is embodied in black writing as an insistent life practice" (124).

103 The opening scene of townspeople speculation about Janie in *Their Eyes* is similar to the rumours about Sula and her witchiness upon her return to the community.

Spillers writes that “Janie might have been Sula,” though “only through a resolution of negative impulses” (“Hateful” 52). Janie, then, tells the tale of her absence; Sula remains reticent, structuring absences into Black women’s translangualism.

The tension between Sula’s absence and presence drives a creative collaboration between individual and community; and in the generation of language, she is both creative and creator. In the iconoclast’s dialogue with the community, there is both that inspiring welcome, the absent presence, and that restricting haunting, a present absence. Janie plays a similar role in Hurston’s novel. Her return frees the town’s language, revealing a community of storytelling; however, her linguistic plurality is contrasted to their singularity of response (though they are individualized elsewhere). The community polices language, restricting that freedom. In the ambivalent absences of *Sula*, this response is inherently diffracted. Sula’s initial absence provides a foundation for both the reader and the community to build narrative bridges; however, Morrison suggests that narrative bridges are not necessarily reliable. Instead, Sula’s ambivalences underscore the importance of the plural narratives that empower translanguaging.

Much like the tongue-sharing *Their Eyes* (and the other novels), there is a dialogic in *Sula* based on female friendship. In contrast to their abject status, the protagonists in both novels are intimately linked with a woman more firmly rooted in the community, who is then inspirited by their outsider friend. Similar but different, Sula and Nel are an interesting iteration of the Janie-Pheoby friendship; in Morrison’s novel, the friend in the community takes a more prominent role that foregrounds the oscillation between individual and community desires. Nel is Sula’s main partner in the dance among the axes of language: the freedom of possibility and the constraint of structure. The experience of language both oppressive and liberatory, Sula’s

partial presence and amended absences alongside Nel, elided under Sula's name, yet equally important, correspond to make palpable the oscillation of this specific ambivalent expression. Noting the friends' similar response to absence, Grant sees a difference in Morrison's treatment of Nel's emotional breakdown after she catches her husband and Sula in coitus and he leaves (not for Sula) and Sula's depression in the aftermath her lover also decamping. Arguing for Sula as a fractured enigma, Grant notes that Sula does not receive Nel's "extended and unmediated first person point of view" in her mourning over lost love (92). Bahktin would note that everything in the novel is mediated (278), thus Sula gets a monologue that is no more mediated than Nel's. Nel's free indirect discourse authority over narration is both as mediated through the author's double-voice and as independent in utterance as Sula's direct discourse. Grant assumes that direct speech holds less status than narration; however, this assumption retains the values of the traditional frame. Beginning with conventional binary judgments, Bergenholtz writes: "Morrison clearly wants us to recognize that although Nel and Sula appear to be quite different —one the epitome of goodness and the other the embodiment of evil—they are also quite similar" (92). The similarity challenges the borders between narrated and quoted text, textually underscoring that sharing of narrative authority and suggesting further linguistic dehierarchization which undermines these values. Externalizing *Louisiana*'s possession, the indeterminate possibilities of translanguaging across bodies proves the mutable frame.

Translanguaging through Nel and Sula suggests an attempt to balance within the movement of linguistic authority. From the vantage point of demonic ground, the difference in presentation maintains Nel as more contained than Sula—Nel's remains within her head, while Sula verbalizes her thoughts—but it offers the alternates as equally authoritative in the language

of the text. (Nel's complaint is longer, but so is her relationship.) The women enact the same function in the text, while presenting different aspects of it. McDowell writes: "The narrative is neither an apology for Sula's destruction nor an unsympathetic critique of Nel's smug conformity. It does not reduce a complex set of dynamics to a simple opposition or choice between two 'pure' alternatives" ("Self" 86). Each is required in the expression as the two forces of language in tension; they are each a part of the linguistic repertoire.

Language is both veil and revelation, much as the two absences evade and acknowledge and the tradition knows and does not. Morrison's language strategies exploit this ambivalence to invest in difference. Morrison's language is flexible in its response to the exclusions of race and gender; it invests in difference; she writes: "in Afro-American literature itself the question of difference, of essence, is critical. What makes a work Black? The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language—its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language" ("Unspeakable" 11). This "masked and unmasking language," the veil dance of spectacular opacity, racializes in its attention to absence. Race comes from the abyss, denying its emptiness but concealing its depths. Its influence on language is embodied in Sula. Carmean writes that Sula "dramatizes [Morrison's] talent for using language as 'both indicator and mask'" (149). Basu notes the similarities between Morrison's description of language and her description of Sula, explaining that "Sula, then, becomes the figure of language itself" (92). Morrison's categorization without definition does as little to fix language as do the categories that identify Sula. Houston A. Baker writes that Morrison uses Sula "to suggest the expressivity

of language" ("When Lindbergh" 255). Racializing through her absences, this language becomes anti-oppressive through its intercourse between individual and community.

Morrison calls Nel, "the muted standard," referring to her place in the community relative to Sula and the other Peace women ("Foreword" 5), but the terminology evokes a linguistic comparison. Nel, too, is a figure of language—the standard to Sula's dialect, the centripete to Sula's centrifuge; however, she is decentralized against Sula, much as Sula is against herself, in proliferation of possibilities that enables a perception of translangual strategy. Per Jacques Lacan, Baker explains: "Language is always coextensive and coterminous with the emergence, and, ironically, the alienation, of the subject" ("When Lindbergh" 255). As Glissant writes of errantry, the desire is not for totalization, but for exploration in the expression of self and the awareness of Other. Morrison structures her dialogic through the abyss (similarly to the affect of Anna's possessing silence in *Louisiana*, a call to embodiment and incorporation). Masked and unmasking, on demonic ground, a translangual emergence is not alienation but decentralization—not the decentring that denies the individual, but a decentralizing that acknowledges others.

Morrison's writing performs and pushes this move onto demonic ground as a conscious racialization, an awareness of the abyss.[104] In the press release announcing the awarding of the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature to Morrison, the committee writes: "She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race." "Delves in" corresponds to a move into the abyss, but "fetters of race" is suggesting the constraints of

104 Morrison says: "If it is written, it can be learned—but to be learned, it has to be in print" (McKay, "An Interview" 153).

racialization. Liberation could suggest a flight from race altogether. Rather, Morrison says: "I'm trying to do what I call a Black style—not *the* Black style, but *a* Black style—very much in the way if you say 'a Black musician,' that's not pejorative; it's a clarifying statement" (Wilson 136, emphasis hers). She has, however, been criticized for her attention to race (Als) and she admits a potential danger in this project. In "Home," she writes of her racialized expression: "It became increasing clear how language both liberated and imprisoned me" (3). Morrison embraces racialized language—and acknowledges the embrace's historical actuality and present ambivalence.

Morrison's descriptions of her racialized language are characteristically indeterminate. In response to an interviewer who asks how a Black literary style is created, Morrison says: "Some of the writers think it's dropping the *g*'s. It's not—it's something else. It's a putting together of all sorts of things" (Wilson 136). Morrison does not specify what "things" should be present, but she is clear about what needs to be eliminated. She explains:

> I always hated with a passion when writers rewrote what black people said, in some kind of phonetic alphabet that was inapplicable to any other regional pronunciation. There is something different about that language, as there is about any cultural variation of English, but it's not saying 'dis' and 'dat.' (Ruas 96)

This visually sonic representation could be the deplored "eye dialect" or Hurston's literary dialect; for Morrison, it does not feel right. She describes Hurston as treating racialized language as a transcript (Als), a visual record that highlights its distance from sound, arresting the synaesthesic sensation. It is too focused on visual difference; thus, while they both seek intimacy through translanguaging, Morrison opens where Hurston pushes forward.

Morrison sounds the depths of racism in the hypervisibility of Blackness:

> We were perceived as the lowest of the classes because we can be identified that way. It wouldn't make any difference what we wore, or what neighbourhood we lived in, we're still visible as that. The visibility has made the prejudices last longer. It's not because one is black that the prejudice exists. The prejudice exists because one can identify the person who was once a slave or in the lower class, and the caste system can survive longer. (Ruas 117)

This means the racialized cannot escape engagement with the visible (or the body) but must also be aware of its traps. In a Thomas LeClair interview, when he observes that despite the critical attention to sound in her work, Morrison explains that she is actually quite interested in vision: "The interest in vision, in seeing, is a fact of black life. As slaves and ex-slaves, black people were manageable and findable, as no other slave society would be, because they were black. So there is an enormous impact from the simple division of color—more than sex, age, or anything else" (127). Morrison's literary language seeks to avoid the hypervisibility that the racialized suffer, yet it also acknowledges the utility of simple visibility, notwithstanding its dangers. Morrison tells LeClair: "The complaint is not being seen for what one is" (LeClair 127). This complaint drives the desire and despair that shapes her language—to be seen in this way implies agency, but the danger of being seen remains.

Morrison does want the image to shine; she writes: "I try to do that by constructing sentences that throw such words ['sabotaged by constant use'] into relief, but not strange words, not 'large' words. Most large words are imprecise. They are useful because of their imprecision. If you work very carefully, you can clean up ordinary words and repolish them, make parabolic

language seem alive again" (Tate 165). The hypervisibility of the "large" word is heavy and cumbersome, but it can be useful in obscuring; other words, which have accreted a multiplicity of other meanings, offer movement and flexibility: vitality. The word itself can obscure an absence—a present absence; the space Morrison creates around the word with this carving becomes a variable frame—an absent presence. She is bifurcating and streamlining the pieces of language so that they can move like Hurston's "new force words" (32): "cleaning up the language so that old words have new meanings" (Wilson 136). The strategic presence of her primitivism, however, is manipulated through absence, through deletion; she writes: "My efforts were to carve away the accretion of deceit, blindness, ignorance, paralysis, and sheer malevolence embedded in raced language so that other kinds of perception were not only available but were inevitable" (Morrison, "Home" 7). Bakhtin's images-in-relief are restored as images in Relation. Presence can obscure absence, maintaining oppression; but absence can clarify presence, offering revelatory possibilities.

Morrison refuses the usual indicators for different ones—reciprocal ones from the abyss. It is less about the phonemes than about the experience. In what could be a description of Sula, Morrison says: "My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it" (Tate 164). Morrison's absences function in similar and reinforcing ways in her language and her narrative. In the inverse of the kissin(g) in *Their Eyes*, the narrator takes on Sula's absences as an explicit linguistic act. The structure is incomplete to allow for collaborative manipulation. Morrison identifies this as a racialized strategy: "Black literature is open-ended, participatory" (Russell 44). In her work, the content and technique place the reader in control of the rememory described by Grant; he observes: "*Sula* in form and in content is 'about' gaps, lacks, 'missing'

subjects, and ambiguous psychic space, all of which must be ‘filled’ and interpreted by the reader...” (94). For instance, ellipses abound. The text uses the dots as a trail on the map, marking the passage of time as a passage through space whose events the narrator leaves untold: Shadrack’s removal to the cabin by the river, Hannah’s relationship with Sula’s father, and so on. In marking the absence of narrative with suggestive visible marks, the seen is juxtaposed with the unknown space around it. The ellipses place a spotlight on the gaps that facilitate oscillation between writer and reader, who is invited to travel their own narrative path. McDowell writes that “[the ellipses] compel the reader to pause, think back, evaluate the narrative’s events, and formulate new expectations in light of them, expectations that are never quite fulfilled” (“Self” 87). Readers generate narrative in their individual expectations, which may diverge from the text’s unfolding. The path is not fixed.

The experience of this difference is the experience of language’s bifurcation. As the reader looks beyond Sula to understand the complexity of Black womanhood, Morrison says: “I look beyond the people to see what makes black literature different” (McKay, “An Interview” 153). The object is not to be examined, but the content experienced. Exploring the subject reveals something other than the “objective” informing its vitality. The ellipses’ oscillation between presence and absences echoes the binary of Sula and Nel, writer and reader, putting together all sort of things within the moving duality of call-and-response. In that collaboration, sensation blooms.

Morrison, like Hurston, finds synaesthesia in the language of Black people; she says: “I think the language of black people is just so full of metaphor and imagery—the way they talk is very concrete, is bright, and has a lots [sic] of colors in it; has pictures. It’s heavily loaded

graphic-graphic. In addition to its sound, it has its sight—those two things" (Jones and Vinson 179). This description echoes Hurston's oral hieroglyphic; the synaesthesia rescues the image from fixity. In Morrison's texts, absence has a sound; this is where her grammar becomes nonstandard. Crossing the flexible axis of lexical presence is grammatical absence, and in the confluence is synaesthesia (another kind of perception). Morrison tells Sandi Russell that "Someone once asked of her, 'Where are the adverbs?'" (44). It is appropriate that the adverb, the representation of the action is removed; this is the restraint of the dancer in Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (35). Morrison explains: "The part of the writing process that I fret is getting the sound without some mechanics that would direct the reader's attention to the sound. One way is not to use adverbs to describe how someone says something. I try to work the dialogue down so the reader has to hear it" (LeClair 124). This may seem contradictory at first; she wants to direct the reader to sound without the writing mechanics developed to do just that. In a different interview, Morrison elaborates: "...I never say 'She says softly.' If it's not already *soft*, you know, I have to leave a lot of space around it so a reader can hear that it's soft" (Wilson 136, emphasis hers). It is in the space—the abyss—that the reader can access this sharing of feeling. Removing a piece of the puzzle—the description of the action, Morrison encourages readers to place their own piece there, the performance of the missing description. Describing "the affective and participatory relationship between author and audience," Morrison explains that "[w]hat is left out is as important as what is there" (qtd. in McDowell, "Self" 87). What you do not see signifies on what you do (see). Her strategy asks the reader to create the sound rather than read it. Looking beyond the visual, Morrison seeks synaesthesia, a multisensate experience, to emphasize the experience of language.

The synaesthesia of sight and sound makes crossed axes that offer a different orientation, an orientation of subjective difference. Morrison places writing above music in its ability to exploit this feature. Bringing together the visual and sound leads to something else; she writes: “the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing” (“Unspeakable” 31). Increasing the burden of work on the audience, that inner ear sound is something the listener must generate, making it both inaudible and hyperaudible. This imperceptibility is the provenance of indeterminacy: the place that cannot be known producing a fruit that cannot be contained. Morrison further explains that the intangibility of the inner ear sound can “infus[e] the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can” (“Unspeakable” 31-32). To drive the affective, the unheard sound relies on the collaboration of presence and absence. Morrison’s oscillation blurs their bifurcation to a hum, a drone that can offer relief like a meditative mantra or disturb like a tinnitus whine. It sounds like the affective power of Hurston’s inaudible voice; it sounds like Black women.

The oscillation between presence and absence, reader and writer, creates a conduit space for a collaborative and changing experience, but that process is guided by the contours of the absenting—the presences of race and gender dictate the rhythm. Hilton Als describes Morrison’s work in these terms: “If Morrison had a distinctive style, it was in her rhythms: the leisurely pace of her storytelling.” Als wants to emphasize the experiential effect of her text. Music underscores the body’s participatory role, the importance of experience. Significantly, rhythm is constituted by the space between the pulses, so it is experienced as absence as much as puncture. The interpretative relationship depends on the mix of senses; but, as opposed to

Hurston's visible mix, it is the readers' self-generated visuals that feel the beat. The beckoning rhythm, like a swinging jump rope, puts together the apparent and unapparent, the centripetal and centrifugal respectively, to move the body. Morrison says: "[the language] must not sweat" (LeClair 124) (nor should the representation[105]), but the body certainly can.

The visual-aural synaesthesia generates the experience of racialized language. Morrison's interest in sound has been read as African-inherited orality. Her synaesthesia is racialized in its impression of race, in its insistence on participating in the experience of the racialized. In this capacity, music is metonymic for Morrison's Blackness. Rather than identify an object, the reader must identify with the subject. Morrison says: "The only analogy I have for it is the music. John Coltrane does not sound like Louis Armstrong, and no one ever confuses one for the other, and no one questions if they are black. That is what I am trying to get at, but I don't have the vocabulary to explain it better" (McKay, "An Interview" 153). The choice of jazz both embeds racialization in the historical and emphasizes the intensity of the experience. It is music understood to inspire other senses, muscle-moving head nods and toe taps, as part of its auditory impression. Morrison's comparison is not concerned with the specifics of bebop or New Orleans jazz, but with the experience of difference within racial similarity—call-and-response, the oscillation between the community and the individual. In the individual expression of a racialized cultural strategy, they perform the Black body as diverse and immersive experience. Basu observes that Morrison uses her music analogies to avoid strict definitions of racialized expression (90); music encourages these other kinds of perceptions. Basu writes:

105 I am referring to "rep sweats"—the desire to correct dominant images without constraint from respectability politics. A term coined by comedian Jenny Yang, she uses it to refer to the anxiety aroused in marginalized audiences around their foibles being represented to the mainstream. I apply it here to the anxiety that artists might feel about representing these foibles.

> Morrison, then, is clearly preoccupied not only with the technical considerations of point of view but also with the question of representation itself. It is as if she would have Sula become the figure of music in the text. When Morrison attempts to define the blackness of black language, she has, as we have observed, no vocabulary for it but relies on analogy with music. So, too, when she attempts to describe Sula's blackness and femaleness. (92)

Music as her metaphor of Black experience works with the metonym in a project of Black female complexity.[106] Metaphor is already a moving visual experience, carrying over the idea from one word to a different one,[107] so that Black language need not be distinguished on the page, because it distinguishes in the experience (survival). Morrison says: "The way black people talk is not so much the use of non-standard grammar as it is the manipulation of metaphor" (McKay, "An Interview" 152), getting over the words. The manipulation of metaphor is the metonym, playing with replacement creates a narrative, a path of errantry. All language is transitive but Morrison's Black translangualism moves between individual and community to engage Relation as experiential specificity, the experience of absence.

Appearances and disappearances in the novel stage the metapragmatics of Morrison's translanguaging. The constitutive elements of language variation are not the signifiers, but the subjective experience of creating significations. Morrison's racialized literary language represents this with space that generates the unseen connection, as with the ellipses, each reader's generation another point of Relation. The sensation comes from this handling, the move from an imagined visual to a real feeling. Morrison describes being able to hear

---

106 It is also music as simile. Morrison claims: "My effort is *like* something that has probably only been fully expressed in [Black] music" (McKay, Introduction 1, emphasis hers).

107 The word 'metaphor' comes from the Greek, meta, "after, across," and phora, "to bear, to carry."

metaphors, the way she can rhythms and music, in their distinct Blackness (Ruas 96). She deliberately concedes her visuals—the racial—to the control of the reader, making metaphorical manipulations conscious, intentional. Stressing the affective, Morrison says: “More important to me was making a statement on a kind of language, a way to get to what was felt and meant” (Ruas 96). Her statement is experience, the activation of a literary language. Her synaesthesia demands the reader do the work of racialization by adding the sound in strategic absences. Drawn in by the oscillation of presence and absence, the reader is marked by this movement, made metonymic to participate in the discourse of racialization.

The response is crucial to experiencing. Existing in the continuous present but relating to the presences and absences of traumatic memory, the text’s expression of language is insistently invitational, determinedly desiring experiential intimacy. Morrison explains:

> An artist, for me, a black artist for me, is not a solitary person who has no responsibility to the community. It’s a totally communal experience where I would feel unhappy if there was no controversy or no debate or no anything—no *passion* that accompanied the experience of the work. I want someone to say *amen.* (C. Davis 231, emphasis hers)

Morrison intends that the reader be no passive receptacle, saying: “My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It’s not just about telling the story; it’s about involving the reader” (Tate 164). The dualities in both *Sula* and *Their Eyes* are engendered by a certain writerly reticence. In an example of her turn to music, Morrison cites jazz, arguing: “There is always something else you want from the music. I want my books to be like that—because I want that feeling of something held in reserve and the sense that there is more—that you can’t have it all right now” (McKay, “An Interview” 155).

Similar to her practice with adverbs, these descriptions recall the suggestive performance of Hurston's dancer, who holds a pose that turns the audience from spectator to participant. The dancer would remain frozen should the spectator not turn (and Hurston suggests that it is only white people who attempt to resist the call) (Hurston 35). Hurston uses repetition as jazz hands that push forward and distract from her protective retreat, as with Hopkins's ornamentation, but Morrison's repetition with absence draws attention to it. She emphasizes that the participatory is entwined with something held in reserve; it is in the artist's reticence that the audience is made aware of their contributing role—their authority to create. Morrison says: "...two people are busy making the story. One is me and one is you and together we do that, we invent it together" (C. Davis 231). Roynon observes that participatory reading "implicates us in event" (14); the reader must share responsibility for the work so that collaborative art challenges authorial mastery. In Morrison's consciously racialized project, however, the reader's relationship to this control is as ambivalent as the one between Sula and the other characters; there is an oscillation between positive and negative that intends that, in challenging the master's authority, the reader also questions their own. Morrison insists on the awareness of interpretation.

Deconstructionists apply the challenge to authority to all language, but ambivalent mastery's self-conscious influence on metapragmatics defines Morrison's racialized (and gendered) literary language. She sets the beat for a *bios-mythois* of Black women that beckons for more polyrhythms. Unfixing the image, Morrison wants the reader to feel the word dance on this ground in her rhythm of translanguaging, but the reader must also lead some of the dance. Its expression mediating through absences with a process of language acquisition and language

contribution, Morrison draws a visceral representation of Black women writers' desire for an inclusive world, turning their erasure into valuable experience.

Sula's frame establishes the agitating authority of its racialized language. The frame exposes and disturbs the linguistic hierarchy as part of its invitation to the reader; acceptance requires awareness. Basu argues that, by its very existence, African American literature "responds to, resists, and modifies the hierarchy of the literary frame" (102). The text's attention to absence is an attention to the ethics of the frame—what it contains and excludes, when it masks and unmasks. Morrison's engagement with the politics of the frame is clear from her first novel. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison describes the "unstaging" of *The Bluest Eye* (1969); in her first novel:

> the process of selecting each word, for itself and its relationship to the others in the sentence, along with the rejection of others for their echoes, for what is determined, what is almost there and what must be gleaned, would not theatricalize itself, would not erect a proscenium—at least not a noticeable one. So important to me was this unstaging, that in this first novel I summarized the whole of the book on the first page. (20)

In her first novel, acutely aware of the import of her authorial agency, Morrison eschews a formal separation between narrative and reader. The story of vulnerable Black girls rejects any association with the traditional frame. Beginning with a summary of itself, *The Bluest Eye* is framed by its own content; the frame becomes a mimic, camouflaged in its similarity, denying the ambivalence of language. In this identification with the narrative, the frame downplays itself

as distinct or authoritative in relation to the content. The narrative is told mainly from the perspective of a young Black girl, so the thinning of boundaries encourages empathy for and acceptance of this relatively new voice. The narrative attempts an incorporative and inclusive frame by imploding the traditional frame into the narrative. In comparison, in her second novel *Sula*, Morrison describes constructing a "lobby"; she writes:

> The threshold between the reader and the black-topic need not be the safe, welcoming lobby I persuaded myself it needed at that time. My preference was the demolition of the lobby altogether. As can be seen from *The Bluest Eye*, and in every other book I have written, only *Sula* has this 'entrance.' The others refuse the 'presentation'; refuse the safe seductive harbor; the line of demarcation between the sacred and obscene, public and private, them and us. Refuse, in effect, to cater to the diminished expectations of the reader, or his or her alarm heightened by the emotional luggage one carries into the black-topic text. (I should remind you that *Sula* was begun in 1969, while my first book was in proof, in a period of extraordinary political activity.) ("Unspeakable" 23-24)

Her early drafts did not have this threshold, but she was persuaded, "[w]ith some encouragement," to recognize that her original beginning was false ("Unspeakable" 23). The lobby is clearly a significant concession (and one which she apparently regrets). Her acquiescence destabilizes her own authorial authority, but its consequence highlights the struggle. Parenthetically attributing her concession to contemporary upheavals, Morrison suggests a connection between social change and the need to draw attention to that change. The lobby stages the performance of crossing over the line. As Wynter describes, the emergence is

only a herald—the process has been "initiated, in its first transitional phase" ("Beyond Miranda" 366); the new state is on its way, but not fully present.

In this liminal position, the structures of the past maintain a presence. As Morrison notes, *Sula*'s prologue is the closest she will come to something resembling the traditional frame. Referring to the year of her "Unspeakable" lecture, Morrison claims that "[i]n 1988, certainly, I would not need (or feel the need for) the sentence—the short section—that now opens *Sula*" (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 23). Feeling the need in the turmoil of burgeoning identity politics, rather than beginning with the shell-shocked neighbourhood eccentric Shadrack, Morrison begins the novel with a description of the setting, "emphasizing place" (Carmean 150): "In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make way room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighbourhood" (Morrison, *Sula* 3). It is ironic that she depicts this as a safe and welcome beginning (in contrast to my own description of *The Bluest Eye*'s introductory intimacy); literally an opening, it begins with a violent erasure, the description of a place that is absent. While the function of the frame may have been to ease a transition, its constitution denies this comfort. Beginning with an adjectival phrase referring to the removal ("in that place...") and ending with the archaic flavour of a fable ("there was once"), the syntactical order of the sentence founds the fabulist in this violent erasure, underscoring the authoritarian base of the elevated language. The fabulist beginning sets up the neighbourhood denizens as figments of the past—frozen in a distant place, unable to create a present impact. This is the resistance to her concession.

Her focus on the frame has a significant consequence. In "Unspeakable" Morrison writes: "The problem presented itself this way: to fashion a door.... [H]ere I was to posit a door,

turn its knob and beckon for some four or five pages. I had determined not to mention any characters in those pages, there would be no people in the lobby" ("Unspeakable" 24). In its contested presence, this frame consciously draws attention away from its contents—foregrounding the setting over the people. Enacting the power differential of the traditional frame, the text depicts the consequences of that hierarchy on Black representation; the severely framed landscape is the context of Black life. In depopulating her lobby, Morrison frames an oppressive emptiness. We begin in the obscurity of the abyss. The welcoming frame is there and yet it does not frame, it displaces—blurring for whom this displacement serves. The unpeopled proscenium is an uncanny set piece that matches the paradoxes of the title. While distinguishing itself from them, the opening establishes the narrative and the protagonist in creating a partial frame, there and not there. Similar but different, this is a frame that draws attention to itself, not to distance itself from the content but to pull in the reader, continually reminding that there is movement required on their part.

Translanguaging through Romance and realism, Morrison's frame repeats the linguistic hierarchy with a clear critique. Trudier Harris writes that Morrison begins with a fabled history that evokes the distanced, fantastic quality of fairy tales only to later undermine those tales with the story of the Bottom's founding (106, 109). The undermining begins within that fabled introduction and is underscored before the reader even reaches the founding story. Expectations are unfulfilled, but they are also exposed as unfounded. In an unmarked standard, the first paragraph continues discussing the buildings that will be removed to make room for the golf course. In the next paragraph, the people begin to fill in. When the people appear, the language changes, becoming more repetitious and vernacular. It is not visible dialect, but is racialized in

the way of Morrison's feeling language. Eschewing adverbs, the text repeats adjectives such as "sometimes," "a bit of," and "somewhere" (Morrison, *Sula* 4). These equivocal descriptors maintain the uncertainty of the visual, but their repetition evokes the rhythm of life in The Bottom: with the pull of syncopation, experience grounds the visual. The languages-in-relief of the first and second paragraphs undermine the problematic hierarchy of the traditional frame. Both part of this frame, the higher status language of the first displays a lofty disconnection that dehumanizes, whereas the lower status vernacular of the second depicts the people, their connections and feelings. In relief, they are in Relation. Juxtaposing the constricting visual against the expansive emotions, the second paragraph corrects the bodilessness of the first. Morrison says: "I know the standard English. I want to use it to help restore the other language, the lingua Franca" (LeClair 124). In this frame, they each have their place supporting each other in unveiling of their strategically oppressive oppositionality. In the ambivalence of language, which can liberate and imprison, drawing the line can critique but it can also confirm.

Within this second paragraph, the narrator mentions an observer, a valley man who might "have business up in those hills—collecting rent or insurance payments" (Morrison, *Sula* 4). In his financial authority, the valley man is tied to the authority of the traditional frame. He enacts its erasures in his assumptions of shallow emotion informing the inhabitants' pastimes. Too distanced, he cannot see beyond his expectations, reducing people to minstrelsy. The narrator proposes that this detachment could be ameliorated if the valley man could feel something of their art, let it "touch" and "kiss" him (Morrison, *Sula* 4), but he is limited to the single sense of the visual. His intrusion into this paragraph performs the reach of the standard, looming over divergences that may seem to have escaped it.

Structured by the constraints of language, the prologue begins with white men's appropriation displacing a Black community. In the narrative, this physical act is followed by—but in the plot timeline, preceded by—a linguistic act that leads to a foundational displacement—"a prevalent theme in the narrative of black people" (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 26). This chiasm of language and act places the racialization in an inescapable matrix, framing the characters' lives. The linguistic act is dismissively referred to as: "A joke. A nigger joke" (Morrison, *Sula* 4). From this joke "was the way it got started. Not the town, of course, but that part of the town where the Negroes lived, the part they called the Bottom in spite of the fact that it was way up in the hills" (Morrison, *Sula* 4).[108] McDowell observes that "[the novel] glories in paradox and ambiguity" ("Self" 80). The irony around the town's name (down) and topography (up) continues the novel's first paradox of there and not there, amplifying the strangeness of this ground (demonic). The consequent ambiguity is explored through the power of language, the crossroads and the confluence of liberation and imprisonment.

The slur in the joke refers to a specific person, one who was seeking justice. To set the joke, the reader is introduced to two characters who, bred from the ground of the framed absence, enact the dynamics of that contested setting. A white farmer plays a trick on a freed slave who seeks the land promised to him after Emancipation. Unwilling to concede any of his fertile valley land, "[the farmer tells] the slave that he was very sorry that he had to give him valley land. He had hoped to give him a piece of the Bottom" (Morrison, *Sula* 5). When the slave is confused over this designation, assuming the bottom is the valley, the farmer deploys his joke: "'High up from us,' said the master, 'but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's

108 Bergenholtz notes that "in nearly every chapter, a 'bottom'—or, if you prefer, an ass, rear-end, derriere, or buttocks—makes a literal or metaphoric appearance. Such a preposterous number of bottoms suggests that Morrison—a black woman—is able to laugh at one" (94), though I wonder, if, like this originating joke, it is one not meant to be laughed at.

why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven—best land there is'" (Morrison, *Sula* 5). To turn a lie to a joke is the power to name pejoratively and effectively, the power of Man. The narrator underscores the exploitation in her own naming, as she begins to refer to the farmer as the master and the slave as the nigger (Morrison, *Sula* 4). The metaphor can be made the shackle. The joke seems to slip its yoke when the possessive noun which has been lost from the name, The Bottom, is considered. There is a tacit "Heaven" in the name of the town, but in dropping that possessive noun, the cruelty of the joke is foregrounded. Naming the trick, "Heaven"'s absence underscores the deception, not only of the literal absence of the heavenly in The Bottom, but in the lexical absence of a subject that may possess. It is the photonegative of its frame, nigger joke. In the frame, the qualifying noun presents the slur; in the content, the absent qualifier implies the slur. Together, they form a matrix of oppression.

Still, the narrator comments that the residents "[take] small consolation in the fact that every day they could look down on white folks" (Morrison, *Sula* 5). The people on the hill embody the linguistically elevated view of the valley man, so that they might enjoy the joke, too. The narrator adds: "it is lovely up in the Bottom" (Morrison, *Sula* 5). Harris observes that "even some whites speculate on the truth of the joke" (108). The value is reoriented, so that in experience the import of the place name changes; the meaning moves.

Morrison's frame, however, resists a utopia of reorientation. On this destabilized ground, the frame both contains and spills. The ironic humourlesness of the joke (for the group it mocks) is inherent in its qualifier "nigger": the match of slur and amusement a sign of the perspective on the punishing material consequences. These jokes are never just funny, but monolingualism conceals the pain, while monosensation allows the empathetic avoidance of the

oppressor. This “joke” historically precedes the semiotic erasures of the valley man. Oscillating from minstrelsy to feeling humour and back, the marginalized can slip the yoke of the joke, but it easily slips back on. Noting the narrator’s description of people, both Black and white, who tell this kind of joke looking for comfort in troubled times, Baker writes: “All who tell it laugh to keep from crying at their powerlessness” (“When Lindbergh” 238). Baker’s description connects the valley man’s perspective, unseeing of the pain, to the laughter over the joke, hiding the pain. The pain is deliberately avoided in the original intent to mask, but, in the slippage of repetition, a glimpse of it is possible. Acknowledging the hurt hidden within the laughter unmasks the devalued masked as celestial, but there is always the threat of re-masking. In Morrison’s raciolinguistics of absence, translangualism is deployed with the awareness that it is never fully free.

The marginalized can be creative, but without material power they cannot ignore creators. Revalued from a meagre possession of the dispossessed, once the land becomes valuable for its view, it is no longer a joke, but now the dignified Medallion City Golf Course in all its capitalized and capitalist glory. The history of a people contained in the name The Bottom is razed, now submerged under the green, which becomes a present absence obscuring the erasure of a neighbourhood. The setting emptied of characters frames the power dynamics. Feeling language is the salvation of the oppressed, but feeling does not necessarily end the oppressor’s power over language. Harris explains that the “nigger joke” presents archetypes of African-American folklore, but the white man gets pride of place as the trickster (108). The story takes on the metaphors—as Morrison defines it, the feeling—of Blackness, but delineates the limits of any interpretative freedom. Harris sees the promise of wondrous occurrences in the

prologue moving into the commonplaces of war, poverty, and murder of the first chapter (106). The artificiality of a golf course reinforces the relationship between the fable and the fact, underneath the neat fairway are the material realities that ground these pastimes. Founded in infertile ground made desirable through verbal foolery, the nonexistence of the Bottom, now a golf course, continues the process of marginalization. Tying the "nigger joke" to the promise of and reneging on the reparations of forty acres and a mule, Baker explains: "This etiological tale of place naming inscribes the fact and fantasy of capitalism in *Sula*" ("When Lindbergh" 238). The farmer's economic mastery allows mastery over narrative; and this mastery is inherited by his racial descendants. To begin with erasure suggests that the ability to create cannot always elude the power to obscure; the ambivalence of language does not turn randomly. As with Hopkins's sentimental, the realization of fantasy is constrained by fact; there is an oscillation between creative and creator. Performative language is contingent not only on scenario, but on the power of the performer to stage alternatives.

Within the frame of the novel, the narrator should have the mastery of the Bottom's founding farmer: the control over narrative, the power over language. The narrator of *Sula* stages an alternative relationship with that authority. Ralph Ellison avows the democratic possibilities of the third person; in its plurality, it can demonstrate the flexible borders that allow the sharing of authority (qtd. in Gates, *Signifying* 193). Moving its focalization between characters, playing with its own restrictions, *Sula*'s third-person narration translanguages through standards and vernaculars. Page writes that the narrator, similarly to her relationship with the characters, "establishes her credentials and her distance from the reader in the opening chapter [through the historical knowledge] and maintains that separation throughout...

forcefully" (186). No distance, however, is maintained so firmly as Page claims. Boundaries are breached in movement. Morrison's own discussion of her hated valley man suggests the narrator's investment in a multiplicity of perspectives; she writes:

> Yet the bulk of the opening I finally wrote is about the community, a view of it, and the view is not from within (this is a door, after all) but from the point of view of a stranger —the 'valley man' who might happen to be there on some errand, but who obviously does not live there and to and for whom all this is mightily strange, even exotic. ("Unspeakable" 24)

A setting emptied of settlers, the lobby is a history of changing ownership and the mutating power of names. Her use of "opening," the context of her lobby, relegates the offensive valley man to the prologue, underscoring the shift in register as a shift in perspective. With the shift, the erasures of the valley man's perspective become the space inhabited by the novel—blurring the distinction of the narrator and characters and of standard and vernacular.

The initial division that Page describes is often breached by free indirect discourse, which comes in much like the different registers in the prologue to offer a feeling perspective. After the fabulist language of the prologue, the narrator's voice is mostly similar to the various denizens of The Bottom. The first chapter is almost exclusively focalized in the war veteran Shadrack's perspective; Helene, Nel's mother, and Eva, Sula's grandmother, also both direct the perspective of that purportedly distinct narrator. Page does not see, as Basu does, "the constant slippages and shifts between voices," which she attributes to a collaboration between Sula and narrator (Basu 92). The more extended intrusions into the narration are from both Nel and Sula, such as Nel's long first-person passage after her husband leaves or Sula's orgasmic reflection.

Roynon, similarly to Page's analysis, describes the narrator as "fully omniscient" except for one passage (23), but the ellipses in concert with the fabulist language present a narrator subject to the same human restrictions as the characters. The focalizations suggest the contribution of the community to promote a multiplicity of perspectives, like the various interpretations of Sula's birthmark—the intersubjectivity of Wynter's demonic ground rather than the objectivity of Western humanism.

Secrets proliferate. Eva offers no story of her absent leg, and the narrator only provides the community supposition without confirmation or denial. Roynon points out that the reader's ignorance around Sula's ten-year absence extends to the life of the community during that time (26). An even deeper silence operates around Sula's father, who is only mentioned once as absent. In a novel concerned with the linguistic power of presence and absence, the narrator's silence on these subjects emphasizes a commitment to sharing authority, dethroning the narrator, much like is done to the protagonist, yet adding mystery to the narrator's meaning, much like is done to the characters. It protects and invites. In this multiplicity, the unknown announces itself, linking the narrator and the reader, who adds their narrative to that of the community.[109] The opening fable could simply be community-accessible folklore, rather than the report of an overseer. These absences challenge narrative omniscience and its rational pretensions, which have excluded Black women. The narrator cannot be singularly authoritative if the frame cannot contain.

Within this equalizing empowerment, the novel returns to the power of social ideologies. Amongst these focalizations, like the projection of the valley man, comes a couple paragraphs from the perspective of the bargeman who finds the drowned body of the young boy Chicken

109 Morrison confirms that she wants to reader to feel as the community does (Stepto 15-16)

Little. Interestingly, the dialogue in the bargeman paragraphs—an exchange between him and a sheriff that displays no sympathy for the dead Black boy—is not distinguished by quotes. Something more intense than focalizations, the direct discourse of these white men overtakes the narration. Refusing quotation, they are unmarked (unmediated, Grant would claim). Their callousness stands without comment, as if their presumptions—their variations—have become dominant. The language, with its contractions and colloquialisms, does not change from the rhythm established in the second paragraph of the novel, so that the use of standard is clearly one of privilege, not speech, one of perspective, not grammar. The narrator of previous focalizations cannot resist these iterations of the farmer/master and the valley man because of their normative authority.

The farmer's manipulation of language presents a teleology of mastery, a present absence obscuring the agency of the marginalized; the absent presences within the teleology—the missing stories—suggest an axis of subversive collaboration. The prologue's history of a community oscillates between the present absence and the absent presence. Morrison writes: "certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighbourhoods that are defined by the population held away from them" ("Unspeakable" 11). Pointing the reader to the manipulations and exclusions of this neighbourhood, the frame raises questions to be answered and sets puzzles to be solved. The reader is made to engage with the hierarchical politics of the frame, which is always being exceeded by the notable absence. The text's framing of absences draws attention their changing relationship with presence, encouraging the reader's identification with a moving assessment of language—a metapragmatics of awareness that demonizes the playing field.

The mutable frame energizes the penetrating and proliferating possibilities of the word, which performs the processes of the farmer's joke in microcosm. Bakhtin describes the word as a multi-planed object which may refract light as meaning in a multitude of ways, its directionality affected by the refraction (279-280). Ellison writes: "In the beginning was not only the word but the contradiction of the word. In this lies the novel's flexibility and its ability to transcend the bounds of class and notion, its endless possibilities of mutation" (qtd. in Hunt 163). The word is the kernel of heteroglossia. The difffraction available with the mutable possibility of the word is vital for the marginalized, but the word is errant in its refraction, never under anyone's full control. Describing the language use in a multiracial urban high school, Mary Bucholtz observes the way students assign linguistic value based on racialized status rather than the language itself; the "coolest" words can turn from an in-group marker to a sign of linguistic mastery that marginalizes these same groups ("Da Man" 453-456). The golf course demonstrates the same process; regardless of the moving agency of language, material agency always exerts its own pressures, yet there are opposing forces. Geneva Smitherman devotes a chapter of her germinal text on the African American vernacular to "Black Semantics," which partly examines some lexicon of the vernacular. Smitherman writes: "once a word gains widespread usage in the white American mainstream a new term must be coined" (41). She adds that it is not only about coinage; existing words are activated with new meanings (as Hurston suggests). One of Smitherman's examples is the use of "nigger" as a term of endearment (42). The slur, as used in *Sula*'s joke, has become even more verboten in the forty years since the first edition of Smitherman's text, mainly appearing as "the n-word" in mainstream discourse. Its

reappropriated use in the Black community is often argued with the reference to a pronunciation change—substituting the -er ending for -a, as if it becomes less formal and friendlier without the consonant ending. This usage, though, is still quite contested within the community, partly because of non-Black people's desire to wield it. The name never fully loses its oppressive origins; however, the particular constitution of "nigger"'s doubleness, insult and intimacy, does help to keep it from the full mainstream appropriation observed by Bucholtz; its slipperiness prevents a firm grasp, as do Morrison's polished words. The differing gaps between the signifier and the signified, the frame and the content, allow mutations that can build or demolish—or do both simultaneously—for different groups.

The power and the danger of the changing word is concentrated in Morrison's attention to naming. As Carmean observes, complicated by the rupture from the family name, for African Americans, names become a veil that suggest there is something crucial underneath (qtd. in Moraru 191). From the abyss, naming is always already renaming. Morrison says:

> I never knew the real names of my father's friends. Still don't. They used other names. A part of that had to do with cultural orphanage, part of it with the rejection of the name given to them under circumstances not of their choosing. If you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it is not just *your* name but your family, your tribe. When you die, how can you connect with your ancestors if you have lost your name? That's a huge psychological scar. The best thing you can do is take another name which is yours because it reflects something about you or your own choice. (LeClair 126, emphasis hers)

In the loss of a family name, the individual name steps forward, but that name is cosigned by the community, incorporated into their cohesive plural. Black diasporic re-naming is often a community process; Glissant explains: “The Name is first and foremost for us a collective one” (qtd. in Degras 616). The community observes “a feat accomplished, a trait emphasized, or a characteristic noticed” and provides a corresponding attribution (Lyles-Scott 24). Glissant claims that the attribution is “chosen and not... imposed” (qtd. in Degras 616), but it is imposed by that community confirmation. The diasporic practice of renaming plays with the oscillation of creative and creator, similar to the attempts to reorient marginalizing words.

Self-reflexively, Derrida asserts: “Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming” (*Monolingualism* 39). Naming, in his use, is a metonym for all language; the control of language is the force of the master. Suggesting a similar metonymy, Priska Degras writes of Glissant’s interest in surnames: “The Family Name is in itself language, since it encompasses the meaningful signs of both a History and the histories of a community: being a language game, it is both reflection—often ironic—of this language on itself and double language, since some of its obvious meanings are in fact only a part or *détour* of its signifying totality” (616). The name, a word, refracts and diffracts, particularly Black ones emerging from the abyss. Bridging over erasures, the names are more rememories: their absent presence and present absence the image of oscillating action. Language emerges from and creates duality, but duality conceives a multitude of possibilities.

Morrison’s character names are tantalizingly suggestive—referencing the Bible, folklore—but the lines of connection work on a moebius strip oscillation of affirmation and rejection. In *Sula*, the application of a name also carries the instability of Bakhtin’s alien word, the

difference within the word and the multiple possible responses to the word because of society's variety (279-280). The cruel appropriateness of the Bottom, its negation and assertion, is bred into other acts of naming conceived on this land.

Song of Solomon (1977) is the Morrison text most often used in discussions of her naming. A major part of the journey of that novel's protagonist, Milkman (né Macon) Dead is what Melvin Dixon calls "our sometimes painful search to discover our names and articulate their meaning ("If You Surrender" 29). Christian Moraru links Roland Barthes's essentializing power of the word and Morrison's approach to names in *Song*: "To be appropriately named amounts to bringing out one's personality or 'essence'" (191). He claims that Morrison often uses names as metonymic labels, a suggestion of essence, in recognition of the importance of naming for the Black community (Moraru 191). The characters in *Song* resist marginalization with the quest for the appropriate name.[110] In contrast to *Song*'s unidirectionality, *Sula*'s names —the semiotic symbolic and the symbolic semiotic—challenge any teleological journey to articulation.

This is certainly the case with Chicken Little. While the narrative of the neighbourhood may suggest an apocalyptic connection, this little boy has no direct apparent parallel to his namesake. Likely a renaming, by whose provenance and what was their reasoning? The narrator does not explain, nor does the text offer any clear contextualization for the narrative import. Does the fable chicken's gathering of believers indicate something about the community of the

110 In her Introduction, McKay observes that *Song of Solomon* is "the most extensively reviewed" of Morrison's novels, "but the one black women are most critical of" (4). *Song*, Morrison's third book, is chosen for the Book-of-the-Month club, which had not selected a book by a Black writer since Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940; it received awards from the National Book Critics' Circle and the American Academy of Arts and Letters; it won best novel from the National Book Awards. McKay suspects that it is the recognizable path of a male bildungsroman that paves the way for mainstream Morrison appreciation ("Introduction" 4). Interestingly for my purposes, while retaining the capacity for a multiplicity of meanings, much of the naming seems far more straightforward in *Song*.

Bottom? Are Nel and Sula unwitting representatives of the sly fox who takes advantage of the other animals' eschatological paranoia? Is the water closing over his head the sky falling for novel Chicken Little? Never cleanly symbolic, but clearly intentional, these shifting possibilities evade an authoritative answer. Keith E. Byerman writes:

> Consistent with the dialectics of language, Morrison finds both control and its negation in naming. When a person, place, or thing is named, the namer assumes it to be fixed, present, and under his or her dominion. By such practice, experience can be organized and even reified. But in *Sula* the process of designation creates possibilities not intended by the namer. (106)

It is the tension of language and experience; the name both offers and rejects mastery—no easy Adam. The oscillation of the name contains its application and redirects its actuality. In *Sula*, there is no heroic quest for a name, but rather an absorbing disquisition on the propriety of naming and the politics of mastery. Morrison tells Naylor that she begins the writing process with names: "You have to introduce yourself and you have to know their names. They won't behave if you don't know their names" (Naylor 203). In her linguistic ambivalence, this is a complicated knowing.

With a will and a force, naming and renaming drives a process of moving agency, the force of the translangual. Describing orality, Basu writes: "The word finds a local habitation in the body at the same time as the body, or the trajectory of desire, penetrates and inhabits the word" (102). In the tension between language and experience, the name in particular, holding the potential energy of the body it represents, enacts this movement with unstable uncertainty. The tension animates the main families of the narrative, the Wrights and the Peaces. Hunt

claims: “Not surprisingly, Morrison’s critics want to identify characters precisely with a biblical namesake or as the namesake’s opposite” (176). Karen Stein argues that the female characters’ names “recall mythic women who are either noted for their virtue and devotion to family or notorious for their flagrant disregard of honor and family obligations,” but the ironic relationship of the naming (usually the woman’s life contrasts poorly with her mythic namesake’s) “suggests the limitations inherent in the two roles” (227). Stein contrasts the Trojan War eponym of Nel’s mother to Helen’s traditional domestic life with a mostly absent husband (227). Stein reads Helen as reduced, suffering in comparison to her eponym based on the change to Helen’s name as her circumstances and geography transition—moving from the French Helène, the evidence of her creole Louisiana roots, to Helen, the perfect Ohio homemaker (227). The dropped ‘e’ could function as a metaphor for identity repression, or perhaps more properly a castration given the sexualized associations of her past; on the other hand, perhaps it is the casting off of a fetter since Helen might be the most personally satisfied character in the novel (in contention with Sula’s mother, Hannah); she gains the name Wright in marriage and it confirms the trajectory of her (mainstream) conventional desires. In contrast to the passive Helen of Troy, Helen of the Bottom has an active role; the narrator explains that “She loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband” (Morrison, *Sula* 18). Nel, the diminutive of her mother, suffers all the constraints of the move from the “exotic” French to the reduced Nel. Helen keeps Nel confined by her concepts of propriety: “Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground” (Morrison, *Sula* 18). Contradicting Stein’s interpretation, Helen of the Bottom supersedes her mythic namesake in the surrendering of her ‘e’; it is imposed on her,

but she imposes on others. Like the uncertain extension of Chicken Little parallels, with Helen the reader is left to wonder about an abduction, a war, and the fall of a city (or whether these relations are even possible).

The community of the Bottom confirms the change in sound. The narrator notes that the only battle Helen ever lost was over the pronunciation of her name (Morrison, *Sula* 18). It is interesting that Helen fights for her original French pronunciation, given how forcefully she rejects other aspects of her heritage; however, she is thwarted in her struggle by the community she exemplifies and over whom she usually leads. They assert their collective mastery over language, refusing her individual control, creator over creative. The narrator follows the community's lead in calling her Helen. What would it have meant to win the battle over pronunciation? When is Helen not (W)right?

A similar slipperiness surrounds the name Eva Peace, a common site of name analysis in *Sula*. She is an Eve without her Adam—in taking on the 'a' of his name, incorporating as opposed to Helen's castrating, and with same ambivalence of the move from "nigger" to "nigga." It is also the unanglicized version of the name, another form of otherness in multilinguality. The absent father of her children is BoyBoy, her not-Adam, doubly not a man. She is the dangerous Sycorax. Stein argues that Eva—the ironic Black mother—takes on Adam's task of naming, but "hinders rather than promote[s]" development (227). Margaret Homans also notices the ambivalence of Eva's name. Eva at first appears to be an appropriation of patriarchal power; at the Bottom of Heaven, she is "creator and sovereign" of the house, which she rules from its top (Homans 191). Her power, however, derives from her one leg, so Homans argues that, for the Black woman, power comes at the cost of significant mutilation

(191).[111] According to Homans, this power is problematized in other ways. She claims that female sexuality is always associated with two thighs in the novel, so Eva is also castrated (Homans 191). In addition, her procreative ability is stunted. Eva kills her son, and cannot save her daughter from a fatal burning, losing the use of her remaining leg in the attempt. Eva's biological relationships end in tragedy, and her adoptive ones are equally difficult. Her renaming of her boarder from Fair Jonnie to Tar Baby for "a mixture of fun and meanness" takes him from liminal status to foregrounded agitator, causing clashes in being claimed by the Black and white communities (Morrison, *Sula* 40, 133*)*. A problem for both communities, Tar Baby exists in a similar linguistic bind to the "nigger joke"; named for the white man's trick in an African American folktale, Eva ensures that he will never rest comfortably in either community. Similarly, the three children Eva ostensibly rescues from negligent parents become, as Hunt calls it, a "disturbing fulfillment of the mystery of the trinity" through Eva's mononominism "dewey" (166). Despite different backgrounds and ages, the deweys turn alike in aspect and size, fused into a three-bodied singular entity (Morrison, *Sula* 38). Stunted, they are perhaps worse off for her care. Eva is a subversive Eve, like Helen a problematic mother whose own name metaphorizes her complexity and whose power to name is similarly affected by uncertainty. Her creativity takes on creatorship with all its attendant confinements.

Alongside these maternal presences are paternal absences, making any fatherly naming equally problematic. At the end of the novel, Eva's biological children and grandchild appear in the epilogue as four PEACES etched on gravestones while Eva lives on. The four etchings also represent significant absences that should raise questions. That there are four reminds the reader of Eva's third child, Pearl, who is only mentioned once as away and married (Morrison, *Sula*

111 Homans, too, assumes insurance payoff story is the correct one.

41), though she is not buried under her husband's name. Neither is Sula's mother, Hannah; Sula's father, in the same paragraph on Pearl, is only given a first name, Rekus (Morrison, *Sula* 41). This is a language that can ignore the Family Name, while also being subject to it, an oscillation of named language and translangualism.

Perhaps most significantly, the eponymous protagonist's name is, in the epilogue, now just one of several Peace's in a graveyard. The titular name is buried like the town, though this submerging is partially indicated by the inscription. Homans argues that Nel's observance of the repetition of "peace" on the gravestones makes the first names transient compared the durability of the absent father; additionally, in the repetition, the name changes from word to wish or command, so that the father's name becomes performative in a way Eva's naming is not (192). Homans suggests that Eva lives on impotently, but I would counter with improbably. Eva as lone survivor complicates that paternal durability, particularly juxtaposed against the missing husbands. Presumably she is the one who has dictated the engraving (at least starting the pattern with her children's deaths, and without the economic constraints of the bereaved Sethe in *Beloved*), so the names could also function as benedictions for propagation denied. Though Homans sees Eva as ultimately powerless, her determined longevity allows her to play a catalytic role in Nel's final revelation with another naming, as will be discussed. Eva complicates the phallic anchor of the Family Name.

The names for absent bodies call attention to their obscuring under the word 'peace,' which calls as much attention to itself as Helen's "Wright." Baker writes: "Morrison's subtle delight in nominalism, a delight that competes in *Sula* with an ironic essentialism, surfaces in the name 'Peace.' For surely a more cacophonous household than Eva Peace's would be

difficult to discover outside of Morrison's own corpus or the provinces of Latin American fiction" ("When Lindbergh" 240). More interested in the ostensible protagonist, Harold Bloom writes: "Sula Peace bears a name itself ironic, since her mode of individualism can achieve no peace whatsoever" (2). Seeing only the contradiction and not the word, both these interpretations ignore the genuine moments of peace afforded those with the last name—the house remaining a refuge (though not without its own dangers) and Sula's orgasmic bliss in the tradition of her mother's comfortable sexuality. Escaping creatorship through their perversity, these contradictions foreground the way the body reorients the word. It is in the refraction that diffraction is possible. The Family Name symbolizes the cohesive force of family, but this name's final image in a graveyard underscores the end of that cohesion.

Rather than the standard naming by the Father, an unquestioned mastery, in his absence, naming's subversive relation to the Mother is destabilizing—a choice that evokes ongoing discourse, a trajectory of desire that inhabits the word. Morrison relies on names, which, like frames, are necessary and ambivalent, both appropriate and inappropriate; they gesture towards signification, but do not fix it. They open a dialogue, but do not finish it. The strategic positionality of each character, controlled by themselves and others, can be used to conform or differentiate, offering a contingent agency in its manipulations of the mainstream.

Sula herself, naturally, provides a powerful example of the uncertainty of naming. Juxtaposed against her titular dominance, Sula ultimately appears absorbed back into her family's embrace, simply another Peace in a graveyard waiting for one more. She is part of the group once more, but can never be obscured as the title of the book. It is a singular title in many ways. In its lack of historic or literary forbears, the name Sula stands out among the others.

Finding a connection to her iconoclastic behaviour, Stein claims that ‘Sula’ is new coinage (228). Morrison, though, says it seems to her “an ordinary name,” as common as “Sula Mae” (Koenen 80). From this attributive refraction, there is an interpretative diffraction. Using anagrams, Hunt finds biblical namesakes that both conform to the character and contradict it: Saul (king of Israel before David), and Sula Mae is nearly one of Samuel (who anoints both Saul and David as kings). Hunt notes that the books of Samuel are about wars (166); and that mother of Samuel is a Hannah, who after being barren for many years, dedicates the life of her miracle child Samuel to God (175). Lisa Williams associates the name with its Icelandic meaning of seabird; she suggests the combination of water and bird, fluid and in flight, informs the character’s duality (115). Sula can be a diminutive of the Hebrew Shulamith (male, Solomon; female, Salome) related to shalom, peace (Lansky); her full name then reinforces its similarity alongside difference in its translation as Peace Peace. Also a diminutive of the Latin Ursula, meaning little bear, Sula appears as a word in many other languages: Irish Gaelic for ‘before,’ Tagalog for ‘carbuncle,’ among others. Each interpretation providing its own utility, like those of Sula’s birthmark, all these possibilities, intended and unintended, prompt interpretative excess—a grotesque excess as an ornamenting absence.

As with Morrison’s polished words, Sula’s grotesque shines from her absence. Basu sees grotesque movement in Sula’s excessive enumerations, transgressive in their associations and so destabilizing (93); if Sula’s preacherly enumerations are grotesquely excessive, the abundance of symbolism around her name provides its own grotesque. The grotesque wrests control of language from refining authorities, but, as Byerman writes, “the attempt to control language is always subject to negation by the very nature of language itself” (106); its movement challenges

anyone who presumes authority over it, even Sula in her role as the embodiment of language. Stein suggests that *Sula* is about "the inadequacy of names to capture the essence of another's reality" (229); the inadequacy of capture should suggest an inability to fix, rather than an incorrect interpretation.

Sula's Black feminine excess—her grotesque against her absence—challenges Man's fixity, the white patriarchal conventions. The grotesque insists on the body by presenting its lower functions—eating, evacuating, copulating—in order to evoke the feeling body, the inescapably visceral (common depictions in satirical levellings, notes Bergenholtz [94]) in a rebuke of the dominance of rationalism and abstraction. Basu argues that all examples of grotesqueries in the novel find their embodiment in Sula (91), attributing to Sula's discourse a conscious somaticism. Right before Sula exits the plot, her body is foregrounded in the text's most sustained depiction of visual textual difference: a sex scene. (This is Roynon's one scene of non-omniscience.) Basu links this scene to Janie's pear tree ecstasy, claiming that their moments of orgasmic revelation move both protagonists away from "a central condition of absence" back to "a plenitude... a prediscursive universe" prior to an attempt to recreate the symbolic order (101). There is a difference in the direction of their movement though. As Basu describes it, Janie externalizes the internal and establishes her self; Sula, instead, enters someone else, losing her own cohesiveness along the way (101). Sula, like Janie, has sought self-knowledge through corporeal experience; in this way the sexual body is the sensual body, providing a synaesthesic moment in shared and transcendent physical experience. Janie, though, establishes her need to tell; Sula confirms her silence, performing the interaction of absence and presence.

Presence and absence, the subversive Mother and problematic Father, Sula's grotesque and Nel's propriety centre this racialized project in the experience of the gendered body. Suggesting her facility with translangualism, Sula's recreation of the symbolic order with her semiotic challenges foregrounds the corporeal experience of positionality. Sula's orgasms are described as achieving "the center of silence," which is the "death of time and loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning" (Morrison, *Sula* 123). Disturbing in its profundity, it is a silence as excessive as the grotesque. This silence attempts an absolute absence, one where Sula encounters no one but herself—herself as ungraspable universe, obscuring her partner.

Sula's intimacy with Ajax is opposed to these previous orgasms. The text highlights the experience; this coupling is singled out for expression. Basu describes Sula's mounting to orgasm with Ajax as partly a visual duet with "the typographical assistance of interspersed italicized lines, enact[ing] a collaboration of voices" (92), like the translangualism in Sappho and Dora's jewel box of desire. Basu argues that as a moment of high literacy Sula's orgasm is "marked by the sovereignty of the eye," but this passage is still able to suggest "an altered sensory matrix" (Basu 99). The italicized lines narrate a mental penetration of the physical; they describe Sula imagining that she is moving through Ajax's layers to reach the soil within. The unitalicized ones narrate the union of the bodies: how Sula moves on Ajax (Morrison, *Sula* 130-131). Sula's imaginings arouse her body's acts: a matrix of crossed axes. The process is that of Bakhtin's "sharply heterglot" societies where "boundaries are drawn with new sharpness and simultaneously erased with new ease" (419): "the collision and interaction of languages is especially intense and powerful" allowing resources to move between with ease (418). The italicization keeps the voices separate, but "paradoxically marks their complicity" (Basu 98), as

the content of the alternating types builds on each other. It is as if the different types are copulating in their code-switch.

There is a duality to the process that is lacking in the earlier description of her orgasms, which, without differentiating between numerous men's bodies, suggests the superfluity of their interiors, and so breaches no barriers. Basu writes:

> In this passage, several boundaries are placed under erasure, boundaries between voices, between sensory and bodily hierarchies, between life and death. [Ajax's] body becomes a cipher in a matrix of signifiers, a surface that Sula would penetrate, a site where 'the confines between bodies' are placed under erasure.... interiority and exteriority are no longer strictly demarcated but defined in a continuity. (100)

This ecstatic mixing of senses balances the body between the sign and the experience, between presence and absence. The partner is no longer obscured. Ajax's body may become a cipher but not an empty one; Sula never loses her sensory materialism. Basu notes that "[t]his dialectic between the abstract and the concrete, the idealist and the materialist, provides a crucial impetus for the language of the text" (102). Sula's conceptual: "I will put my hands deep in your soil" is preceded by the concrete: "She slipped her hands under his armpits" (Morrison, *Sula* 131, 130). The words inhabit the body as the body gives the words a trajectory; her figuration is grounded in the somatic and integrated with the real. With the textual difference, the visual is emphasized at the same time that it dissipates into feeling. The boundary between body as cipher and body as sensor is penetrated.

A doubling that breeds further doubling, like the embedded dialectics, Sula's centred body makes her orgasm the experience of the narrative—desire, action, and articulation in

Relation: translanguage. Appropriately then, this synaesthesic foregrounding recedes precipitously from its climax. After this new relational orgasmic experience, Sula becomes attached to Ajax with painful consequences—his intensive presence becoming an equally forceful absence.[112] First, there is the confluence of silence after the crossroads of duet. In the pattern of beginning with ending, the duet begins with the end, describing its culmination in "high silence" (Morrison, *Sula* 130)—a moment echoed by the final line of the passage: "the house was very, very quiet" (Morrison, *Sula* 131). Moving from individual experience to setting description, the silences that bracket the climax form a chiasmic frame to Sula's absences on either side of the narrative—a continuity of interior and exterior framing a move from exterior to interior that repeats the move over the narrative threshold.

In this framed narrative, the copulating grotesque also serves to trap Sula in the mastery of the name. She experiences the same projections of the standard that the narrative does. After Ajax penetrates her transcendent absence, Sula must obscure his material absence when he loses interest in their relationship.[113] Searching for proof of Ajax's presence, Sula finds his driver's license and discovers that his government name is Albert Jacks (Morrison, *Sula* 135). The card becomes a rememory object—specifically, a present absence, obscuring the absence of the real. The confining absence bars Sula's access to the oscillating collaboration of the duet. Glissant writes: "our generations are caught up within an extended family in which our root stocks have diffused and everyone has two names, an official one and an essential one—the nickname given by his community" (*Poetics* 72). The shift in relation enacts a shift in the sign from the essential

112 Sula's Ajax presents a convenient inverse to Janie's Tea Cake, whose ambivalent influence ultimately generates lights playing on a wall.

113 Where the pear tree experience is both celebrated and analysed in *Their Eyes*, Basu observes that Sula's mounting to orgasm has received the most praise, yet it is the least analyzed in *Sula* (97). Perhaps it is because Sula's experience does not result in the performative empowerment that Janie's inaugurates.

enter-able Ajax to the official obscure A. Jacks. Unable to mediate between the formal and informal, Sula arrests the oscillation that clarifies as if jarring a microscope out of focus. She is left with only a transcript, a present absence that avoids intimate knowledge.

Many analyses of this moment realize Sula's fears of the community assessment, giving all the power to the standard. Focusing on Sula's seemingly fixed disappointment, critics have interpreted this moment as one of the many degradations of life in the Bottom. Stein writes that, like Ajax, many characters "conjure up heroes of literary tradition," but since they are of pointedly lesser status "these allusions provide an ironic indication of a fall from past greatness" (226). Page describes Sula's lover as "deflated from heroic Ajax to the mundane Alfred Jacks" (193). Certainly, Ajax performs heroically in the Trojan War, but the gods are against him and, ultimately, he goes mad and kills himself: is Ajax of the Bottom so much of a decline then; is the mundanity of Alfred Jacks so dispiriting? In his subjective experience of translanguaging through these names, he may be his own hero. In ignoring his narrative, Sula deflates him.

Sula falters in the face of the authoritative standard. Referencing the narratorial comment that Nel was the first friend whose name Sula knew, Stein writes that "[k]nowing another's name, for Sula, is an indication of spiritual kinship" (229) (suggesting an affinity with the author). In the case of Ajax, this goes the other way; with him, knowing another name is dispiriting. When Sula further reflects on Ajax's departure, she blames her orgasmic explorations: "It's just as well he left. Soon I would have torn the flesh from his face just to see if I was right about the gold and nobody would have understood that kind of curiosity" (Morrison, *Sula* 136). Trapped in the dominating mastery of his written name, the arresting

myopia, Sula's concern takes the form of her focus on the community's perception of that desire ("nobody would have understood"), something for which she previously had no concern.

The focus on a single name supports the hierarchy of values that marginalizes the Other. For Sula, the nickname, and therefore the body, the subjective experience, disappears behind the insistent visibility of the identification card—the same centripetal force of the gravestone etchings. She says "aloud to no one": "I didn't even know his name. And if I didn't know his name, then there is nothing I did know and I have known nothing ever at all since the one thing I wanted was to know his name so how could he help but leave me since he was making love to a woman who didn't even know his name" (Morrison, *Sula* 136). Sula rejects any knowledge she had prior to the nominal revelation, while repeating "know" so often that it loses meaning and becomes unfamiliar (becomes a "no" perhaps); knowledge becomes grotesque. Homans agrees with Sula's fatalistic take, writing that the catcall from Ajax to the pubescent Sula [and Nel] marks her for life, but her "modest" desire to know his name drives him away (192). The first clause is debatable; it seems a stretch to render Sula (or Nel) "pig meat" lifelong, particularly in a narrative that so plays with names. The second clause is not borne out by the progression of events. It is not Sula's intimate investigation into Ajax that drives him away, but her subsequent turn into a conventional lover. The change is not about knowing his name, but about not knowing herself, not acknowledging her desire (I=no could be the equation of her repetitive quote) and so not recognizing his own. Her move to the standard leads her away from the variation; she prioritizes the official and retreats from the personal; she rejects Ajax's subjectivity *and* her own. This, though, is only one possibility.

The orgasm chapter then suggests possible sites of challenge in the inadequacy of authority by ending in soothing incompletion. After the disappointment of being left with only the official name, Sula sleeps:

> When she awoke there was a melody in her head she could not identify or recall ever hearing before. 'Perhaps I made it up,' she thought. Then it came to her—the name of the song and all its lyrics just as she had heard it many times before. She sat on the edge of the bed thinking, 'There aren't any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are. I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are.' She lay down on the bed and sang a little wandering tune made up of the words *I have sung all the songs all the songs I have sung all the songs there are* until touched by her own lullaby, she grew drowsy...." (Morrison, *Sula* 137, emphasis hers)

Beginning with presence from nothing, Sula's realization of provenance seems at first a confirmation of finality—her new beginning an ending. It is, however, the possessed revelation of paradigm shift, from this certainty of finality comes something new.

Sula's exhausted summation of the arts recalls her apparently dangerous lack of creative output, but its expression undermines that lack of output. Critics have found her creatively expressive in her grotesque enumerations; and McDowell suggests that Sula's creative expression is "seen in the long prose poem she creates while making love to Ajax" ("Self" 83). Even more so, this "wandering tune" and "lullaby" is explicitly an artistic work. Her song, its wandering evoking the errantry of the abyss, sets up a rhythm through the stutter of "all the songs" (which almost turns the phrase into a palindrome[114]). It is a polyrhythm that hints at the

114 Grant sees quasipalindromes throughout the novel: in the narrative structure, events in characters' lives (96). The imperfection of the palindromes—the slightly different returns (except for Hannah's name, I suppose)—suggests that the text always presents the possibility of change in repetition.

flow in her certain-uncertain A. Jacks revelation, somewhere between the alternating beat of the orgasmic rise and the insistent syncopated repetition of the no “know.” Ending the fragment with “there are” also incorporates a beginning; this incomplete work offers an invitation to continue, reversing the ending within a beginning, this a beginning within an ending. Since the song comes out of her claim of finality, her own tune of totality exceeds the very claim it makes. In this subjective excess, Sula rediscovers a perpetuating oscillation. She is able to turn the present absence of A. Jacks into the absent presence of Ajax.

The italicization presents her creativity in the same typographical difference of that prose sex poem; therefore appropriately, growing drowsy, “in the hollow of near-sleep she tasted the acridness of gold, felt the chill of alabaster and smelled the dark, sweet stench of loam” (Morrison, *Sula* 137). Drawn to synaesthesia through creativity, Sula is able to re-access some of the experience of her boundary-blurring orgasm. That recall lacks a visual component; the reader is drawn from the brief textual difference to something beyond—a combination of memory and rememory. In the anecdote about Morrison’s father’s friends, the given name remains absent, unknown, to confirm the appropriateness of the nickname—Glissant’s essential not essentialized, but embodied. Sula is able to exceed the grasp of the creator, if only for a moment, through structures of absence and the power of presence, a strategy of recognition that acknowledges oppression and searches for expression.

Sula’s ability to exceed is also facilitated by Nel. Despite the title, this is a novel about two women, Sula *and* Nel. As noted initially, they can be positioned as opposites: the insider and outsider, the conformer and the iconoclast; however, as the singular title suggests, they also

form a unit that encompasses this opposition. Morrison says of the duo: “And so I wanted to say, as much as I could say it without being overbearing, that there was a little bit of both in each of those two women, and that if they had been one person, I suppose they would have been a rather marvelous person. But each one lacked something that the other had” (Stepto 12). Stepto tells Morrison that his students were excited by this concept; they saw “two sides of the same person, or two sides of one extraordinary character. But this character is fractured into Nel and Sula” (Stepto 13). The oscillation between them, driving the narrative, is the energy of translanguaging.

Nel and Sula’s unity is often discussed in terms that emphasize a corporeal union, specifically their eyes. A shared perspective as the primary sign of cohesion connects to the visibility that limns the Black community. Underscoring their shared sight, Bergenholtz observes that Sula and Nel have similarly detached reactions to watching someone die (92). McDowell notes that their maturation depends on a visual dialogic (“Self” 81), and that Morrison uses sight again to describe their reunification (“Self” 85). Sula’s return to the Bottom is, for Nel, “like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed” (Morrison, *Sula* 95); Sula allows Nel to “see old things with new eyes” (Morrison, *Sula* 95) (Morrison’s power over the word translated into sight). Sula thinks of them as “two throats and one eye” (Morrison, *Sula* 147). Appropriately for her grotesque, Sula’s description figures them as one body, but a mutated body—excessive and deficient. Two throats and one eye doubles the voice and diminishes the eye. Their sight is constricted while their expression pluralizes, centrifugal sound with centripetal vision: the fact of vision against the difference of language. McDowell explains

that they have a common perception, but distinct needs and desires ("Self" 81). These wants are the absences that fragment their sight.

Even prior to the extramarital sex which threatens their friendship, there is Chicken Little's death in the section that begins with the girls' pubescent delight over Ajax's calling them "pig meat" (Morrison, *Sula* 50). Baker suggests that the fatal play that follows is in reaction to this titillating naming ("When Lindbergh" 247), which makes the girls think of "cream-colored trousers marking with a mere seam the place where the mystery curled" (Morrison, *Sula* 50). Introduced to this desirable veiling (the curling mystery an absent presence and the mere seam a present absence), the girls go twice from play to erasure. Idle digging in the dirt becomes a seemingly ritualistic burial, an almost desperate filling of space with "small defiling things" (Morrison, *Sula* 59). They want to hide their desires. Then a game of swinging Chicken Little casts him under the water, creating a similar space of buried detritus between the two. The repetition forms the grotesque ornamenting of absence, evading and highlighting it.

Chicken Little falls into both absent presence and present absence. His funeral allows the members of the community to fill in his unexplained death with their own acknowledgement of absences (Morrison, *Sula* 65); but Sula and Nel's culpability in his death opens a break between them. Harris writes that "repeatedly, the smoothness of the water into which Chicken Little sank is referred to as a 'place,' as if there actually is a marker there in the water" (130). The text names the absence, filling the space linguistically, translanguaging absence and presence. In its echo of the novel's opening—a place and a human disappearance, the naming calls attention to the absence, reminding the reader of what is missing, highlighting the denial of the present absence.[115] In this version, the green that obscures is the gap that appears between

115 The echo foreshadows the bargeman's dehumanizing.

Nel and Sula (their eyes watching God). Grant writes of Chicken Little's death that "the ensuing loss of innocence is signified by both girls' profound cognizance of space-as-*emptiness*, a specific and almost mystical awareness of vacuity" (96, emphasis his). Their previous games belie this emptiness. These are the absences of the abyss, unseen not empty. The text's repetition of 'place' fills Sula and Nel's vacuity for the reader, but the space is not necessarily so empty for the girls either. When Sula is crying over Chicken Little, Nel is more concerned with maintaining propriety so she quiets Sula (Morrison, *Sula* 62-63). Though this may seem like an attempt to soothe Sula's distress, at the end of the novel, when Nel reflects on it, she admits she wanted to hide any evidence of their act (Morrison, *Sula* 170). She is the one who creates the secret of Chicken Little's death. Though it is Sula's hands which cast Chicken Little into the water, it is Nel's will that imposes a silence around the circumstances.

In their standard and dialect, they enact the tension of act and language, body and naming; the reader must translanguage through them. Nel turns to stone fearing accusation over the accident unknown by the community, while Sula continues to cry (Morrison, *Sula* 65). Thus, "Nel and Sula did not touch hands or look at each other during the funeral. There was a space, a separateness, between them" (Morrison, *Sula* 64). Their "profound cognizance" is the experience of difference between them, the confrontation of its unbreachability (at that point). Nel effects an erasure that is not space as emptiness, but space as obscurant. The differing expressions of Nel and Sula are a gap between them, but their gap is filled with secrets that have been closed over like the waters over Chicken Little's head—a bloating corpse floating downstream (this river is like the watery graveyard of the Middle Passage, fomenting the abyss). They are cognizant, and yet not, of the fullness of space. In this moment, Sula's

mourning joins her to the rest of community—her gap an invitation to share, while Nel is the unfeeling outsider—the mute stone barring entry to a secret. They have crossed in their relationship to the community, but the crossroads where they pass binds them together in confluence: the gap of the two throats and the fusion of the one eye. Baker proposes that, challenging the dominant symbolic, Morrison parodies the phallus in the tale of Chicken Little from the blank seams to the place in the water ("When Lindbergh" 248). Morrison substitutes both the space Chicken Little leaves and the dialectic of Nel and Sula for the un-anchored symbol, now an incorporation of absence and presence, sameness as difference.

Nel and Sula's first difference is each other's home; and they are drawn to the other's intimate space (Sula's cluttered, Nel's neat [Morrison, *Sula* 29]). The desire to enter these spaces is a desire to internalize the other, but the space that creates the desire is also the gap that prevents total knowing. Their distinct desires are a drive that links and separates them, becoming fraught when Sula has sex with Nel's husband.[116] McDowell places the crux of their slippage in their approaches to sex. For Nel, sex is "for the pleasure of her husband and in obedience to a system of ethical judgment and moral virtue" (McDowell, "Self" 82); for Sula, it is "in the realm of sensory experience and in the service of the self-exploration that leads to self-intimacy" (83). In addition to Sula's weeping and Nel's stoicism, this difference embodies their two throats, their variation in communication as expressed in physical intercourse. In similarity to the high literacy of the orgasmic climb, the text joins sex and words (bodies and language); they can join and separate. When Sula returns from her long absence, Nel's joy is expressed through clarified sight; but when she finds Sula and her husband together, she

116 Grant observes that Morrison underlines the kinship between Sula and Nel in that they both use memory to create presence in the absence of their male partners; the event that separates them also brings them together (though he warns about overdrawing the memory connection in part because of that narration versus speech distinction) (99-100).

expresses a desire for Sula's language, using her grotesque as a refusal of intimacy. In the context of their shared eye, this desire to share throats is constricting. The intimate space becomes dangerous, so that Sula's language is a barrier. Nel, in fact, wants to hide their shared vision—intimacy with her husband—with what she calls Sula's college words, "which [she] never understood but which [she] loved because they sounded so comfortable and firm" (Morrison, *Sula* 105). For Nel, the transitive property of the words is subsuming in its authoritative unknowing. Superseding her standard with their elite incomprehensibility, the lack of understanding allows her to focus on the synaesthetic quality of the words and use that sensory experience as a totalizing anaesthesia. Sula becomes a place Nel dare not enter; no longer a remedy, now a poison she wilfully ingests for her absolute absence. Nel wants the dominating incomprehensible word to hide its own canyon of unknowingness; its present absence will bury the defiling things, the challenge of difference.

Nel's introduction in the novel includes her first experience of the association between language difference, transgression, and bulwarks. When Helen takes Nel to Louisiana for the funeral of the grandmother who raised Helen, Nel's sole encounter with her own grandmother, Rochelle, gives her some insight into her mother's lost 'e.' Helen associates her mother with a dangerous sexuality at odds with her upbringing by her God-fearing grandmother. That grandmother now gone, the text reinforces the contrast with Rochelle's language. Her Creole is not presented in italics, but in a setting so clearly different from the Bottom that there is still a visual difference to the different tongue which the reader must conjure. When Nel first meets Rochelle, her grandmother asks: "Comment t'appelle?"; Helen replies for Nel: "She doesn't talk Creole," to which Rochelle rejoins: "Then you ask her" (Morrison, *Sula* 16). This is a telling

deferral; Rochelle points to Helen's knowledge and denies her own, as she clearly understands English. She plays a game of translanguaging that pokes at her daughter's insecurities and pretensions. Their family meeting ends with "'Voir! 'Voir!' and [Rochelle] was gone" (Morrison, *Sula* 27). In the farewell, the contracted 'au revoir' takes the form of the infinitive, 'to see'—a tantalizing intimation alongside the full phrase's implication of future meetings—au revoir: we'll meet again, which all know will not happen. Nel asks Helen: "'What does 'vwah' mean?' 'I don't know,' her mother said. 'I don't talk Creole.... And neither do you'" (Morrison, *Sula* 27). Here, the text offers a noticeable difference between Nel's representation of the word and her grandmother's. Nel's phonetic translation underscores her unfamiliarity with the word, implying a similar ignorance in phonetic eye dialect, but Nel's unknown connections change that ignorance from impediment to invitation. Nel does not speak the language and has little direct contact with her grandmother in this brief meeting; the obscurity and brevity of the language are tantalizing to her. As tantalizing as Sula's elite language, but without the caché (in her milieu). Rather than authoritative subsumption, instead Rochelle's Creole suggests a cover prestige of inclusive difference. A submerged part of Nel's heritage, it suggests something just beyond her sight—like that obscured 'e'—that undermines her mother's constricting authority, shakes up her social hierarchy.[117] She hears a liberatory strategy in Rochelle's translanguaging. Helen's obvious denial of knowledge she does have moves immediately to a denial of knowledge Nel might learn; the pull of unknown language becomes a push away from it. Nel learns the oppressive weight of the standard at the same time as the creative disturbance of language variety.

117 Again, it makes me wonder at Helen's desire to retain the 'e', this key piece of difference.

This brief time away from the Bottom shows Helen avoiding words. Her trip home begins in the use of a word gone bad. Helen is discomfited by being called gal by a white train conductor. It sparks a move into free indirect discourse to underscore her focalization: “So soon. So soon. She hadn’t even begun the trip back. Back to her grandmother’s house in the city where the red shutters glowed, and already she had been called ‘gal’” (Morrison, *Sula* 20). For Helen, the word evokes all “the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being something flawed” (Morrison, *Sula* 20). It is because of this “gal”—a phonetic spelling, like the incomprehensible language—that she cannot speak Creole; language variation is dangerous to her safety in its recognition of the painful vulnerability of Black women. The word suggests a conduit to Rochelle against which Helen must erect barriers. Nel becomes a muted standard as a casualty of this linguistic constraint. Her healthy desire for other tongues is perverted by the ‘gal’.

Helen fears flaws, but other women in the text offer a way to own them. In this brief return to her youthful insecurity from her settled self, Helen’s power is reduced in her daughter’s eyes (Morrison, *Sula* 22). Wishing to escape her smothering, Nel’s new, and yet incomplete, perspective on her mother spurs her into a previously discouraged relationship with Sula so that “gal” brings them together; but its refraction—attitudes toward propriety and sex—causes the seemingly unbreachable distance between the friends.

Of course, in this text, barriers always have the potential to be breached. Sula’s change in behaviour around Ajax is her replication of Nel’s language of love; she puts Nel’s tongue in her mouth. In Sula’s new desire to claim Ajax, she begins to cater to him as Nel did to Jude, like a traditional housewife, like Helen; Morrison confirms she “behaves like Nel” (Parker 63): “she learned Nel’s lesson” (Stepto 15). The passage describing the change begins: “Sula began to

discover what possession was.... She was astounded by so new and alien a feeling" (Morrison, *Sula* 131). In her internalization of Nel, that possession becomes ambiguous. It is not just Sula's desire to hold on to Ajax; she is also possessed by her Other. If Bakhtin's alien word can be both within and with-out, with this possession, it becomes both simultaneously. Learning from her mother, Nel's internalization of the word is an anaesthetic, a present absence to obscure an absence she creates; for Sula, it becomes a conjuring—offering her a magic similar to that in *Louisiana*—both the present absence obscuring her lover and an absent presence inviting difference into the space she creates. Sula's desire separates her from her lover, but re-links her to her Other. Ajax's absence and Sula's subsequent illness draw Nel back into Sula's space. Her internalization of Nel's love language does not render her similarly muted; her articulation of a moving heteroglossia disturbs that standard and its pretense to static. They are once again similar but different. The language's reorientation from ideal to option, from named language to translangualism, acknowledges and legitimizes other variations—an investment in possibility over security. To remain vital, the standard seeks its variation. In becoming repertoire, Nel's standard may ultimately access the feeling unfelt by the valley man.

In this practice, Sula deploys her final conversation with Nel into the future. Her questions begin in media res from a place of silent knowing. As Nel goes to leave her on her sickbed, Sula asks with no apparent catalyst: "How you know it was you?" (Morrison, *Sula* 146). She bewilders Nel with a challenge to her sense of self that appears to have no context. It is only after Nel's mute incomprehension that Sula gives her a frame: "About who was good. How you know it was you?... I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me" (Morrison, *Sula*

146). Sula reorients the narrative by questioning their character types.[118] As with her grotesqueries, she challenges the assumed (W)rightness, shifting the moral axes of Nel and herself, destabilizing their hierarchy. The space between them allows the movement, their two throats affirming alternate positions, their shared eye linking the movement. Throughout the novel, Sula, embodiment of the grotesque, moves through all three of Bakhtin's heteroglossic embodiments: as the rogue, she parodies language in her enumerations; as the fool, she naively misunderstands Nel's anger; and, here, as the clown, she upends expectations (Bakhtin 405). In her grotesque heteroglossia, she is able to penetrate her standard, affirm their link through her desire, unsubmerged and ornamenting.

Nel, unable to respond, leaves the question open—allowing Sula's words to follow her despite Sula's departure from the text. Sula's linguistic manipulations allow her to exceed even death. Her heteroglossia is participatory and thus, perpetual. McDowell writes: "[Sula] dies in the fetal position welcoming this 'sleep of water,' in a passage that clearly suggests, she is dying yet aborning" ("Self" 52). With this ambivalence, Sula gestures toward her absent friend: "'Well, I'll be damned,' she thought, 'it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel'" (Morrison, *Sula* 149). Basu writes: "In terms of its language, the text offers what is perhaps its most playful and 'disruptive' moment in Sula's death. At this point, the novel gives the slip to the grim reapers, its language offers what Bakhtin calls the 'gay loophole'" (100). Sula permeates the frame by proposing speech in an expectation of silence; like her orgasm, she opens a moment of radical solitude for another to join her—affirming absent presence and its potential for continuity; like her lullaby, an ending is contradicted by its own statement. The ludic possibilities of the

118 This is also Morrison's challenge to the reader; in an interview, she says: "one can never really define good and evil. Sometimes good looks like evil; sometime evil looks like good—you never really know what it is. It depends on what use you put it to" (Stepto 14).

loophole come from the parodic play of her ambivalent grotesque with Nel's contrary desires; their figures take on the designation of repertoire, not ethnolect. Their interaction maps the strategies available to racialized women. The translanguaging unspools a trail through the destabilizing space of the opening.

Nel, the response, is the protagonist of the final chapter, where her language also exceeds the frame. As an epilogue occurring thirty years after the final vignettes of the main narrative, this chapter is an addendum to the main. It begins with Nel going to visit Eva at the seniors' home in which her granddaughter so scandalously put her. Asking about Chicken Little's death, Eva commits a last act of naming and affirms the commingling Sula and Nel: "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you?" (Morrison, *Sula* 168). Eva's questions raise their own on how she is aware of the girls' involvement in the death. This would be another gay loophole. Eva takes on the putative omniscience of the narrator in an uncanny moment of clarity amidst her senile confusion.[119] The witchy power of her insight connects the girls' shared sight with their shared culpability, thus Nel hears Eva's insight as a curse, the magic of Sycorax.

Eva's retreat back into senility prevents Nel from making a rejoinder—as she refuses to do with Sula's final question to her: "How you know it was you?" Linking the questions of perception and interiority, the repetition underscores Nel's blocked reciprocity; however, in Eva's play with presence as complementary to Sula's facilities, the synaesthesia of the repetition releases the experiences Nel has been occluding. In the wake of their encounter: "A bright space opened in [Nel's] head and memory seeped into it" (Morrison, *Sula* 169). Sula has been

119 Axel Nissen points out the list of strange things that prefigure Hannah's death is later revealed to be Eva's assessment (282). Perhaps this is Eva's manuscript, she the Ella to Sula's Louisiana.

haunting Nel as a rememory. Nel's attempt to obscure Sula's disordering, particularly that of her final question, becomes the musty ball. A distraction in the corner of her eye, the ball disturbs her vision (it is both seen and unseen). Breaching the barrier, reorients the relation to seen and unseen. Rememory shifts forcing Nel to face head-on the distraction so that she can also see a liberatory strategy. The remembered, however, is not offered to the reader; the bright space is the welcoming space—the invitation to experience and articulate. The question remains open for the reader.

First though, in desperation, Nel attempts to bury the filling space, as with the defiling things, by going to the cemetery to find some finality in death. When Nel sees the four repeated etchings of PEACE on the headstones, she thinks to herself: "They were not dead people. They were words. Not even words. Wishes, longings" (Morrison, *Sula* 171). Though she is trying to diminish the power of the dead, in rendering their names as desire, she provides a trajectory for the word into the body. As desire drives the vital oscillation between her and Sula, her search for finality in fact becomes a reanimation. Nel realizes that what she thought was her pain over losing her husband was truly pain over obscuring Sula, lamenting "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude" (Morrison, *Sula* 174). Having been through mourning for an absent body, now she mourns the creation of the present absence. In that mourning, Nel exhumes what McDowell calls "her buried shadow" ("Self" 100); finally, her submerged place of space rises to the top. Her desire ornaments. Having obscured Sula, Nel now reveals her. Acknowledged, the present absence turns to absent presence.

From her response, Nel now calls out to Sula. In doing so, Nel penetrates absence—opening herself to response, to another narrative, to feeling. Grant notes a similarity between

Nel and Sula's final speeches: "Appropriately, both Sula's and Nel's concluding statements in the novel are messages to each *absent* other across the breaches of space and time" (100, emphasis his). Their desires moving toward each other penetrates the abyss.

In this opening, Nel's language performs Sula's excess. The narrator describes a multi-sensual resurrection; Nel calls out to Sula and "Leaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of overripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze" (Morrison, *Sula* 174). The attendant earthiness of the ball recalls the grave the two girls create earlier in the novel. Its dissolution not only resurrects, but also spreads its seed.[120] The memories oscillating within become projection outward. Nel's voice ends the novel: "O Lord, Sula, she cried, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'" (Morrison, *Sula* 174). The repetition of girl (two girls as they were) mutates the word into a multiplicity joined—one eye and three throats. Nel echoes the word and changes it, refraction and diffraction, repetition and difference—like the spreading seeds, a resurrection and birth, two girls becoming more. Under the pressure of compression and change, the run-on cry explodes like a collapsing star into the black hole that ends the novel: "It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow" (Morrison, *Sula* 174). Nel is given a final word that overflows the main narrative, as a coda extends a musical theme. Circles and circles of sorrow is the trajectory of Nel's desire, an oscillation of perpetual motion in the space Sula leaves. It creates the sombre loophole.

Morrison says that "*Sula* is more spiral than circular" (Tate 163). The spiral moves; repetitive along multiple axes, it escapes the confined repetition of the circle. The sorrow spiralling frames the trace of Sula and calls for her response; the reorientation of the musty ball,

120 The furball *is* Jude, another absent father, whose absence allows for feminine communion.

Nel's circles of sorrow are a suggestion and an invitation—the pretense of the standard exposed, the utility of the standard shared. She finds her humanity through searching for others. Homans writes that "girlgirlgirl" is an inversion of Eva's deweys (194); if Nel calls rather than names, in asking for a response, she proliferates rather than stunts. The spiral shapes the incomplete repetition of Sula's lullaby. Frustrating any neat conclusion, the lack of top and bottom challenges the mastery of the naming in order to inhabit the potential promise of calling. The cause of that infinite movement is a mournful absence, so that, characteristically of the abyss, sorrow follows the spiralling as inherent in its nature. The furball manifests to undermine Nel's control—evidence of the impossibility of absolute mastery, a mockery of her anaesthesia through diction; its dissolution means that Nel accepts her incomplete control. This acceptance does not ameliorate sadness; it hopes for revelatory movement in the sharing of sorrows.

As with Sula over Nel, it is tempting to focus on the cry at the expense of the "girl"s. There is a paragraph break between the repeating "girl"s and the description of the cry. Despite their break, I have read "It was a fine cry" as referring back to the repeating "girl"s that "she cried," not as a separate sound. The typographical placement of the cry figures the mutable excess of the abyss. The two paragraphs connect in the abyss—acknowledging the pain of the gap, but also bridging it for relation. The judgment of the cry is distanced from its expression, giving the "girl"s the space to change, to demonstrate their diffraction. Building on Mae Henderson's definition of Sula's orgasmic howl as a prediscursive act of self-reconstruction and subversion of the symbolic order, Spillers compares Nel's cry to Sula's howl as both vocalizations of cathartic release ("Hateful" 196). Homans turns the cry into a howl as "a specifically unborrowed women's language," claiming that it is non-representational (192); it

collapses "word and referent" (194).[121] Homans argues that the cry questions discourse because this collapse is a "desire to put an end to metaphor"; its placement as the completion of Nel's experience and the novel is a "dark prediction" on narrative, a pessimistic alternative to appropriation: representation can never represent women's expression (194). Homans's negative sense of the future would seem more appropriate if turned towards the past's recognition of the originating failure of representation, the cause of the abyss not the abyss itself. Morrison, despite the mournful content of much of her work, never seems this pessimistic when she discusses writing or narrative. She does not seem to want an end to metaphor; she reorients it to her purpose. The final sentence thus adds an element of expansiveness to that repeating sign, the "girl"s, spiralling them beyond the end of the phrase and the novel. It mimics Sula (and the narrative); it is both sound and sight. In this fragmented ending, the word remains representational without being authoritative. The cry does not reject metaphor or narrative; it rejects their singularity.

Through recognition of the painful silencing of the Other, the spirals are the path on which discourse oscillates, producing new language indexes—changing language ideologies. Connecting the cry to Eva's comments, Dixon parallels the spiralling geometry of Nel's grief to the spirals in the water caused by Chicken Little's immersion; he argues that it is another comment on the shifting of accountability between Nel and Sula ("Like an Eagle" 97). McDowell suggests something similar to Dixon, writing: "The 'circles and circles of sorrow' [Nel] cries at the narrative's end prepare her for what Sula strained to experience throughout her life: the process of mourning and remembering that leads to intimacy with the self, which is all

121 In another classical Greek allusion, this description resembles Cassandra's first utterance in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*; Mary Norris describes it as "untranslatable" and "unintelligible": "not even a word, just inarticulate syllables that represent the barbarian princess's howl of despair" (24).

that makes intimacy with others possible" ("Self" 85). Sula actually has trouble with intimacy,[122] but Nel eases her penetration; Nel has trouble with subjectivity, but Sula opens her up. In their shared experience of sight and sound, they produce individual expressions. Basu argues that Sula visualizes her orgasm as free falling into a gaping mouth so that her image of blurred boundaries is repeated in Nel's mouth opened to cry (28).[123] The image is also repeated in the description of Sula in death: her eyes closed but her mouth open in "a giant yawn she never got to finish" (Morrison, *Sula* 172). These open mouths are the possibility of variational voices, spaces to be filled with the tongue—a visceral widening of repertoire.

The spirals link Sula and Nel as co-conspirators, their mouths open to each other. In a demonic encounter, they are now both inhaling the breath of the snake that Sula imagines when they part (Morrison, *Sula* 120). Basu argues that the snake's breath represents the community; Nel is parted from Sula by the flick of their tongue (Basu 96); Sula, on the other hand, "is simultaneously penetrated and inhabited by the snake"; in the "high silence" of her orgasm, the snake's breath and the copperhead over her eye "are integrated in the logic and syntax of the grotesque" (Basu 97). Demonic ground adds to Basu's reading; the flick may be the community, but its breath suggests the reciprocity of experience, the open ambivalence of presence and absence.

Sycorax the witch is really a desiring Black woman. Nel and Sula's desires seek each other in their expression, never completely finding the other, but perpetuating connection in the search. Beyond loss, acknowledging sorrow penetrates the space between them and reconstitutes absence as creative expression. Earlier in the text, Nel wants Sula's language as

122 Morrison says: "[Sula] has trouble making a connection with other people and just feeling that lovely sense of accomplishment of being close in a very strong way... but then she has to learn about possession, a community law, a community value" (Stepto 14, 15).
123 Basu argues that this echo explains the sexualized interpretations of Nel's cry (28).

anaesthesia; in this moment, she accomplishes something like Sula's internalization of her—calling the absent friend to the open, intimate space. The naming of absence is the framing of Sula, a frame Nel acknowledges and manipulates. Sula's tongue is not in Nel's mouth (the barrier of present absence in this text), but Nel's mouth is open to her tongue in the invitation of absence presence. In his summary of critical responses, Page calls Nel's cry ambiguous (196). Directed at Sula, Nel's cry takes on Sula's symbolic form—an unfixable sign—and deploys Sula's semiotic—the oscillation of promise and punishment. Unlike the appropriation of the farmer, or the cool teenagers in Bucholtz's study, this intimate sharing of language helps to maintain the equality of the participants, but is subject to its own constraints. The cry is accessible, it resists appropriation, but it can never be fully unbounded. It is a cathartic loosening of too tight restraints that never fully releases. The circle's oscillation is contoured by desires arising from the rupture; its desiring movement acknowledges absence and attempts to use it creatively. Inhabiting oppositions, the "girlgirlgirl" and the "fine cry" are inextricable, much as Nel and Sula are. Their sameness and difference is the translangualism of desiring Black women, their articulation and assertion of presence (and absence).

Morrison, like other Black women novelists, is concerned with re-telling and recuperation within the sometimes painful parameters of history and experience. McKay connects Hurston and Morrison's "unromantic and unsentimental" sensibilities ("Introduction" viii)[124]—but Morrison's strategy is an interesting inversion of Hurston's method. Both a shared breath, *Their Eyes* finishes on an exhale, and *Sula* on an inhale. Harold Bloom asks: "is Sula an artist without an art form, or is she a Zora Neale Hurston-like vitalist who has wandered into the wrong

124 Morrison asserts that "Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way" (Russell 46).

novel? Morrison brooks no rivals: ...Hurston's heroic egoism is parodied in *Sula*" (2). In line with his Oedipalist analysis of the movement of literature, Bloom seems to attribute a deliberateness to Morrison's contrast that she would deny. It is perhaps more useful to think of these differences arising from each woman's specific context.

Publishing in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston is coming out of a relative plenitude of published Black women writers, whom she would have met and read. Morrison, at the beginning of a publishing explosion with writers she will meet, read, and edit, is coming out of the relative dearth of examples that followed Hurston. Morrison says: "There were no books about me, I didn't exist in all the literature I had read...this person, this female, this black did not exist centre-self" (Russell 45). This is a notable absence. Morrison says:

> the dead girl—and not only was that girl dead in my mind, I thought she was dead in everybody's mind, aside from my family and my father and my mother—that person didn't exist anywhere. *That* person. Not the name, but the person. I thought that girl was dead. I couldn't find her. I mean, I could see her on the street or the bus, but nobody wrote about her. (Naylor 198-199, emphasis hers)

This Black girl is a ghost haunting literature, not inviting, but obscuring (and never maturing). In those relatively quiet decades after the Harlem Renaissance (time that obscured Hurston, too), in the loss of her presence, that girl's absence becomes what Henderson identifies as oppression encoded as a discursive dilemma dependent on silence (24). This dilemma is the differential one, the creator/creative ambivalence of restoring the lingua franca from its apoeticism.

In her Nobel acceptance lecture, Morrison says of the writer figure in her long parable: "For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than to maintain the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance" ("Nobel" 319). Linguistic stasis obscures the Black girl; content to admire itself, the dead language accommodates no Other and, therefore, can admit no change. Dead languages produce dead bodies. They are never, however, totally dead. In revealing the absences produced by dead bodies, Morrison finds gaps in linguistic mastery. Rather than parody, I think Morrison presents the photonegative of Hurston's motion picture. The photonegative plays with absence, acknowledging and defying it, so that the girl's missing body becomes rememory, a seed of the abyss.

Restoring the lingua franca as an element of translanguaging, *Sula*'s translangualism moves in search of missing Black women, who beckon the reader to demonic grounds—a position of seeking for herself and others. Morrison's racialized language is charged by the push and pull of the centrifugal and centripetal, individual expression and community cohesion, creative and creator. Morrison finds language "a search for the ineffable," as she states in her Nobel acceptance speech, which parallels an earlier description of her writing "hanging on to whatever that ineffable quality is that is curiously black" (McKay, "An Interview" 153). Bakhtin theorizes that the heteroglossia of the novel is engaged in a similar search for the unknown (370); its very multiplicity, as Glissant suggests, acknowledges and challenges the unknown. Rizvana Bradley and Damien-Adia Marassa argue that "[t]hose writers who find in black life and writing the ghostly matters of a cultural heritage traverse the edges of

consciousness and are always approaching, moving toward and preparing for an encounter with the abyss" (125). Morrison explains: "Writing is, *after* all, an act of language, its practice. But *first* of all it is an effort of the will to discover" ("Unspeakable" 20, emphasis hers). Her description emphasizes the sequence as separate acts, giving it the force of a quest—the body activating the word; her practice then oscillates back to the word, inhabiting the body in the reading of her writing—the double thrill, the thrill of desire, reanimating Black women. The tradition presents with absence; the discursive dilemma is approached with an acknowledgement of silence's ambivalence. In this ambivalence is complex possibility.

Morrison's Nobel speech analogizes this interaction with an alternate interpretation for the story of the Tower of Babel:

> The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower's failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building, and heaven would have been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as life; not heaven as post-life. ("Nobel" 320-321)

The tower obscures the reality at their feet where desires turn toward intimacy and not domination. The singular is the plural, the top is the bottom; assumptions are destabilized, and priorities can be reoriented.[125] Hell can become heaven, and both can become the world.

125 Russell writes that Black women writers are "writing to repossess, re-name, re-own" (46).

Morrison's version removes the veil of opposition for the parallax view of demonic ground, a double exposure of presence and absence.

The perspective slippage is characteristic of the postmodern, to which Morrison is naturally linked (and about which she expresses characteristic ambivalence—both criticizing the field and admitting a connection to it [qtd. in K. Davis 244, 254]) (see Duvall; Homans; Hutcheon). Her racialization does not lie easily with postmodernist ahistoricism and apolicticism—at least as defined by two of its theorists, Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon (K. Davis 254). In the case of postmodernist language use though, the racialization correlates rather than contests. Kimberly Chabot Davis notes that Morrison's postmodern techniques are firmly based in a Black tradition (254), as with Hurston's modernism. Hutcheon's definition of postmodern irony easily applies to racialized language. Hutcheon explains it as shared and contingent expressed and unexpressed meanings, a rapid oscillation between denotation and connotation that can only be accessed within the parameters of linguistic community (*Irony* 89). Morrison has an almost identical definition of her style:

> I think [irony] that's a Black style. I can't really explain what makes the irony of Black people different from anybody else's, and maybe there isn't any, but in trying to write what I call Black literature which is not merely having Black people in or being Black myself, there seems to be something distinctive about it and I can't put it into critical terms. I can simply recognize it as authentic. Any irony is the mainstay. Other people call it humour. It's not really that. It's not sort of laughing away one's troubles. And laughter itself for black people has nothing to do with what's funny at all. And taking that which is peripheral, or violent or doomed or something that nobody else can see any

> value in and making value out of it or having a psychological attitude about duress is part of what made us stay alive and fairly coherent, and irony is a part of that—being able to see the underside of something, as well. (Jones and Vinson 175)

Like her definition of a Black literary style, Morrison's definition of irony demonstrates the term's characteristics, rather than defining them. Morrison avoids a precise explanation, beginning with the impossibility of such, but then offers partial parameters for the term that depend on experience. Irony is the process that could deepen the valley man's perspective, make him realize how unfunny the joke is. The changing assertion and negation of the word is harnessed in irony, which depends on a shared experience of the movement, an understanding between interlocutors. Irony plays with linguistic difference in Morrison's racialized literary language; it is the aware translangualism.

Attending to the performance of irony links the racialized linguistic community, and particularly the female one, from Hopkins to Brodber. Marginalization tenders creative value in movement between denotation and connotations; irony slips the creative into the creator. In the text, reaching out like the grotesque, irony binds the participants in their personal relations to group meaning. The irony of Morrison's essentialization of difference is an unfunny joke about the marking of racialization; simple humour is more complicated under the force of the trauma that fragments. Irony keeps the image of language moving through power and danger, allowing Morrison to declare language, like race and gender, as oppressive *and* liberatory.

In her discussions of Blackness, Morrison plays with this intersection like Hurston. Seemingly prescriptive in her description of Black people, she claims:

> We’re not too terrified of death, not too terrified of being different, not too upset about divisions among things, people. Our interests have always been, it seems to me, on how un-alike things are rather than how alike things are. Black people always see differences before they see similarities, which means they probably cannot lump people into groups as quickly as other kinds of people can. (Tate 162-163)

Like Sula’s song, Morrison’s statement undermines its own totality. Her image of racialized people depends on variation: a moving picture. She essentializes while establishing a difference that generates further differentiation; the centripetal and centrifugal oscillate. It imprisons and liberates: a relationship with racialization that unfixes the frame, but does not remove it. The essential is the living, feeling body as the mutable signifier in Relation. Basu suggests that Morrison resists essentialization with her insistence on difference (90), but Basu warns that the “text simultaneously risks being recuperated into other types of essentialisms” in resisting a “technicist essentialism” that comes from the privileging of the signifier (102). In her play with language, Morrison insists on difference through the ironic privileging of signifier, using absence to show the signifier’s ability to mutate to different signifieds. She uses the balance to open the text to the reader.

Repudiating a singular authority over language, Morrison’s postmodern invests in the democratic possibilities of repertoire against the authoritarian tendencies of language systems. In her work, presence is affirming, but can fix to its detriment; absence gives space for the democratic, the sharing of power, but it can benefit the oppressive, the concentration of power. The alternations are performed in the interactions among the dialectic between writing and voice, the orality in the text that Morrison and her critics have discussed, and the oscillations

between presence and absence that frame and reframe absence, positioning and repositioning readers as they position and reposition themselves.

Sula, like Janie, offers fertile ground for oppositional criticism. Deborah Guth finds that an equal number of critics find Sula triumphant as defeated (qtd. in Page 195). McDowell notes that readers either want to admire Sula's freedom or condemn her heartlessness ("Self" 86). Page agrees that "[i]t is tempting to fall into the trap of praising or blaming Sula" (195). Hortense Spillers asks: "What is it about this woman Sula that triggers such attraction and repulsion all at once?" ("Hateful" 68). McDowell agrees with Susan Blake who writes that "the reader never knows quite what to think" of *Sula* (qtd. in McDowell, "Self" 86). Morrison, herself, divides the different judgments by cultural perspective, saying:

> Sula's return to Medallion can be seen as a defeat for her in the eyes of some critics, because they assume that the individual, alone and isolated, making his or her way, is a triumphant thing. With black people, her return may be seen as a triumph and not a defeat, because she comes back to where she was at the beginning. As much of a pariah as she is in that village, she is nevertheless protected there as she would not be elsewhere. (McKay, "An Interview" 151)

Elsewhere, Morrison explains Sula's pariahism by claiming that, for the Black community, Sula's adherence to her individuality means she is lost (Koenen 68). She also writes, however, that Sula is the better person in contrast to Eva, her grandmother against whom she is often measured and found wanting, since "she does nothing so horrendous as what Eva does" (Morrison, "Foreword" 5).[126] Despite the propensity to decide one way or the other on Sula's behaviour, Patricia Hunt observes that much of the criticism of the first twenty years after

126 Guth, for instance, compares Sula unfavorably to Eva (qtd. in Page 195).

Sula's publication focuses on the text's move away from the oppositions that inform those judgments (164). Rita A. Bergenholtz suggests the narrative is a satire of the conventional binary thinking that "engenders competition, hierarchy, taxonomy" (89, 90). To move beyond opposition, the text moves within oppositions.

Ruminating on the ramifications of a racialized literary language, Morrison writes: "In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged" ("Home" 12). The writer is a hostess inviting her guests, the readers, to inhabit a shared space so that together they may create and unearth connections. Making space for guests turns interpretation into a domestic activity, rather than an institutional one, so that the novel is "Home" (as she entitles the article): not necessarily comfortable, but intimate. Racialized language marks the speaker. The reader, now a participant in racialized language, is marked by Morrison's play with presence and absence. Morrison uses discursive absence to facilitate her reorientation. Her revelation of the parallax view of dark matter is not a tragic end but a discursive opportunity for inclusive intimacy. It is the linguistic expression of Spillers's proposal for the resistant possibilities of the Black mother's hand; in these novels, it is necessarily joined by the Black woman lover's tongue.

Hurston puts her tongue in another's mouth; Morrison invites the tongue into hers, saying: "I don't want to give my readers something to swallow. I want to give them something to feel and think about..." (McKay, "Interview" 147). Morrison seeks the reader's creative empathy; she explains: "I never describe characters very much.... The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound" (Tate 164). Desire met with desire inhabits Black women's crossroads in a confluence of streams. It is a

synaesthesia accessed through participation, the call-and-response of Morrison's racialized creation. The text embodies the linguistic oscillation between binaries, inhabiting poles in a doubled double helix—the DNA of Black women's writing as experience that diversifies Western humanism to decolonize Western oppression. Explaining Sula's grotesque, Basu argues: "[Bakhtin's] grotesque embodies a specific conception of time, which is historical and materialist, which defines a horizontal continuity of the 'ancestral body' (367) that defeats the gloomy eschatological time of a vertically constructed medieval hierarchy (363)" (93). In intercourse with propriety, the text delivers the confluence at the crossroad. At the crossed axes of horizontal historical time and vertical eschatological time, metonymy and metaphor, is the articulation of a desire to connect and distinguish.

In the extended parable of her Nobel lecture, Morrison suggests the writer "thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control" ("Nobel" 391). It is both named language and translangual. Demonstrating the political ambivalence of language, her novels are a mediated structure that invite engagement. They enact the experience of participating in language, specifically in Morrison's case, in racialized repertoire. The exposed metapragmatics seek to use the system to challenge prior outcomes; the speaker inhabits the system's oppositions so the system is a living thing over which one has shared control. Creator and creative are not the orthogonal cross, impermeable to each other, but the equational relationship: crossroads into confluence. Morrison states: "I knew from the beginning that I could not, would not, reproduce the master's voice and its assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father" ("Home" 4). This Black women's discursive tradition builds from a manipulation of the language ideologies that oppress them, using the master's

tools to dismantle the humanist house, but fashioning new tools to build a complex on demonic ground.

conclusion

I'm a savage: classy, bougie, ratchet.
Megan Thee Stallion, "Savage - remix"

The sorrow spirals into the present day. In the summer of 2020, the police murder of George Floyd catalyzed Black Lives Matter protests all over the Western world, despite the global pandemic. A few months earlier, Breonna Taylor had been shot to death by officers who had burst into her home in the middle of the night, but it was only after the Floyd protests that real attention was brought to the Taylor case. NPR noted that the earliest stories covering Taylor's death did not even mention her name, only referring to her and her boyfriend as "suspects." Despite the heightened awareness around problematic policing, in September of 2020, a grand jury charged only one of the three police officers involved in the incident, while the Kentucky Attorney General—a Black man—released a statement claiming that the other two officers were justified in their use of force, the unloading of their guns into the apartment. The one officer was charged with excessive force, not because he killed Taylor, but because he endangered other residents of the apartment complex. After an outcry, the Attorney General admitted that, besides his lack of recommendation for a homicide charge, even after the jury requested to consider other charges, they were denied. Writing about the case, Brittney Cooper declares: "Black women are surely worth of more than secondary outrage."

The Harlem and Second Renaissances repeated the Women's Era connection between politics and literature. As I complete this dissertation, the racial and gender protests, Black Lives Matter and MeToo, that are continuing the fight against oppression have a corresponding literary movement in the application of a hashtag to a social media post. The dispersals of modernity seem to diminish the centripetal forces that stewed these movements; still, there is

more and more self-representation to support and lead them. Danielle A. Jackson notes that Black women earn sixty-three cents on the dollar to white men, are four times more likely to die in childbirth than white women, and are thirty-five percent more likely to die at the hands of intimate partners, but their presence as media creators has never been greater. Sapphos abound. Cooper observes that Taylor was brought to national attention party because of the Say Her Name campaign, begun in 2015 because Black women were "an afterthought in matters of state violence." Originated by the African American Policy Forum, the social media strategy aims to bring attention to the gender-specific ways in which Black women are disproportionately affected by police brutality, anti-Black violence, and anti-queer violence.[127] In the same month that the state Attorney General refused a grand jury the opportunity to charge police officers with homicide, the city of Louisville paid out to Taylor's family, according to their lawyer, one of the largest settlements ever awarded for the wrongful death of a Black woman by police. Under a Black woman editor, *Vanity Fair* put a portrait of Taylor on the cover for print magazines' highest profile issue of the year, the September issue. In the same important issue, *O Magazine* also had Taylor on the cover, the first time in its twenty-year publication history that it was someone other than Oprah Winfrey. The WNBA partnered with Say Her Name in dedicating their 2020 season to victims of systemic brutality and the players, along with NBA players, wore Taylor's name instead of their own on their jerseys when the season resumed that year.

These images are supported by sound. Songs feature in most of the novels in my dissertation, Hopkins's slave song, Brodber's folksong, Sula's incomplete lullaby. Song proves the connection between body and text, performing the rhythmic reciprocity of the image and the

127 One of the founders of the AAPF is Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term "intersectionality."

subject. Alongside the current untraditional literary movement, in the summer of 2020, an unprecedented number of all-female soloist collaborations led the Billboard Hot 100. In this chart's over-sixty-year history, there had been five all-female number ones; in 2020, there were four. Three of them were all-Black (the fourth featured two white women); two of them featured Megan Thee Stallion, a young woman from Houston. In the time between her first and second hit, Megan had been shot by a friend, another rapper—a Black man—and fearing police reaction delayed naming her attacker. She received mockery and dismissal of her assault. Almost two weeks after the disheartening grand jury indictment, Megan, as the first Saturday Night Live musical guest of the season (with Chris Rock as the host), performed "Savage – the remix," her first of these number ones, on a set emblazoned with the words, "Protect Black Women." She paused the performance, her first time on this major media platform, to play a clip from Malcolm X's now-famous 1962 speech: "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected, neglected person in America is the Black woman." Then, she called out the Attorney General who had failed Taylor. "Savage" is a statement of self, contradictory and assertive, a classic hip hop boast song that claims respect, even if sometimes "acting stupid." In what Joan Morgan calls "hip-hop feminism," it insists on a bad Black womanhood still worthy of humanity. It could be the theme song for any one of the heroines in the novels discussed for this dissertation. The novelists historicize, theorize, diasporacize, and interiorize translangualism into their anti-oppressive complexification of Black women's image; the songwriters synaesthese my theory of reading artistic translangualism as a strategy of resistance that plays with authority and disempowerment

Mainstream hip hop has been the provenance of men who present an image of Black women that unsurprisingly conforms to that of the mainstream culture. In the highly visual genre, the women in rap videos have become their own sub-type of sexually available (Black) women, “the video girl”: silent with a big butt. Video girls maintain Man’s image of Black women in Western culture: inaudible excessive bodies, the sex object—easy to ignore, easy to exploit. Mainstream women rappers, too, generally present the physical visual of the “the video girl”—light-skinned, fit, long-haired. They wear skimpy clothes and dance provocatively. Megan’s SNL performance began with her sitting on the stage in a bodysuit that matched the set, holding her legs open while four female dancers shook their behinds at the audience. It is, however, a repetition with difference. In addition to its enjoyment of the visual, rap is, of course, also highly verbal; in this linguistic investment, the women stand their shifting ground.

The rappers’ authority over their image is found in the play of language. Seth Cosimini points out that the “wild sexuality” of Black women is connected to the monstrousness of Black bodies (52); much like the postcolonial linguistic binary, he argues that Black women’s images are seen as either the stereotype or the anti-stereotype (53). Cosimini, however, finds that Nicki Minaj, another one of those women at the top of the charts in the summer of 2020, escapes the binary in her investment in monstrousness (55). That monstrousness is partly in the embrace of the hypervisible part of the Black woman’s body—her bottom—but its escape from duality is in her verbal variety. Through her personae-changing, accent-morphing, tenor-switching flow, Nicki integrates the abjected, reorienting the conventional image to destabilize its mastery but acknowledge its power: “Pink wig, thick ass, give ‘em whiplash/ I think big, get cash, make ‘em blink fast/ Now look at what you just saw, this is what you live for/ Ah, I’m a motherfuckin’

monster." Her lyrics reorient monstrousness as *Louisiana* reorients possession, Sycorax asserting her desire. While her body conforms to the image, her words deny Man's supremacy over its meaning. Man's mainstream projection of the image cannot be ignored, but it can be changed in the linguistic practice of demonic love, a deformation of mastery through a mastery of form.

Using text to change the image, the lady raunch rappers present their bodies in the conventional way while playing with language that signifies on conventional meanings. The men rap about "bitches" and "hoes" and "thots" in another iteration of the history of the creole sayings and the roast and boasts. The women wield these terms, inhabiting their danger. Unapologetically-big rapper/singer Lizzo earned her first hit, "Truth Hurts," in 2019, entwining genetics into this reclaim: "I just took a DNA test, turns out I'm a hundred percent that bitch." In a song that dismisses men who "wanna hide this," Lizzo asserts her worth by refusing coupling on those terms: "I will never ever, ever, ever, ever be your side chick." The excess demands respect. In her language, she will not be obscured; she determines her positioning. As "that bitch" she asserts a power that comes from the blood, from the body, thus she assumes authority over her presence. "That bitch" invests in the specific as a play of authority; not just "a bitch" but "*that* bitch," she identifies herself as dangerous in the particular, disturbing the totality of the dominant, rejecting the singular Other.[128] Lizzo, shrugging off her "boy problems" with "[y]ou coulda had a bad bitch," sings "I don't play tag, bitch, I been it." In her verse, she decides the game. "Bitch" may be a painful truth imposed on her, but with her language play, the revelation of the imposition is a truth that reflects back on the imposer: "You tried to break

128 This suggests the distinction of "*that* Violet" (90) in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), a fracturing of the main character Violet who sometimes falls in the cracks and does things such as attacking corpses with knives.

my heart?/ Oh, that breaks my heart/ That you thought you ever had it/ No, you ain't from the start." Cosimini writes that "play is a complex act of expression where desire and trickery constitute one another" (49). The trickery is in the reveal of the magic trick of oppression; when Heaven's Bottom becomes The Bottom, the residents have turned to play with the irony of their desires—the constant hope that relieves the pressure of repression, the centrifuge against the centripete. The shift to the demonic heralded by the Second Renaissance actually begins in the opening of the abyss in the Middle Passage—the shift from human to slave, the birth of the humanist paradigm refracting and diffracting in its own articulation.

The play of stage names symbolizes this process. Megan is Thee Stallion, the moniker of a male horse conjoined with what could be a Renaissance pronoun or an African American vernacular article. She asserts her gendered, sexual prowess, inverting the expected authority through a name play of différance in her qualifier—both in the diffracting translanguaging of "thee" and the refracting trans-sexing/trans-speciesing of "stallion": this is the horse, will you ride? Katherine McKittrick explains that, in Sylvia Wynter's reorientation, "Man-as-human-and-origin fades away not to be *replaced* by an alternative perspective/figure who occupies that defining position, but rather to bring a challenge to *where* humanness takes place" (155, emphasis hers). Taking animal names through the gay loophole with a buzzard-type extension, Doja Cat's "Mooo!," her first viral success, the precursor to her 2020 top 100 single with Nicki, plays not only on her stage name, but its metapragmatic assumptions: "Bitch, I'm a cow/ I am not a cat/ I don't say meow." The human can mutate, accept or refuse, or both at the same time. The audience is oriented to a destabilization, to the constant shifting of demonic ground. Black

Lives Matter and Say Her Name demonstrate that we have not yet escaped the Plantation; these artists use their play with language and the image to reveal Relation from that ground.

Reframing and reforming, the rappers, like the novelists, approach the image as a master's house that can be dismantled through discursive reorientation. In "Savage," Megan asserts her discursive control: "Let's play a game, Simon says, I'm still that bitch, ayy." She is still, however, inviting others to the play with the possibility of shared authority. This reciprocity is underscored by the collaborations. Morgan argues:

> The truth cannot be found in any one rapper but in the juxtaposition of many. The keys that unlock the riches of contemporary black female identity lie not in choosing Latifah over Lil' Kim, or even Foxy Brown over Salt-N-Pepa. They lie at the magical intersection of where those contrary voices meet—the juncture where 'truth' is no longer black and white, but subtle, intriguing shades of gray. (62)

Their plurality warps the individual frame, the fixity of singularity, the mastery of Man, in an intimacy of dominant discourse with subordinate that destabilizes those certainties. Women rappers, particularly the raunchy ones, were often siloed off from each other and other women performers, so that every collaboration was an event. The growing commonality of popular all-female collaboration embodies their translangualism in service of a dialogic diversity that complicates the image of Black womanhood.

On the remix to "Savage," the version which went to number one, Beyoncé—another Houston native—joins Megan in her play.[129] Beyoncé raps that she is "on demon time," referencing a video streaming site, "Only Fans," that became increasingly popular with sex

129 Beyoncé's 2016 album *Lemonade* would be the first time many people heard Malcolm X's speech to Black women.

workers during the pandemic, as it offered them more control over their services. Beyoncé's strategic primitivism lands her on that dangerous ground, where she asserts authority over her commodification with her performative translanguaging—rapping and singing: "I just raise my price./ I'm a boss, I'm a leader... I got that shit from Tina." (Tina is her mother.) Cosimini calls this dangerous play "an exploitation of the unstable and oppressive cultural sites of language, the body, and desire" (49). In its heteroglossic possibility, language enables the potential for an alternating authority over exploitation to destabilize oppression.

Megan's other number one from 2020 was her Fall hit with Cardi B, "WAP," which caused a commotion with its explicit lyrics, like "Now get a bucket and a mop for this wet ass pussy" (the final noun phrase offering the acronym of the title). In one farcically disingenuous critique, a (white, male) conservative commentator affected concern for the rappers' reproductive health, despite the obvious play of lines like: "I let him taste it, now he diabetic." Now threatening his physical autonomy, Man's demon is the challenge to his supremacy; in his construction is its undermining. That scandalous chorus from "WAP" is also a command, an expression of authority in the service of excessive desire. In these ambiguities of presentation, a tension between commodification and authority, sex and sexuality choreograph the pas-de-deux of crossroads and confluence.

The strategy of mainstream Black women rappers extends back to the beginnings of the record business and the raunchy blues singers of the early twentieth century. These classic blues ladies were the first popular recording artists from the Black community and their lyrics matched the explicit content of the contemporary mainstream rapper. Hortense Spillers notes the primacy of these singers in representations of Black women's sexuality; her sexual

experiences are represented, “if and when by the subject herself, often in the guise of vocal music” (“Interstices” 153). Maleda Belilgne suggests that this primacy is due to the power of the sound. Analyzing James Baldwin’s use of sound, Belilgne identifies the sonic as a medium which relocates place “beyond itself... inhabiting always more than one space” (46). Sound is able to challenge the fixity of hypervisibility in its unfettered movement through space; it moves from one interiority to another, changing space. Attached to the image, it can exceed it; their joint excess becomes a sign of mutability in synaesthesic play. Together, they provide the transitive power of Janie’s storytelling, Louisiana’s singing into prophesying, and Nel’s cry; in exploitation of the monstrous body, the affective power of the grotesque comes from the play between that body and its language. Against the established male authority that depicts objectified female bodies, these Black women artists present Black women’s bodies *and* interiors, offering a different space that moves the object, making it subject in a narrative of reclamation.

Translangualism demonstrates the linguistic object reoriented as grammatical subject; the named language is fragmented into elements of repertoire and deployed by the authoritative subject in relation to their audience. Cardi B translanguages through English and Spanish, standard and dialect, representing the linguistic heterogeneity of her Latin Caribbean heritage in her multilingual verse, engaging in the continuous movement of Édouard Glissant’s creolization that Nicki’s monstrous possession performs. Encompassing the changing positions of subject and object, the free use of repertoire in translangualism plays with the possibility of movement within fragmentation. The re-positioning of language reveals fragments as constructing the rhizome within which Relation moves. Discussing the tension between a hum and the lyrics in a

Bessie Smith song, “Backwater Blues,” Belilgne writes: “this affirmation of black personhood, being, and sociality orients the listener” (48). In awareness of fragmentation, Smith is able to position these ideas in relation to herself and her audience. Belilgne explains that, in the context of double consciousness, sound can be restorative or alienating since “[s]ound can take you out of place, and that space is your body, sound can take you outside of yourself and fracture your psyche” (48). This is a function of the aural, but Belilgne’s analysis ties it to the verbal, underscoring language’s ability to wield this power of sound. Even as text, it is a sound—an expression of presence that moves beyond the self, even as the self itself resonates. The sensual extension of the body is a fragmentation; there is authority in the extending but also a daring relinquishing in the hope of connection. Language, the word, articulates that hope. Playing with their objectification, these artists—writers and singers—translanguage across discourses, displacing Man’s centrality, insisting on plurality: Audre Lorde’s warning existing alongside “The Zora canon.” Nathaniel Mackey argues that the sound of the polyrhythm demonstrates a fractured self; however, rather than the damaged psyche that Belilgne offers as a possible negative, for Mackey, the split insists on self as verb not noun, and, therefore, powers the change of oneself and the movement of culture (275-276). Insisting on being seen and heard, the translangualism of these artists dares the dominant, destabilizing the conventional hierarchy to assert some authority of Black women over language and body.

Empowerment does not preclude restriction. Raunchiness is a common feature of many well-known Black women rappers; it seems that the dominant culture prefers this raunchiness—easy to exploit, easy to ignore. Strategic primitivism must account for the possibility of misreading, both deliberate and unknowing. The most popular Black recording artists of the

1920s, the pioneering classic blues ladies were, for a long time, obscured by the rise of the traditional blues man. In the 1930s, the mores of a prudish middle class and the assumptions of an essentialist folk culture (and the economics of their bigger bands) rendered these women taboo and inauthentic, too sexual and too produced (and too expensive). These criticisms remain for the raunch rappers—accusations of an overdetermination that repeats the oppression, like Pauline Hopkins's use of the sentimental or Zora Neale Hurston's use of the folk. For Black women, to be seen and heard is revolutionary, but not guaranteed.

Their excess, however, destabilizes any fixed interpretation. Through sexuality, the play of these Black women artists exploits hypervisibility to highlight the reorientating dance. Discussing Nicki's play with various hypersexual personaes like Black Barbie (for whom, her fans, the Barbz, are named) and Chun-Li, named for one of the first female roles in a fighting video game, Cosimini argues: "Play within and around these roles is founded upon those identities thrust upon women (of color) and the assumptions and expectations of audiences that are as dangerous, even lethal, as they are monstrous," but the power lies precisely within that danger (51). In the naming of these identities, there is the power of the dialogic—the possibility of reinforcement and the potential to change. Black women's articulation of their desire moves them from sex object to subject sexualizing, turning the dialogic battle to play. In this most dangerous game, Cosimini argues that, "[t]he monstrous, then, works not just as the violent relegations of the black women's subjectivities, but the site of indeterminacy and play that dangerously challenges and revises these relegations" (55). Already hurt, the danger is not in the perpetuation of the image but of its violence. Black women are in danger even when asleep in the presumed safety of their homes; these Black women artists invest in that inescapable danger

in a parallax view of oppression and expression that allows them to face that danger and make it clear that they act in love in spite of it.

They form a chiasm between oppression and expression that acknowledges the former in Relation with the latter—dismantling by reorienting. In “WAP,” Megan’s last verse ends: “If he fuck me and ask ‘Whose is it?’/ When I ride the dick I’ma spell my name.” In response to her lover’s demand for sexual authority, Megan asserts her own sexual *bios-mythois*. She literally takes the phallus and writes herself, changing it from fixed and abstract anchor to shared and embodied authority. In Hopkins’s last, wild, novel, the heroine is a Fisk singer, who, as Daphne Brooks observes, charms people with her music before and after she is murdered by her kidnapper/brother who is jealous of her husband/brother (these blood connections being revealed at the end). As Hopkins’s Black female heroines became more and more decentred in her texts, as Hopkins herself fought against the misogyny that would eventually push her out of her editorial position, effectively ending her writing career, as the Women’s Era waned and the oppression continued, vocal music was a place to assert the Black female presence that underscored the possibility of ambivalence. In the intensity of discursive suppression, the voice, as the representation of subjective authority over sound—both language and music, becomes unpredictable magic. In the fiction that is the Black diaspora, the body and the word work together to link and individualize in synaesthesic plurality. We say her name in the polyrhthym of the *bios-mythois*, translanguaging through a love for oneself, one’s people and culture, in an intimacy with the dominant—a dangerous desire that speaks to and disturbs to the endangerment of desire.

bibliography

Adisa, Opal Palmer. "De Language Reflect Dem Ethos: Some Problems with Nation Language." *Winds of Change: the Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*, edited by Adele S. Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, P Lang, 1998, pp. 17-29.

Als, Hilton. "Toni Morrison and the Ghosts in the House." *New Yorker.* October 27, 2003, np.

Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford UP, 1991.

---. "Afterword: *Winona*, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-first Century." *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, edited by John Cullen Gruesser. U of Illinois P, 1996, pp. 211-219.

Anderson, Jeffrey. *Conjure in American Society*. Louisiana State UP, 2005.

Anderson Cordell, Sigrid. "'The Case was Very Black Against Her': Pauline Hopkins and the Politics of Radical Ambiguity at the Colored American Magazine." *American Periodical: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 52-73.

Ashcroft, Bill. "Language and Race." *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Language*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2001, pp. 311-328.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, editors. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006.

Awkward, Michael. "'The inaudible voice of it all': Silence, Voice, and Action in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels*. Columbia UP, 1989, pp. 15-56.

---. "'The evil of fulfilment': Scapegoating and Narration in *The Bluest Eye*." *Inspiriting Influences*, pp. 57-95.

---. Introduction. Awkward, pp. 1-28.

Awkward, Michael, editor. *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Cambridge UP, 1990.

Baker, Houston A. Jr. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. U of Chicago P, 1987.

---. "When Lindbergh Sleeps with Bessie Smith: The Writing of Place in *Sula*." *Morrison*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 236-260.

---. *Workings of the Spirit: the Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. U of Chicago P, 1991.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, U of Texas P, 1981.

Basu, Biman. "The Black Voice and the Language of the Text: Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *College Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1996, pp. 88-103.

---. "'Oral Tutelage' and the Figure of Literacy: Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *MELUS*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 161-76.

Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: the Caribbean and the Postmodern*. Translated by James Maraniss, Duke UP, 1992.

Benor, Sarah Bunin. "Ethnolinguistic Repertoire: Shifting the Analytic Focus in Language and Ethnicity." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2010, pp. 159-183.

Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*. Cambridge UP, 2010.

Belilgne, Maleda. "Sonic Living: Space and the Speculative in James Baldwin's *Sonny's Blues*." *James Baldwin Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 54-62.

Bergenholtz, Rita A. "Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Satire on Binary Thinking." *African-American Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1996. pp. 89-98.

Bergman, Jill. "'Everything we hoped she'd be': Contending Forces in Hopkins Scholarship." *African American Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 181-199.

Berzon, Judith. *Neither White Not Black: the Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York UP, 1978.

Bloom, Harold, editor. *Sula: Critical Interpretations*, Chelsea House, 1999.

---. "Introduction." Bloom, pp. 1-2.

Bradley, Rizvana and Damien-Adia Marassa. "Awakening to the World: Relation, Totality, and Writing from Below." *Discourse*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2014, pp. 112-131.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging*. Doubleday, 2001.

Brodber, Erna. *Louisiana*. 1994. UP of Mississippi, 1997.

---. “Oral History and the Other Perspective.” *Oral Scribble*, special issue of *Caribbean Quarterly: A Journal of Caribbean Culture*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2013, pp. 20-30.

Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Duke UP, 2006.

Brooks, Kristina. “Mammies, Bucks, and Wenches: Minstrelsy, Racial Pornography, and Racial Politics in Pauline Hopkins’s *Hagar’s Daughter*.” *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, edited by John Cullen Gruesser. U of Illinois P, 1996, pp. 119-157.

Brown, David West. “Girls and Guys, Ghetto and Bougie: Metapragmatics, Ideology and The Management of Social Identities.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2006, pp. 596-610.

Bucholtz, Mary. “The Whiteness of Nerds: Superstandard English and Racial Markedness.” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2001, pp. 84-100.

---. “You da Man: Narrating the Racial Other in the Production of White Masculinity.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* vol. 3/4, 1999, pp. 443-460.

Bufkin, Sydney. “*Contending Forces'* Intellectual History: Emerson, Du Bois, and Washington at the Turn of the Century.” *Arizona Quarterly*: *a Journal of American, Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2013, pp. 77-98.

Burrows, Stuart. “‘You Heard Her, You Ain’t Blind’: Seeing What’s Said in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *The Turn of the Century American Novel*, special issue of *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2001, pp. 434-452.

Byerman, Keith E. “Beyond Realism.” *Morrison*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 100-125.

Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. Oxford UP, 1987.

---. “The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk.” Awkward, pp. 71-94.

Cardi B featuring Megan Thee Stallion. “WAP.” Atlantic Records, 2020.

Carmean, Karen. “*Sula*.” Bloom, pp. 149-161.

Cassidy, Thomas. “Contending Contexts: Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*.” *African American Review*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1998, pp. 661-672.

Clarke, Deborah. “‘The Porch Couldn’t Talk for Looking’: Voice and Vision in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *African American Review*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2001, pp. 599-613.

Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice From the South*. 1892. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters*. Edited by Charles Lemert and Esme Bahn. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998.

Comfort, Alex. "Demonic and Historical Models in Biology." *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1980, pp. 207-216.

Compton, Anne. "Standing Your Ground: George Elliott Clarke in Conversation." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1998, pp. 138-164.

"Conquian." *Wikipedia*, 6 March 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquian

Cooper, Brittney. "Why Are Black Women and Girls Still an Afterthought in Our Outrage Over Polic Violence." *Time*, 4 June 2020. https://time.com/5847970/police-brutality-black-women-girls/

Cosimini, Seth. "'I'm a Motherfuckin' Monster!: Play, Perversity, and Performance of Nicki Minaj." *Feminist Formations*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2017, pp. 47-68.

Cudjoe, Selwyn R., editor. *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*. Calaloux Publications, 1990.

Compton, Anne. "Standing Your Ground: George Elliott Clarke in Conversation." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1998, pp. 138-164.

Cullum, Charles. "The Issue of Identity in Pauline Hopkins's Fiction." *Making Connections* vol. 16, no. 2, 2016, pp. 117-137.

Dash, Michael J. "The Madman at the Crossroads: Delirium and Dislocation in Caribbean Literature." *Profession*, 2002, pp. 37-43.

Davie, Sharon. "Free Mules, Talking Buzzards, and Cracked Plates: The Politics of Dislocations in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *PMLA*, vol. 108, no. 3, 1993, pp. 446-59.

Davies, Carol Boyce. Introduction. *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, edited by Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, Africa World P, 1994, pp. 1-24.

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, and Class*. Random House, 1981.

Davis, Andrea. *"Hegemony of the Spirit": Black Women's Resistance and Healing through African Diasporic "Counter Cultures of Modernity" in Selected African Caribbean and African American Women's Writing*. Dissertation, York U, 2001.

Davis, Christina. “An Interview with Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1986. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, edited by Danille Taylor-Guthrie, UP of Mississippi, 1994, pp. 223-233.

Davis, Kimberly Chabot. “Postmodern Blackness: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the End of History.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1998, pp. 242-260.

Degras, Priska. “Name of the Fathers, History of the Name: Odono as Memory.” *Édouard Glissant Issue*, special issue of *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1989, pp. 613-619.

Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Translated by Patrick Mensah, Stanford UP, 1998.

Dixon, Melville. “Like an Eagle in the Air: Toni Morrison.” Bloom, pp. 93-104.

---. “If You Surrender to the Air...” McKay, pp. 27-29.

Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton UP, 2006.

Doja Cat. “Mooo!” *Amala*, Kemosabe, RCA, 2018.

Dormon, James H. “Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The ‘Coon Song’ Phenomenon in the Gilded-Age.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 450-471.

Drabinski, John E. “What is Trauma to the Future? On Glissant’s Poetics.” *Qui Parle*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2010, pp. 291-307.

---. “Theorizing Glissant, Creolizing Philosophy.” *The Work of Édouard Glissant*, special issue of *The CLR James Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2012, pp. 7-13.

DuCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction*. Oxford UP, 1993.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. “Power, Judgment, and Narrative in a Work of Zora Neale Hurston: Feminist Cultural Studies.” Awkward, pp. 95-124.

Duvall, John. *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*. Palgrave, 2001.

Edwards, John. *Language, Society and Identity*. Basil Blackwell, 1985.

Edwards, Norval. "'Talking About a Little Culture': Sylvia Wynter's Early Essays." *Sylvia Wynter: a Transculturist Rethinking Modernity*, special issue of *Journal of West Indian Literature*, vol. 10, no. 1/2, 2001, pp. 12-38.

Elfenbein, Andrew. *Romanticism and the Rise of the English Language*. Stanford UP, 2009.

Ellison, Bart. "In the Pocket." *drummercafe*, www.drummercafe.com/education/articles/in_the_pocket.html.

Errington, Joseph. *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power.* Blackwell, 2008.

Fishman, Joshua A. *Language and Nationalism*. Newbury House, 1972.

Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "'Reading Aright': White Slavery, Black Referents, the Strategy of Histotextuality in *Iola Leroy*." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1997, pp. 327-350.

Foster, R.F. *Foster's Complete Hoyle: An Encyclopedia of Games*. Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1914.

Friedman, Marilyn. "Going Nowhere: Nagel on Normative Objectivity." *Philosophy*, vol. 65, no. 254, 1990, pp. 501-509.

Fuller, Janet M. "Language Choice as a Means of Shaping Identity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2007, pp. 105-129.

Fusco, Coco. "Who's Doing the Twist: Notes Toward a Politics of Appropriation." *English is Broken Here*. The New P, 1995.

Gaál-Szabó, Péter. "Zora Neale Hurston's Cultural Space and African American Spatiality." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2011, pp. 85-96.

García, Ofelia. "The Curvas of Translanguaging." *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, pp. 86-93.

Gardner, Eric. *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*. UP of Mississippi, 2009.

Gates, Henry Louis. "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes." Introduction, "*Race,*" *Writing, and Difference*. Edited by Gates and K.A. Appiah, U of Chicago P, 1985, pp. 1-20.

---. *The Signifying Monkey: Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford UP, 1988.

---. "Preface." *Morrison*, Gates and Appiah, pp. ix-xiii.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and K.A. Appiah, editors. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Amistad, 1993.

---. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present.* Penguin, 1993.

Gilman, Sander. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." "*Race," Writing, and Difference*, special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and K.A. Appiah, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 202-242.

Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by Michael J. Dash, U of Virginia P, 1989.

---. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, U of Michigan P, 1997.

Grant, Robert. "Absence into Presence: the Thematics of Memory and 'Missing' Subjects in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." McKay, pp. 90-103.

Gyimah, Miriam C. "Setting the Word on Fire: Treatment of the Tongue in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *The Zora Neale Hurston Forum*, vol. 18, 2004, pp. 36-43.

Hack, Daniel. "Contending with Tennyson: Pauline Hopkins and the Victorian Presence in African American Literature." *American Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 484-511.

Harris, Trudier. "*Sula*." Bloom, pp. 105-132.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, and Cultural Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-237.

---. "New Ethnicities." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, Routledge, 1996, pp. 442-451.

Hathaway, Rosemary V. "The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and a Theory of 'Touristic Reading.'" *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 117, no. 464, pp. 168-190.

Hattenhauer, Darryl. "The Death of Janie Crawford: Tragedy and the American Dream in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Varieties of Ethnic Criticism*, special issue of *MELUS*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1994, pp. 45-56.

Haurykiewicz, Julie A. "From Mules to Muliebrity: Speech and Silence in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1997, pp. 45-60.

Headley, Clevis. “Glissant’s Existential Ontology of Different Author(s).” *CLR James Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, Special Issue on: The Work of Édouard Glissant, 2012, pp. 59-101.

Hemenway, Robert. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. U of Illinois P, 1977.

Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn. *Speaking in Tongues and Dancing Diaspora: Black Women Writing and Performing*. Oxford UP, 2014

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 251-274.

Hill, Jane. “Language, Race, and White Public Space.” *American Anthropologist, New Series*, vol. 100, no. 3, 1998, pp. 680-689.

Homans, Margaret. “‘Her Very Own Howl’: The Ambiguities of Representation in Recent Women’s Fiction.” *Signs*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1983. pp. 186-205.

hooks, bell. *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. South End P, 1981.

Hopkins, Pauline E. *Contending Forces: a Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. 1900. Edited by Richard Yarborough. Oxford UP, 1988.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, editors. *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*. The Feminist Press, 1982.

Hunt, Patricia. “War and Peace: Transfigural Categories and the Politics of *Sula*.” Bloom, pp. 163-181.

Hurston, Zora Neale. “Characteristics of Negro Expression.” 1930. *African American Literary Theory: a Reader*. Edited by Winston Napier, New York UP, 2000, pp. 31-44.

---. “From *Dust Tracks on a Road*.” Hurston, pp. 28-81.

---. “How It Feels to Be Colored Me.” Hurston, pp. 152-154.

---. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing. And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, edited by Alice Walker, The Feminist P, 1979.

---. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. U of Illinois P, 1978.

---. “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” Hurston, pp. 169-173.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 1989.

---. “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History.” *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, edited by Patrick Davis O’Connell and Robert Con, Johns Hopkins U, 1989, pp. 3-32.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony.* Routledge, 1994.

Jackson, Danielle A. “Joan Morgan, Hip-Hop Feminism, and *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*.” *The Paris Review*, August 8, 2018.

“John Crow.” *A Dictionary of Jamaican English*, edited by F.G. Cassidy and R.B. LePage. U of the West Indies, 2002, p. 250.

Johnson, Barbara. “Metaphor and Metonymy in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” 1984. *Their Eyes Were Watching God: a Casebook*, edited by Cheryl A. Wall, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 41-58.

---. “Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston.” *Hurston*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 130-140.

Jones, Bessie W., and Audrey Vinson. “An Interview with Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1985. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 71-187.

Jones, Carolyn M. “*Sula* and *Beloved*: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison.” Bloom, pp. 133-147.

Jones, Gavin. *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*. Berkely, CA: UP of California, 1999.

Jones, Gayl. “Breaking Out of the Conventions of Dialect.” *Hurston*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 141-153.

---. *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in American Literature*. Harvard UP, 1991.

Khokher, Reginald. “Dialoguing Borders: The African Diasporic Consciousness in Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*.” *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2004, pp. 38-42.

Koenen, Anne. “The One Out of Sequence.” Interview, 1980. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 67-83.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1991.

Kutzinski, Vera M. “Borders and Bodies: The United States, American and the Caribbean.” *CR: the New Centennial Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2001, pp. 55-88.

Labov, William. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. U of Pennsylvania, 1972.

Lansky, Bruce. *100 000 + baby names: The Most Complete Baby Names Book*. Simon Shuster, 2006.

Laudun, John. "Reading Hurston Writing." *African American Review* vol. 38, no. 1, 2004, pp. 45-60.

Lawrence, Karen R. Introduction: "The Cultural Politics of Canons." *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons,* edited by Karen Lawrence, U of Illinois P, 1992, pp. 1-19.

LeClair, Thomas. "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Interview, 1981. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 119-128.

Lemke, Sieglinde. *The Vernacular Matters of American Literature*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

Levecq, Christine. "'You Heard Her, You Ain't Blind': Subversive Shifts in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1994, pp. 87-111.

Link, Katherine. "Inside and Outside Language in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Zora Neale Hurston Forum*, vol. 15, 2001, pp. 24-37.

Lizzo. "Truth Hurts." *Cuz I Love You (Deluxe*), Nice Life Recording Company, Atlantic Records, 2017.

Lombardi, Elena. *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante*. U of Toronto P, 2007.

Lyles-Scott, Cynthia. "A Slave by any Other Name: Names and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Names*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 23-28.

Mackey, Nathaniel. "Other: From Noun to Verb." *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing.* Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 265-304.

Mahdawi, Arwa. "We must keep fighting for justice for Breonna Taylor. We must keep saying her name." *The Guardian*, 6 June 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/06/we-must-keep-fighting-justice-breonna-taylor-say-her-name

Matza, Diane. "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*: a Comparison." *MELUS*, vol. 12, no. 3, Ethnic Women Writers IV, 1985, pp. 43-54.

McCullough, Kate. “Slavery, Sexuality, and Genre: Pauline Hopkins and the Representation of Female Desire.” *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, edited by John Cullen Gruesser. U of Illinois P, 1996, pp. 21-49.

McDowell, Deborah E. “‘The Self and the Other: Reading Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and the Black Female Text.” McKay, pp. 77-90.

---. *“The Changing Same”: Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory*. Indiana UP, 1995.

---. “Black Feminist Thinking: The ‘Practice’ of ‘Theory’.” *African-American Literary Theory: A Reader,* edited by Winston Napier, NYU P, 1995, pp. 557-579.

McKay, Nellie. “An Interview with Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1983. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 138-155.

---, editor. *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. G. K. Hall & Co., 1988

---. “Introduction.” McKay, pp. 1-15.

McKittrick, Katherine. *Sylvia Wynter: on Being Human as Praxis*. Duke UP, 2015.

McKittrick, Katherine, Frances H. O’Shaughnessy and Kendall Witaszek. “Rhythm, or On Sylvia Wynter’s Science of the Word.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2018, pp. 867-874.

Megan Thee Stallion featuring Beyoncé. “Savage – remix.” *Suga*, 1501 Certified, 300, 2020.

Meriwether, Rae Ann. “The Blues Matrix: Cultural Discourses and Community in Erna Brodber's *Louisiana*.” *Small Axe*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2012, pp. 103-118.

Miller, Eugene E. “Richard Wright and Gertrude Stein.” *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1982, pp. 107-112.

Milroy, James and Leslie Milroy. *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2012.

Minnick, Lisa Cohen. *Dialect and Dichotomy: Literary Representations of African American Speech*. U of Alabama Press, 2004.

“monstropolous.” *Dictionary of American Regional English*, edited by Frederic G. Cassidy and Joan Hall Houston. Belknap P, 1985-2012.

Moraru, Christian. “Reading the Onomastic Text: ‘The Politics of the Proper Name’ in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.” *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1996. pp. 189-204.

Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost: a Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*. Simon and Schuster, 1999.

Morrison, Eric “Monty”. “Sammy Dead.” Kentone Records, 1964.

Morrison, Toni. *Sula.* Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

---. “Foreword.” *Sula.* Vintage edition, 2004. pp. 2-9.

---. *Jazz*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

---. “Home.” *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, edited by Wahneema Lubiano. Random House, 1997, pp. 3-12.

---. “Nobel Lecture, 7 December 1993.” Lasting Laurels, Enduring Words: A Salute to the Nobel Laureates of Literature, *Georgia Review* vol. 49, no. 1, 1995, pp. 318-323.

---. “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature.” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1989, pp. 1-34.

Mühleisen, Susanne. “Encoding the Voice: Caribbean Women's Writing and Creole.” *Framing the Word*, edited by Joan Anim-Addo, Whiting and Birch, 1996, pp. 169-184.

Nagel, James. Introduction: “The Literary Context.” *The Portable American Realism*, edited by Nagel and Tom Quirk, Penguin, 1997, pp. xx-xxxii.

Naylor, Gloria. “A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1985. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 188-217.

Nelson-Sathi, Shijulal, et al. “Networks Uncover Hidden Lexical Borrowing in Indo-European Language Evolution.” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, vol. 278, iss. 1713, 2010, np.

Nissen, Axel. “Form Matters: Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and the Ethics of Narrative.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1999, pp. 263-285.

North, Michael. *Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. Oxford UP, 1994.

Norris, Mary. “Greek to Me.” *The New Yorker.* January 14, 2019, pp. 24-29.

Olaivar, Tamara. "'Your corposity sagaciating O K?': *Ulysses* and Pauline Hopkins." *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1/2, Joyce's Women, 1996-1997, pp. 173-174.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologies of the Word*. 1982. Routledge, 2002.

Otheguy, Richard, Ofelia García, and Wallis Read. "Clarifying Translanguaging and Deconstructing Named Languages: A Perspective from Linguistics." *Applied Linguistics Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, pp. 281-307.

Padgett, Ken. "Origins of 'Jump Jim Crow.'" https://black-face.com/jim-crow.htm.

Page, Kezia. "'Two places can make children': Erna Brodber's *Louisiana*." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1/2, 2005, pp. 57-79.

Page, Philip. "Shocked into Separateness: Unresolved Opportunities in *Sula*." Bloom, pp. 183-202.

Parker, Betty Jean. "Complexity: Toni Morrison's Women." Interview, 1979. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 60-66.

Pattison, Dale. "Sites of Resistance: The Subversive Spaces of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *MELUS*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 9-31.

Pavletich, JoAnn. "Pauline Hopkins and the Death of the Tragic Mulatta." *Callaloo*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2015, pp. 647-663.

---. "The Practice of Plagiarism in a Changing Context." *American History*, vol. 30, no. 4, special issue: Rethinking Pauline Hopkins: Plagiarism, Appropriation, and African American Cultural Production, 2018, pp. e9-e13.

Pollard, Velma. "Writing Bridges of Sound: *Praise Song for the Widow* and *Louisiana*." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2009, pp. 33-41.

Powell, Azizi. "What 'John Crow' Means in Jamaica." http://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2012/09/john-crow-part-i-what-john-crow-means.html

Putzi, Jennifer. "'Raising the Stigma'": Black Womanhood and the Marked Body in Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*." *College Literature*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2004, pp. 1-21.

Ramsey, William M. "The Compelling Ambivalence of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1994, pp.36-50.

Reich, Wendelin. "Three Problems of Intersubjectivity – and One Solution." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2010, pp. 40-63.

Rickford, John R. and Russell J. Rickford. *Spoken Soul: The System, Source, and Significance of Black Vernacular*. Wiley, 2000.

Rosa, Jonathan and Nelson Flores. "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective." *Language in Society*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2017, pp. 621-647.

Roynon, Tessa. *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

Ruas, Charles. "Toni Morrison." Interview, 1984. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 93-118

Russell, Sandi. "It's Ok to say OK." McKay, pp. 43-47. (interview essay in *Women's Review*, vol. 5, March 1986, pp. 22-24.)

Saunders, Patricia. "The Project of Becoming for Marlene Nourbese-Philip and Erna Brodber." *Caribbean Cultural Identities*, Bucknell Review, vol. 44, no. 2, Edited by Glyne Griffith, Bucknell UP, 2001, pp. 133-159.

Sawaya, Francesca. "Emplotting National History: Regionalism and Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*." *Breaking Boundaries: New Perspective on Women's Regional Writing*, edited by Sherrie A. Inness and Diana Royer. U of Iowa P, 1997, pp. 72-87.

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. Palgrave, 1997.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Epistemology of the Closet*. U of California P, 1990.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. 1611.

Sharpe, Jenny. "When Spirits Talk: Reading Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* for Affect." *Small Axe*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2012, pp. 90-102.

Shockley, Ann Allen. "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: a Biographical Excursion into Obscurity." *Phylon*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1972, pp. 22-26.

Simone, Nina. "Four Women." *In Concert*, Charly Records, 1965.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: the Language of Black America*. Wayne State U, 1986.

Somerville, Siobhan. "Passing through the Closet in Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*." *American Literature*, vol. 69, no. 1, Unnatural Formations 1997, pp. 139-166.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Interstices: a Drama of Small Words." 1984. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. U of Chicago P, 2003. pp. 152-175.

---. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: an American Grammar Book.” 1987. *African American Literary Theory: a Reader*. pp. 257-279.

---. “A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love.” Sula*: Critical Interpretations*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1999, pp. 51-75.

Stein, Karen. “‘I Didn’t Even Know His Name’: Names and Naming in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*.” *Names*, vol. 28, 1980. pp. 226-229.

Stepto, Robert. “Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1976. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 10-29.

Stuelke, Patricia. “Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 19, no. 14, 2013, pp. 755-774.

Tate, Claudia. “Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1983. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 156-170

---. “Allegories of Black Female Desire; or, Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority.” *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*, edited by Cheryl A. Wall. Rutgers UP, 1989, pp. 98-126.

---. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: the Black Heroine’s Text at the Turn of the Century*. Oxford UP, 1992.

Taylor-Guthrie, Danille, editor. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. UP of Mississippi, 1994.

Trust, Gary. “Cardi B and Meghan Thee Stallion’s ‘WAP’ Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100 with Record First-Week Streams.” *Billboard.com* 17 August 2020. https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/chart-beat/9435213/cardi-bs-wap-debuts-no-1-hot-100/

---. “Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow.” Introduction, Hurston, pp. 7-25.

Watson, Carol McAlpine. *Prologue: the Novels of Black American Women, 1891-1965*. Greenwood P, 1985.

Washington, Mary Helen. “’I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands’: Emergent Female Hero.” *Hurston*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 98-109.

West, Kanye featuring Bon Iver, Rick Ross, Jay-Z, and Nicki Minaj. “Monster.” *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2010.

Wideman, John. “Frame and Dialect: The Evolution of the Black Voice in African American Literature.” *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 5, no. 5, 1976, pp. 34-37.

---. “Defining the Black Voice in Fiction.” *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1977, pp. 79-82.

Wiedorn, Michael. “Glissant’s ‘Philosophie de la Relation’: ‘I have spoken of the chaos of writing in the ardor of the poem.’” *Édouard Glissant: A Special Issue*, special issue of *Callaloo*, vol, 36, no. 4, 2013, pp. 902-915.

Wilentz, Gay. “English is a Foreign Anguish: Caribbean Writers and the Disruption of the Colonial Canon.” *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century “British” Literary Canons*, edited by Karen Lawrence, U of Illinois P, 1992, pp. 261-278.

Williams, Lisa. *The Artist as Outsider in the Novels of Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf*. Greenwood P, 2000.

Williams, Susan L. “The Inconstant Daguerreotype: the Narrative of Early Photography.” *Narrative*, vol. 4, no, 2, 1996, pp. 161-174.

Wilson, Judith. “A Conversation with Toni Morrison.” Interview, 1981. Taylor-Guthrie, pp. 129-137.

Wolff, Maria Tai. “Listening and Living: Reading and Experience in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” *Hurston*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 218-229.

Wolfram, Walt. *Sociolinguistic Aspects of Assimilation: Puerto Rican English Spoken in New York City*. Center for Applied Linguistics, 1974.

Woodard, Vincent. “Deciphering the Race-Sex Diaspora in Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2006, pp. 72-93.

Wright, Richard. Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *Hurston*, Gates and Appiah, pp. 16-17.

Wynter, Sylvia. Afterword: “Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman’.” *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, edited by Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, Africa World P, 1994, pp. 355-372.

---. “Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles.” *Édouard Glissant Issue*, special issue of *World Literature Today*, vol. 60, no. 4, 1989, pp. 637-648.

---. “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues.” *Knowledge on Trial*, special issue of *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1994, pp. 42-73.

---. “On Disenchanting Discourse: ‘Minority’ Literature Criticism and Beyond.” *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse II*, special issue of *Cultural Critique*, no. 7, 1987, pp. 207-244.

Yarborough, Richard. “Introduction.” *Contending Forces: a Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. 1900. Edited by Richard Yarborough. Oxford UP, 1988.

Yountae, An. *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins*. Fordham UP, 2017.

“The ZORA Canon: 100 Best Books by Black Women Authors.” *ZORA*, 27 January 2020, zora.medium.com/100-best-books-by-black-women-authors-zora-canon-46b3492bdded.