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THE FOLK TRADITION IN THE FICTION OF
BLACK WOMEN WRITERS

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Presented for the
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Degree
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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mrs. Emma M. Johnson, and my grandmother, the late Mrs. Mary L. Johnson, for their unconditional love and support throughout this endeavor and my life. Thanks for wanting the best for me.

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ABSTRACT

Some of the increased scholarly interest in Black literature and folklore in the last three decades has focused on the function of folklore or folk elements in the writings of Black authors. Black women writers in particular incorporated folk materials insightfully into their fiction, following the innovations of Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison. These three writers are bound by the tradition of realistic fiction that identifies and extols the virtues of a community located in a cultural space with a rich folk tradition extending from the history and tradition of Black people in the diaspora.

Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison have inherited an oral tradition developed over centuries of prosperity, assault, travail, and struggle and informed by folk ritual, legend, customs, lore, myth, superstitions, expressions, setting, and the idea. The folk idea, a group of people's traditional assumptions about the nature of humanity and the world, provides a framework for identifying and examining those notions that inform the Black fiction writer. This study suggests that one folk idea--that material gain does not assure happiness or spiritual wholeness--consciously or unconsciously informs the work of these women.

Chapter I introduces the concept of the folk idea, and the general concerns of the three writers. Chapter II

establishes Hurston as a forerunner in the folk tradition with her use of folk expression, folktales, folkloric setting, and creation of the folk hero and heroine.

Chapter III treats Marshall's use of the West Indian folk tradition to portray female protagonists influenced by it.

Chapter IV examines Toni Morrison's transformation of the folktale, folk setting and heroes, storytelling, and superstition to create sophisticated modern fable.

Indirectly influenced by Hurston, both Marshall and Morrison affect the work of other Black women writers, as discussed in Chapter V. These writers' clear directions for human and racial survival denounce materialistic indulgence and individualism and encourage acceptance and understanding of cultural history.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The emergence in the 1960s of Black Studies and in the 1970s of Women's Studies has prompted substantial interest in Black women writers. Studies of Black fiction prior to this period have generally surveyed content, themes, and techniques, as in the case of Sterling Brown's The Negro in American Fiction (1937), Addison Gayle's The Way of the New World (1976), Robert Bone's The Negro Novel in America (1958), and Arthur P. Davis' From the Dark Tower (1974). Other studies have identified specific themes or techniques in the works of particular writers, as with Lloyd W. Brown's article in Novel, "The Rhythms of Power in Paule Marshall's Fiction," or Robert Hemenway's Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography. Except for studies of images of women in literature, as in Daryl Dance's "Black Eve or Madonna? A Study of the Antithetical Views of the Black Mother in Black Literature" in Perspectives of Afro-American Women, Andrea Benton Rushing's "The Changing Same: Images of Black Women in Afro-American Poetry," or Mary Helen Washington's "Black Women Image-Makers," both in Black World, few studies attempt to explore trends or traditions in the writing of Black women. While some recent articles have placed more attention on comparative

studies of themes and concerns of Black women writers, the most thorough analysis of traditions is found in Barbara Christian's Black Women Novelists.

Over the same period of time and in a similar manner, studies of folklore and the use of folklore in creative literature have been developed. The earliest materials on Afro-American folklore included collections of folklore such as Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men (1935), Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps' The Book of Negro Folklore (1958), Richard M. Dorson's American Negro Folktales (1967), J. Mason Brewer's American Negro Folklore (1968), Harold A. Courlander's A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore (1976), and Daryl Cumber Dance's Shuckin' and Jivin' (1978). These collections provide a variety of types of tales which have been collected and provide excellent material for an introduction to Afro-American folklore (Thomas 3). Examples of many forms of folk material abound in these and other collections including trickster tales, toasts or tales of the "Bad Nigger," the dozens and insults, the blues and spirituals, and examples of folklore in religious forms and rituals. More serious scholarship that attempts to discuss and interpret these forms of folk material has developed since the 1960s. Some of the most significant work includes Ralph Ellison's Shadow and Act (1964), LeRoi Jones' (Amiri Baraka) Blues People (1963), and Sherley Anne Williams' Give Birth to Brightness (1972).

The latter work provides a study of black folk attitudes regarding the hero and how those attitudes are reflected in Afro-American literature.

Although many Black writers, both female and male, acknowledge their dependence on Black folk traditions, few studies show the explicit relationship between these traditions and the novelist's imagination. This is regrettable for several reasons. First of all, from a literary point of view, one is hard put to distinguish between folk tradition or folklore as a pure literature and the novel as the singular creation of the imagination. If in Black literature these two dimensions are interdependent, the folkloric tradition might be illuminated by the insights of Black literary criticism.

At the initiation of this study, a major concern for the writer was the definition of folklore and other terms related to the folk tradition in literature. Several writers have offered illuminating definitions and others have provided enlightening critiques of creative literature which incorporates, through various means, folk elements. Selected definitions and a review of literature led to the discovery of the concept of the folk idea, a form which allows a means of analyzing basic cultural premises and folk elements found in the fiction of recent American writers. This study explores the significance of the folk

idea as a unit of worldview and the tradition established by black women writers.

While folklore as a literary genre has no precise definition, that folklore and folkloric materials inform the work of the novelist is readily observable in American and Afro-American literature. Hennig Cohen, in "American Literature and American Folklore," points out, "Folklore in American literature has been put to work in a number of ways, among them, to advance the plot, to characterize, to provide structure, and to defend, explain and raise questions about the nature of society" (242-243).

Moreover, Darwin Turner, a noted critic, defines Afro-American literature as "that which reproduces characteristics derived from the oral tradition of folktale, depends upon the language usage common in or unique to the black community, derives from and recreates significant aspects of black culture, such as the sermon, utilizes rhythms characteristic of the music composed by blacks, and advances attitudes unique to the black community" (Theory and Practice 11-12).

Afro-American novelist Ralph Ellison further elucidates the significance of folk materials for the novelist. Folklore, he maintains,

offers the first drawings of any group's character. It preserves mainly those situations which have repeated themselves again and again in

the history of any given group. It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it; and it describes those boundaries of feeling, thought and action which that particular group has found to be the limitation of the human condition. It projects this wisdom in symbols which express the group's will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives or dies. These drawings may be crude but they are nonetheless profound in that they represent the group's attempt to humanize the world. It is no accident that great literature, the products of individual artists, is erected upon this humble base. (Ellison 171)

Ellison's view of the more particular significance of folklore appears in his comment:

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger culture which regarded it as inferior, was an especially courageous expression. It announced the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his masters to define these crucial matters for him. (172)

Recognition of the importance of folklore to the Afro-American creative artist has existed for a number of years

and has been the subject of much debate. As H. Nigel Thomas remarks:

It took a very long time, until Ellison, in fact, for black American writers to be convinced that what earlier generations of blacks and whites saw as debasement of the race in folklore was in reality sustenance and should be depicted as such. Fortunately, doubt no longer exists about the value of folklore as a tool for the black writer who wishes to explore the wellsprings of the black American soul. (8)

Acknowledging the rich body of experience in Afro-American folklore, Ellison states: "We can view it narrowly as something exotic, folksy or 'low-down', or we may identify ourselves with it and recognize it as an important segment of the larger American experience--not lying at the bottom of it, but intertwined, diffuse in its very texture. I can't take this lightly or be impressed by those who cannot see its importance; it is important to me" (172).

Afro-American literary critics have taken seriously the folklore heritage but have had to deal with the problems facing the artist who used materials from his folk heritage. Charles Waddell Chesnutt employed folklore and folk materials in his fiction, but not without some dilemma which prompted his development of fiction reflecting the limitations of remaining absorbed in the folk culture.

Chesnutt's concern was with presenting more positive images of blacks than those images found in other Reconstruction literature. While Chesnutt relied heavily upon folklore in his collection of stories The Conjure Woman and Other Tales, he was reluctant to employ folklore as a primary source in later works. This dilemma is discussed by Helen Chesnutt in Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line (1952). Also, Trudier Harris notes that Chesnutt's attitude changed in his later works and he saw "folk elements as a definite hindrance to advancement into the dominant culture." He felt that a total "belief in superstition blocks educational advancement" (Tie 85). Chesnutt's later work tended to reflect disbelief and more rationalistic regard for superstition and other folk elements.

Paul Laurence Dunbar's difficulties regarding his use of dialect in poetry have been chronicled in such works as James Weldon Johnson's Along this Way (1933) and J. Saunders Redding's "Portrait against a Background" (1975), William Dean Howells' laudatory preface to Dunbar's Lyrics of Lowly Life (1898), and James Weldon Johnson's prefaces to The Book of Negro Poetry (1922 and 1931). These works reveal the reactions of black and white critics to the use of the folk idiom (Thomas 8).

The debate regarding the use of folk materials in literature became more acute during the Harlem Renaissance

of the 1920s and through the 1930s as reviews of the literature by W. E. B. DuBois and articles by Charles S. Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke, as well as Richard Wright's "Blueprint to Negro Literature" (1937) and the novels of Zora Neale Hurston provided new perspectives and formulas for the role of the Afro-American artist in American life and culture.

By the 1950s essays by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin had forged a greater appreciation for the influence of folk ways on the literature of the Afro-American artist. It is no surprise then that the events and literature of the 1960s presented an even clearer perspective of the relationship of the Afro-American artist and his community--the folk. The wave of cultural nationalism provided many new voices and a new "Black Aesthetic" (Thomas 9). Since the 1970s, a move toward critical approaches indigenous both to the literature and the community that produces it has been espoused by Afro-American critics such as Houston Baker; Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; Karla Holloway; Michael Awkward; and Barbara Smith. In addition, most major Afro-American women novelists reveal the influence of the folk tradition in their fiction.

Three key innovators in the use of folk material in Afro-American fiction are Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison. These women writers forge a

tradition in fiction writing which exhibits a particular interest in folk material (i.e., ritual, legend, customs, folklore, myth, superstitions, etc.). In their individual artistic visions and narrative techniques, they present their varied proposals for racial survival and notions of the Afro-American folk woman independent of material obsessions. Zora Neale Hurston, the most prolific Afro-American woman writer prior to the 1960s, broadens her objective of "collecting the folkways" of her people by creating fiction which embodies folk materials. Hurston, through the romantic pastoral, incorporates in her stories of blacks in Florida, not only such folk customs as funeral observances and superstitions about death, but also her concern with romantic or supernatural elements outside the self. A writer of the 1920s and 1930s, Hurston begins a tradition which introduces the use of folkloric materials by Afro-American women novelists to reveal the history and character of black life through varied dimensions.

While Hurston's intent to create fiction which portrayed the folkways of her people was realized in the novels Jonah's Gourd Vine and Their Eyes Were Watching God, greater development and expansion of that intent is clear in the novels of more recent Afro-American women novelists. Two of these women, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison, may be examined specifically because of their successes with the techniques used by Hurston and because of their

creation of fiction which reveals a unique cultural consciousness and a more complex cultural symbolism.

Paule Marshall, born of West Indian parents who moved to New York, where Marshall grew up, is a serious student of West Indian folk tradition as well as a novelist very much concerned with the structure and themes of her work. Her fiction incorporates the legends, customs, and other folk material abundant among West Indian Blacks, as well as a realistic concern with the importance of land (place), racial heritage and identity (history), and personal identity (sense of self) that are important for survival of the West Indian native in the United States. In her novels, Brown Girl, Brownstones, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, and Praisesong for the Widow, the themes of colonization and the struggle for victory within the context of Pan African history and consciousness, as well as the political overtones of communal identity, effectively demonstrate the profound tension between romance and realism. Her work shows strong, sequential plot structure and development of characters who have internalized the tradition; these are the major creative techniques which work to elucidate Marshall's worldview.

The novels of Toni Morrison show how she draws upon the techniques used by the other two writers. Morrison, in The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, and Tar Baby, utilizes folk materials to provide a source of hope for

those who can no longer live with the beliefs and heroes of a white society which destroys the sense of self. Further, her works suggest how and why people respond as they do to certain cultural forces. Like Hurston, she employs freely folk materials such as ritual, legend, folklore, superstition, and custom to project her worldview. Like Marshall, she creates profound tension between romance and realism. Yet, Morrison expands and extends the use of interior monologue and a decentralized plot structure of an uncrystallized narrative, which reflects directly the irresoluteness of the imagination and of modern life.

While it is clear that Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison all depend upon the rich Afro-American folk tradition to reveal many of the basic tensions of modern life, as they see them, a precise construct of how they use folk materials is difficult. While the very nature and definition of folklore and the novel prohibit any simplistic correlations between the two genres, there are several ways to illustrate the influence of the folk tradition upon the work of these novelists. However, it is not the intent of this study to identify and categorize folklore, but rather to show how several underlying assumptions grounded there contribute to the worldview of Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison, thus establishing a bond between the authors' worldview and the worldview embodied in Afro-American folk tradition. Also of importance is

demonstrating the techniques of the literary voices and visions that communicate the paradigms.

One definition of folklore leads us to consider more comprehensive concepts embodied in the folk tradition. H. Nigel Thomas broadly defines folklore as "the dramatization of the psychic essences that bind a people. It is therefore the sum total of the rituals, practices, and behaviors undertaken with community sanction to reinforce the beliefs, the values, and the attitudes of a community. Thus, all culturally recognizable codes constitute a part of that culture's folklore" (1). This definition, while compatible with those of Ellison, Cohen, and others, brings to mind another concept embodied in the folk tradition, the folk idea.

Folk ideas may be defined as "traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world" (Dundes 95). These notions are demonstrated in the actions, sayings, and stories of a group and reflect the underlying assumptions that are the building blocks of worldview. Folk ideas, unlike other folk materials, would not constitute a genre of folklore but rather would be expressed in a great variety of different genres. Folk ideas might be expressed through proverbs, folktales, and almost every conventional genre of folklore, as well as through nonfolkloristic

materials (Dundes 95). They are, in other words, a theory of values.

An example of an American folk idea might be the idea that any object can be measured in monetary terms. We see this idea in the expression, "Anything or any person has his/her price." Another American folk idea is that "There is no limit as to how much of any one commodity can be produced." This idea is shown in such traditional phrases as "There's (plenty) more where that came from." Also, countless stories and legends such as the American buried treasure legends uphold his notion of unlimited goods. Another folk idea is the notion that "if something is good for you, it must taste bad." The converse to this folk idea is the notion that "if something tastes good--like candy--it must be bad for your health." Alan Dundes notes that both of these ideas--unlimited good and salvation through suffering--share a commitment to progress. This is consistent with the future orientation of an American worldview which is tied to a "bigger and better principle" (97-98).

Many other American folk ideas provide examples of this concept of folk ideology. Some show opposition in their nature. One is the idea that all individuals are or should be equal in terms of opportunity, which appears clearly in the statement "Any man can be President." "This folk idea is supported by the Puritan ethic and capitalism.

At the same time, there is the folk idea, intimately related to the notion of democracy, that political decisions should be made not on the basis of individual wishes, but on the basis of what is deemed best by and for the majority" (Dundes 99). Thus, the idea of denying individualism in favor of what is best for the group is also an attribute taught to American children but may be in conflict with concepts about the rights of the individual.

Dundes' theory of folk ideas provides a basis for identifying some of the basic cultural premises inherent in a tradition of black fiction that has its beginnings among black female writers with Zora Neale Hurston and is further advanced by key innovators such as Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison. Specific folk ideas exist about growing up female and black; marriage; family; religion; education; and woman's role in career, job, and family. These ideas have particular significance for each writer, especially as they help to define the writer's message about the Afro-American family and Afro-American women. Underlying all these specific folk ideas is a general typology concerning materialism and its incompatibility with black life. This folk idea may be expressed in the belief that material or financial success changes people and makes them become someone other than themselves, hence folk expressions accusing Blacks who have had material success of "being white" or "dichty." In fact, the acquisition of material

wealth or property often is equated with changes in language patterns. We might consider the example of young black college students who are concerned about getting "away from the community" by not being able to communicate with the people in their own language. These students are often reluctant to master Standard English usage, particularly orally, and to learn some concepts because they sense the incongruity or conflict between their home or heritage and the outside world.

Black women writers use ritual, folkloric setting, the folk hero or heroine, folktales and folk expressions, among other genres and forms, to present realistic portrayals of the black community and black life. But most importantly, these women writers have been informed by the folk idea that material gain will provide the "good life." As writers, prophetic speakers to the folk, they invert this folk idea and assert that material gain is incompatible with a fulfilled life or spiritual wholeness. The dominance of the converted folk idea in the fiction of Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison indicates the commitment of these three writers to present those beliefs or aphorisms which undergird the lives of black people, while often showing the falseness and shallowness of modern life or pointing out the disorders in society. Furthermore, the resolutions of this fiction convey the artistic struggle to explain or reconcile history in order

to assert that history is not static or linear, but rather recurring or cyclical. This influence of the folk idea, use of folk materials, and redefinition of history reflects a tradition in the fictional writings of black women.

Since the inception of this study, the purpose has been, rather than to cite specific textual sources of folklore, to explore instead the extensive, sometimes subtle ways that writers have incorporated folk material in fiction. Perceiving folk ideas and other folk materials as media for enhancing creative literature, this study expands the work of those who have raised significant questions regarding the integration of form and content in the works of creative writers who employ folklore in their art. During the course of this research, many others, such as Barbara Smith, Michael Awkward, Majorie Pryse, and Hortense Spillers, have proven that a definite tradition of folklore in the Afro-American novel exists. Their work has greatly illuminated, confirmed, and corroborated the assumptions and research underlying this study.

Perhaps a first in its discussion of the folk idea as it relates to Afro-American fiction, this study affirms the existence of a folk tradition among black women writers and the importance of cultural heritage and identity within that tradition. Therefore, subsequent chapters probe the influences and techniques of Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison. Chapter II establishes Hurston as a forerunner

in the tradition. Chapters III and IV confirm the notion of a heritage for black women writers, since both Marshall and Morrison are indirectly influenced by Hurston and they directly or indirectly affect the work of other black women writers. The study concludes with a review of this folk influence and its implications for other fiction by black women. These writers propose clear directions for human and racial survival which denounce an indulgence in materialism and encourage a movement toward acceptance and understanding of cultural history.

CHAPTER II

ZORA NEALE HURSTON: A FOLKLORIST CREATING FICTION

Probably more than any other Black woman writer in her time, Zora Neale Hurston was aware of the strange mixture of fiction and folk traditions. Robert Hemenway in his biography aptly describes her contribution to the Harlem Renaissance as one who articulated the race spirit by looking to the folk heritage as a source of art: "She more than any other Renaissance artist struggled with the dangers of surveying the masses from the mountaintop, treating the folk material of the race as a landscape to be strip-mined in order to fuel the creative forge" (ZNH 50). As a writer, Hurston's place is secured because of her prolific work and unique sense of self; moreover, her imaginative reworkings of folk materials initiate a tradition among African-American women writers. As a significant forerunner and inspirational and textual source for many later twentieth century fiction writers, including both Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison, Hurston is a pioneer in juxtaposing realistic detail and folk materials while dramatizing the significance of racial heritage and identity. Her role as folklorist creating fiction is clearly seen through an examination of her life and the

plots of her two novels, her depiction of the preacher and the sermon, and her fusion of folklore and romance.

Born in Eatonville, Florida, an all-Black town incorporated in 1866, Hurston was one of eight children born to John and Lucy Hurston. Her father, Reverend John Hurston, moderator of the South Florida Baptist Association, served as mayor of Eatonville for three terms and was a leading figure in the community. John Hurston was a strong yet realistic man who knew the South and its codes for Black people; thus, he discouraged Zora's "spirit." On the other hand, her mother, Lucy Hurston, understood and nurtured the dreams of her youngest daughter and encouraged her to "Jump at de sun." Mrs. Hurston's strength and intelligence in dealing with her husband and daughter greatly influenced Zora's early life, which provides many thoughtful characters and situations in Hurston's fiction. When Zora was nine years old, her mother died; her father remarried shortly thereafter, and she spent most of the following years wandering in search of an outlet for her "spirit." She lived with various relatives, took jobs in private homes, and later worked as a wardrobe girl for a repertory company which provided her with traveling experience as well as experience with life (ZNH 17). While in Baltimore with the repertory company in 1917, Hurston left the company, and entered Morgan Academy to earn her high school diploma. Around 1919, she enrolled

in Howard University in Washington, D.C. While there, she became involved with literary study and met Alain Locke, who encouraged her writing. As a member of the Stylus, a Howard literary club formed by Locke for talented students, Hurston published "Drenched in Light." Even her first stories indicated her interest in sharing her love and understanding of Eatonville and black life. Much of her later fiction was accepted for publication in Opportunity, the publication founded by Charles S. Johnson. In fact, she won several literary prizes. As Hemenway notes, "Hurston was struggling to make literature out of the Eatonville experience. It was her unique subject, and she was encouraged to make it the source of her art" (ZNH 19-20).

In 1920, Hurston arrived in New York to become part of the new Harlem literati. She took advantage of the many dinners and other social events that allowed her to make contacts and friends that would influence and aid her career as a writer. Besides her continued associations with Locke and Johnson, she became friends with other of the young Negro writers, such as Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Bruce Nugent, all of whom would make the Harlem Renaissance the cultural movement it was to become. Also, she met writer Fannie Hurst and became her private secretary. Through this association, Hurston met many prominent persons who helped her with her career and

assisted her in entering Barnard College, the women's division of Columbia University.

Hurston's folk experience came alive in her work once she entered Barnard College and began her study of anthropology with Dr. Franz Boaz. As Robert Hemenway explains, "The academic discipline provided a conceptualization of her folk experience. The Eatonville folk became no longer simply good storytellers, relaxed in their lifestyles, remarkable in their superstitions, creators of profound humor . . . Now they became part of cultural anthropology: scientific objects who could and should be studies for their academic value" (62).

While Hurston had long been aware of the entertainment value of her stories and superstitions, her new studies yielded an even more challenging experience--discovering a framework by which to present her southern folk experience and its meaning without destroying what was authentic and real for her as a person and native Southerner. Her awareness of the tensions involved in living her experience and telling it are best revealed in her statement in Mules and Men:

From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when

I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that. (Mules and Men, 17)

Welcoming the opportunity to examine the source that she knew held so much material for study and believing that the material could be gained without "hurt, harm, or danger," Hurston rushed to Eatonville and other parts of the South to collect the folklore of her people.

Zora Neale Hurston's work includes two collections of folklore, Mules and Men (1935) and Tell My Horse (1938); an autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942); several short stories; and several novels including Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939), and Seraph on the Suwanee (1948).

Many of these works concentrate upon the romantic yet everyday features of life while making clear use of the folk tales, rhymes, idioms, superstitions, games, and customs of her Eatonville experience. While Hurston's primary concern in her work was to "gather the folkways of her people," her skill with folklore and fiction provides the basis for a tradition in Black women's writing.

Early Eatonville experiences provide the foundation for the rich, colorful, and romantic material of much of

Hurston's early work. Obsessed with a concern about intraracial male-female relationships which are supportive and/or stifling, Hurston draws upon real and imagined situations of her own family to develop several complex relationships and characters who live by many basic American ideas, yet who struggle for freedom and happiness as defined by themselves.

These relationships and characterizations show Hurston to be the central figure in a paradigm which examines the concerns of the fictional writings of Black women. Rather than the conventional view of narrative movement as linear in the development of a literary tradition, Hurston's work offers the beginning of a cyclical approach to the use of history, particularly folkloric history, in the Black feminist tradition in fiction. Hurston's concern with both the exterior, as seen through the development of the romance, and the interior, as evidenced in the central characters and dynamics of the narrative, is authenticated and enhanced by her juxtaposition of folk material and realistic detail.

Hurston's first novel clearly shows her utilization of folkloric material in the development of narrative romance. Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934) is the story of John Pearson, who leaves an Alabama plantation to build a life for himself as a preacher and family man. The young John Buddy leaves the home of his mother and step-father, Amy and Ned Crittenden,

after several abusive encounters with his stepfather. He moves to "the other side of the creek" to find work at the Pearson plantation, his mother's former home. As John Buddy adjusts and begins to learn the ways of the people on this side of the creek, he also recognizes his fondness for the girls, particularly the smartest girl in his class, Lucy Potts. Although Lucy is younger than he, John persuades her to marry him despite the objections of her mother, who wants her daughter to marry someone who has more wealth, polish, and promise than John Pearson. Lucy decides to follow her heart rather than be concerned about material gain and social status. After they are married, John continues to have romantic interests in other women and later gets in trouble for stealing, attacks Lucy's brother, and is jailed. The plantation owner--John's probable natural father--bails him out of jail, but advises John to leave town, pointing out that "distance is the only cure for certain diseases" (JGV, 163). John leaves Alabama and heads for Florida. Later, he sends for Lucy and they settle in Eatonville, Florida, an all-Black town.

As John becomes a successful carpenter, prominent member and mayor of the community, and respected preacher and moderator of the Southern Baptist Convention, Lucy encourages and advises him in his political and religious pursuits. However, John's weakness for women continues to be a source of conflict between the couple, and ultimately

Lucy's illness and death and John's progressive cruelty and quick remarriage after Lucy's death become key elements in John's fall into disgrace and despair. After a bitter divorce from his hoo-doo practicing second wife, Hattie, neglect of his children, and his move to another city, where he meets and marries a wealthy widow, John rises again to a position of respect in the church and community and moves back to Eatonville. After yet another adulterous encounter with a young woman, however, he dies in a car accident.

The novel's major theme, man's search for spiritual peace within himself, is clearly delineated through John Pearson's struggle. Lillie Howard notes, "On a literal level, Jonah's Gourd Vine concerns one man's search for spiritual equilibrium. On a broader level, however, John Pearson is a universal symbol for every man who seeks a balance between reconcilable opposites" (Howard 75-76). Howard, like Larry Neal, writer of the introduction to the novel, sees John as "a product of a pre-Christian society which recognizes no dichotomy between the world of spirit and the world of flesh" (76). However one views John's cultural situation, the presence of two conflicting cultural attitudes and the struggle for some kind of reconciliation is clear. John appears to be the biblical Jonah, Samson, and even Christ as Hurston allows her character to develop as the weak, yet human figure who

bewilders his community through his charisma, but is rejected because he cannot reconcile societal expectations and human desire.

Even in her title Hurston denotes the struggle and judgment which she has seen in man. Hurston explained her title in a February 28, 1934, letter to Carl Van Vechten:

Oh yes, the title you didn't understand. (Jonah 4: 6-10). You see the prophet of God sat up under a gourd vine that had grown up in one night. But a cut worm came along and cut it down. Great and sudden growth. One act of malice and it is withered and gone. (quoted in Hemenway ZNH 191)

The title of the book and its theme, according to Bernard Bell, are a rewriting of the verses in Jonah 4: "the biblical parable stresses God's mercy for the repentant sinners of Ninevah, whereas Hurston's narrative emphasizes God's judgment on the Reverend Pearson for his unregenerate lechery" (120).

The people of Eatonville and his second wife see John Pearson as a Jonah's Gourd vine that must be cut down, and Hurston provides a dramatic struggle for her protagonist; he cannot control his weaknesses and does not understand himself. As Robert Hemenway points out, the turning point for John is when he hits Lucy on her deathbed. For the first and only time in their marriage he is physically

abusive with her and "from that moment John's descent begins" (Hemenway ZNH 192). After her death, "John dreams of Lucy, begs her forgiveness, and tries to forget his act, but he cannot do so" (192). He comes to realize that Lucy has protected him from many of the societal affronts that he faces in his marriage to Hattie, who clearly proclaims: "Ah ain't no Miss Lucy, 'cause Ah ain't goin' tuh cloak yo' dirt fuh yuh" (JGV 227). John Pearson comes to realize that what Lucy has always understood about him is what he and others do not understand and cannot reconcile. She has been conscious of his worth as an individual and as a leader in the community and has sought to support and sustain him as others are not willing to do. She is his soul mate, who recognizes his human weaknesses, but concentrates on the positive features of his personality and life. Throughout the novel, Lucy's support of John and their family has been and remains after her death a sustaining force for a man who doesn't know himself. Without her, "he becomes as much the victim of others as of himself" (ZNH 192).

While Hurston's point in Jonah's Gourd Vine may be to show the life of a man, her narrative has value as a clear portrayal of Black folklife. Her portrayal of the folkways is so significant that the novel becomes a repository of folk materials that almost supercede the development of the novel. Hemenway aptly notes,

Jonah's Gourd Vine cannot be properly represented by a plot outline or a discussion of character development. The novel is less a narrative than a series of linguistic moments representing the folklife of the black South. (ZNH 192)

The profuse utilization of folk material in Jonah's Gourd Vine, however, has important meaning in Hurston's conception of the development of her narrative. This meaning becomes clear as one examines Hurston's use of folk expressions in the dialogue of the characters, characterization of the folk preacher/poet, and acknowledgment of the belief in superstition among people of her fictional Southern community. These traditional folk materials further elucidate the folk idea concerning materialism and its incompatibility with spiritual wholeness; Hurston shows the tragedy of her hero, who is at various points estranged from the community but who considers himself a leader. This dichotomy and the incongruity of situations provide the foundation for examining the folk ideology of Hurston.

A most distinctive feature of Zora Neale Hurston's first novel is the language. Hurston attempts to reproduce the language of southern black people, and the dialect produced provides a realistic speech representation for her characters. Spellings such as "Ah" for "I," "uh" for "a," "de" for "the," "heah" for "here," "dis" for "this," and

"fuh" for "for" provide a linguistic representation of long sounds. But the reproduction of a dialect is not Hurston's only purpose for providing realistic language patterns; she also reveals the many colorful and figurative expressions of southern speech.

Beginning with the first sentence in the novel, Hurston presents the metaphors of a simple, yet God-fearing people who explain natural phenomena in the language they know. "God was grumbling His Thunder and Playing the zig-zag lightning thru his fingers" (JGV 9) shows the folk belief in the power of God but the metaphor makes him seem like the gambler and chance taker that the average man might be. The expression also suggests the image of musician or artist, a quality seen in the preacher/poet.

Other statements by various characters show the spirit, vitality, and color Hurston admired in the language of black life. As Hemenway has observed,

A statement of one's independence is "Ahm three three times seben and uh bottom." At parting people say, "See yuh later, and tell yuh straighter." At birth a child's "nable string" is buried under a chinaberry tree. A game of "Hide and Seek" is accompanied by a standard rhyme, probably adapted from jump rope chants:

Ah got up 'bout half-past fo'

Forty fo' robbers wuz 'round mah do'

Ah got up and let 'em in
 Hit 'em ovah de head wid uh rollin' pin.
 All hid? All hid? (ZNH 192)

Most of the major characters in the novel express themselves in such metaphorical language usually to show their strength, their rage, or their understanding of a subject. For example, early in the novel Amy Crittenden, John Buddy's mother, argues with Ned, her husband, and he calls her "a lie." She responds: "Youse uh nother one, Ned Crittenden! Don't you lak it, don't take it, heah mah collar come and you shake it!" (JGV 17). This familiar retort is one used by many youngsters in response to dares and name calling, and this use by Amy and the words that follow are examples of her linguistic ability to confront her husband and "put him in his place" (my quotes). Later, in a more playful scene, as John Buddy tells Lucy that she can be handled easily,

"You ain't even uh handful."

Lucy put herself akimbo, "Ahm uh little piece uh leather, but well put t'gether, Ah thankee, Mist' John." (JGV 69)

Both Amy Crittenden and Lucy Potts Pearson exhibit skill at verbal duelling in several scenes in the novel.

It would be impossible and pointless to try to count or recount the many folk expressions Hurston's characters use during their dialogues and speeches in Jonah's Gourd

Vine; we might simply say that every character parades Hurston's awareness of the idiom and metaphor of her people. While one might think that Hurston means only to show the spirit, games, rhyme, and metaphor of the language, she has much more purpose for her use of the metaphorical folk talk of black people. Several scenes point out the serious issues that her characters address.

During an argument with Ned, who accuses her of spoiling her son and treating him special, Amy Crittenden discusses the issue of black folk learning to love their children. Ned says to her: "Wese all niggers tuhgether, ain't us? White man don't keer no mo' 'bout one dn he do de other" (JGV 16). Amy responds:

Course dey don't, but we ain't got tuh let de white folks love our chillun fuh us, is us? Dass jest de pint. We black folks don't love our chillun. We couldn't do it when we wuz in slavery. We borned 'em but dat didn't make 'em ourn. Dey b'longed tuh old Massa. "Twan't no use in treasurin' other folkses property. It wuz liable tuh be took uhway any day. But we's free folks now. De big bell done rung! Us chillun is ourn. Ah doan know, mebbe hit'll take some of us generations, but us got tuh 'gin tuh practise on treasurin' our younguns. Ah loves dese heah

already uh whole heap. Ah don't want 'em knocked
and 'breked. (JGV 16)

This passionate speech by a mother, who tries to protect her children from a man who does not believe that parents should "spare de rod and spile de child," is a key statement of folk ideas surrounding the rearing of children, especially the male child in the black community. In fact this idea is repeated in later novels by black women writers and child-rearing becomes a central issue in some works of the 1970s.

Another instance of the use of metaphorical language for more serious situations occurs during John and Lucy's courtship. In a scene in which John and Lucy are talking and John proposes marriage in a traditional folk context, both characters show their familiarity with folk art:

"Lucy, you pay much 'tention tuh birds?"

"Unhunh. De Jay bird say "Laz'ness will kill you,' and he go to hell ev'ry Friday and totes uh grain uh sand in his mouf tuh put out de fire, and den de doves say, 'Where you been so long?'"

John cut her short. "Ah don't mean dat way, Lucy. Whut Ah wants tuh know is, which would you ruther be, if you had yo' ruthers--uh lark uh flyin', uh uh dove uh settin'?"

"Ah don't know whut you talkin' 'bout, John. It mus' be uh new riddle."

"Naw 'tain't, Lucy. Po' me, Lucy. Ahm uh one wingded bird. Don't leave me lak dat, Lucy."

Suddenly Lucy shouted, "Look, John, de knot is tied right, ain't it pretty?"

"Yeah, Lucy iss sho pretty. We done took and tied dis knot, Miss Lucy, less tie uh 'nother one." (JGV 124-25)

This passage indicates John's folk manner of asking Lucy if she would rather be single or married, a lark flying or a dove setting. Robert Hemenway notes that "John's query about birds is a ritualistic opening to a courting formula that existed among slaves in the nineteenth century and that has a number of twentieth-century descendants" ("Lark or Dove" 135). Several sources for the folk ritual are cited by Hemenway, but he notes that "the significance of Hurston's representation is that Lucy, either deliberately or out of inexperience (she is only fourteen at the time), misunderstands" (135). Hurston takes the opportunity to again show the class and cultural differences between John, son of an ex-slave who has grown up on a plantation, and Lucy, daughter of free blacks who are an upwardly mobile landholding family. "Lucy, in a sense, represents the new ways, John the old" (139). As Hemenway has aptly noted in his article, this passage provides significant material for analysis and discussion of several aspects of Hurston's use

of folkloric material and shows the metaphorical language of the novel at its best.

Similarly, Jonah's Gourd Vine provides an opportunity for Hurston to emphasize another feature of the language of black folk culture, the poetry as expressed by the black preacher. Her original dedication to the novel read: "To the first and only real Negro poets in America--the preachers, who bring barbaric splendor of word and song into the camp of the mockers" (Hemenway 195).

A major focus of Hurston's narrative in the novel is the character of John Pearson as a black preacher who falls into disgrace but later is redeemed (in the narrative) because of his contrite posture. Pearson is a folk preacher-poet whose charisma leads to his success with both church congregation and women in his secular dealings. Hurston's characterization of John as a preacher is enhanced by the author's understanding of the relationship between the black preacher and folk art. Hurston sees the black preacher as an artist whose performance is expected to be reflective of the folkways and understandings of the people of the community. He articulates with superior poetic style the yearnings and beliefs of the people. He is aware of the oppressive life of the community and has learned "the words and ways (of courtship), the poetic ceremonies that adorned life under an oppressive system" (193). John is a human being who possesses the drama and

poetry needed by a black preacher. As Hurston explained about her character to James Weldon Johnson:

John was to be "a Negro preacher who is neither funny nor an imitation Puritan ram rod in pants. Just the human being and poet that he must be to succeed in a Negro pulpit." (quoted in Hemenway 193)

Robert Hemenway provides a key to understanding the importance of the preacher-poet image in the novel by maintaining, "The preacher as poet is the dominant theme in the novel, and it is the quality of imagination--his image-making faculty--that always redeems John's human failings" (193). Like the classic black preacher, John possesses skill at delivering the sermon which is characterized by chanting and call-response technique; classic rhetorical and narrative techniques; stories from the Bible, folklore, current events, and other sources; well-known "folk sermons" affixed to another sermon; and dramatize use of tropes, particularly from the Bible, spirituals, and other sermons. As Robert G. O'Meally argues, these qualities of the highly conventionalized craft of sacred black oratory make it a folkloric process (194-195). Hurston is conscious of the process and, in this novel, is more interested in the performance of the sermon than in her character the preacher.

Several incidents in the novel provide evidence of John Pearson's skill in image-making that cause the congregation and his family to forget his human errors and respect his oratory. After one of his evenings away from home with one of his lovers, Big 'Oman, John is found unconscious and taken home. Lucy thinks that he may be dead. When he awakens and they discuss his indiscretion, John admits that his activities with Big 'Oman are "the brutebeast" in him and promises if given another chance, he will mend his ways. He attends the next big meeting and prays in church. His prayer causes the deacons to comment upon his words and his voice. The last lines contain the figurative language and Biblical references found in sermons:

You are de same God, Ah
 Dat heard de sinner man cry.
 Same God dat sent de zigzag lightning tuh
 Join de mutterin' thunder.
 Same God dat holds de elements
 In un unbroken chain of controllment.
 Same God dat hung on Cavalry and died,
 Dat we might have a right tuh de tree of life--
 We thank thee that our sleeping couch
 Was not our cooling board,
 Our cover was not our winding sheet . . .
 Please tuh give us uh restin' place

Where we can praise Thy name forever,

Amen.

(JGV 145-46)

Hurston allows John to display the poetic skill of mixing images of nature as in the "thunder," "lightening," and "tree of life" with more practical and materialistic images to which the people respond such as the "couch," "cooling board," and "winding sheet" as he contrasts life and death. John has grasped the preacher's talent for image-making and is not reluctant to pray at future meetings. "John never made a balk at a prayer. Some new figure, some new praise-giving name for God, every time he knelt in church. He rolled his African drum up to the altar, and called his Congo Gods by Christian names" (JGV 145-46). His prayers even make converts respond and join the church, which is more than the pastor is able to do. His skill is translated from his primitive, pre-Christian past. Although his gifts as a preacher are acknowledged even before he considers himself a man of God, his ways in his secular life are still the talk of the community.

In other incidents, John is accused of adulterous affairs and the people threaten him with "setting you down" or dismissal from the church. Wisely, Lucy advises him to preach about himself and to be honest in his sermon. He preaches and leaves the pulpit after his sermon, but the deacons stop him by laying on hands, similar to the

healing, supportive African ritual. John is restored to the pulpit and forgiven by the people. The board of deacons plans to replace John and bring another minister. John is made aware of this and preaches his "far-famed" Dry Bones sermon. This sermon, based on Ezekiel's vision, is a classic folk sermon and has been delivered by many preachers in many versions. Hurston adapts this sermon to her narrative and the response of John Pearson's congregation saves him and makes him the acclaimed pastor for that day. Several members of the congregation comment upon Pearson: "Dat's uh preachin' piece uh plunder, you hear me?" (JGV 247). After the other preacher speaks about the race problem, another woman comments on his sermon, ". . . dat wan't no sermon. Dat wuz uh lecture" (250). These scenes reflect the preference for the preacher "to take his text from the Bible," as Pearson does, and for audience arousal.

Hurston includes one complete sermon in the text in which John Pearson displays even more of the qualities of the black preacher who arouses his audience. She comments on the "bearing up" at the service and provides a note in the glossary to explain the breathing or straining of the preacher, which further indicates her concern with performance of the sermon. These sermons and their performance provide the ritual which suspends John Pearson above the people, yet he fails to reconcile his impulsive

and adulterous behavior with his Christian calling. John is depicted as a complex man who has warring spirits within him: the primitive artist who must dance to his drums and knows no separation of body and spirit and the man who must respond to the laws and customs of his society. The past and present, the old order and the new age struggle within a man who understands little about either. As the preacher states at Pearson's funeral, "He wuz uh man, and nobody knowed 'im but God . . ." (312).

A logical extension of the folk expressions, rituals and customs of Hurston's community is the acknowledgment of the belief in superstition. Superstition becomes the medium by which Hattie, John's second wife, and other members of the community intend to discard John. John is afraid after Lucy's death and learns that Hattie has practiced hoodoo to get him to marry her. Hattie has visited An' Dangie Dewoe, the best conjure woman in the area, since she first met John Pearson in an attempt to cause him to leave his wife. Once Lucy is dead, Hattie asks for more conjure to snare John. John's friends want to testify in divorce court about her tactic. One of the members says, "Ah wanted tuh tell de judge 'bout all dat conjure and all dem roots she been workin' on you. Feedin' you outa her body--" (JGV 261). She has worked a "mojo" on him. But John refuses to fight Hattie in court. His response to the conjure is through his Christian faith, as

he recognizes that the Christian people will rally to help him fight the hoodoo. As one of the deacons tells Hattie when she asks about some conjure men:

Look at Moses. He's de greatest hoodoo man dat God ever made. . . . De Bible is de best conjure book in de world. (JGV 231)

This struggle between the Christian preacher/poet and hoodoo creates even greater tension for the hero of Hurston's novel. He must reconcile primitive impulses and his art. Thus, Hurston has introduced the folk hero who must reconcile his art and art form. This folk hero, the treatment of superstition, and folk expressions provide the major forms of folk material of the novel. Hurston's efforts to incorporate folk elements into the narrative reveal a progressive movement from exterior usage, as with adaptation and imitation of folklore, to interior usage, as revealed in the conflict between Christian belief and hoodoo. The progression in technique is more apparent in her later novel as she continues to depict the folkways of her people.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston provides more carefully integrated folklore and a more sophisticated development of the romance narrative than in Jonah's Gourd Vine. Hurston's first attempt at longer narrative writing produced a novel packed with folkloric material, which includes folk expressions and phrases, a

folk hero who is the classic folk preacher/poet, and the treatment of superstition. In fact, her depiction of the folkways of her people circumvents the narrative. Her second novel, while still concerned with folk materials, has a more clearly structured plot, clearly developed characters, and specific themes and techniques which are enhanced by the utilization of folk materials.

A common reading of Their Eyes Were Watching God is that it is a romantic story in which Janie Crawford, the protagonist, searches for a true love and her own identity. Janie becomes aware of nature and the possibilities of love when she observes the signs of mating in nature. She watches the bee and the trees and is sensually stimulated. Absorbed in the workings of nature, Janie responds to the kiss of Johnny Taylor, a ne'er-do-well from the community. Realizing Janie's natural stage of curiosity, her granny rushes to promote a suitable match for her granddaughter with Logan Killicks, an older man who owns property. Granny believes that Killicks can provide for Janie material possessions, stability, protection, and respectability through marriage. Faced with the reality of the marriage with Killicks, Janie realizes that she doesn't have the feelings that she expects from a fulfilling marriage. She has envisioned her own life "like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone" (TEWWG 20), but her life with

Killicks distorts her vision. "The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn't know how to tell Nanny that" (28). After Nanny's death, Janie becomes even more disillusioned with the drudgery and confinement of her marriage. Therefore, she is easily distracted by the young ambitious man she meets on the road. She leaves Killicks for Joe Starks, "a citified, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle" who has a dream of becoming "a big voice" (47). He becomes prosperous as the mayor of Eatonville and proprietor of the general store. But over the years Janie realizes that Stark's prosperity and authority lead to possessiveness and brutality, and her love for him fades.

Janie has been a woman with a dream, a romantic adventurer, and only more adventure makes her happy after Stark's death. This comes in the form of Tea Cake, whose real name is Vergible Woods (True Nature). She thinks, "He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring" (161). Tea Cake fits her vision of happiness. As Janie tells her story to her friend Phoeby, whose name recalls the Greek God Phoebus Apollo, and looks back on her adventures, she is aware of the folk idea that material gain does not bring happiness. She has had it all and finds contentment down on the muck with Tea Cake, a man who brings limited property but much spirit to their marriage. Her

relationship with Tea Cake encourages the flowering of her happiness. Their journey to the muck brings fulfillment for Tea Cake, also since he confesses, "Ah feels lak uh motherless chile round heah" (255-56), before they leave Eatonville.

On its most simplistic and literal level, Their Eyes Were Watching God is a romance, but careful study forces the reader to look at theme, setting, language, and other techniques. Much scholarly emphasis has been placed on the themes of the novel. The major theme is the search for identity. Other themes include intraracial prejudice, sex stereotyping, and freedom from materialism. More recently, attention has been given to techniques of the novelist. One of these is the use of folk material in the novel. However, Hurston does not use folklore merely to portray a quaint picturesque group, but to explore issues and to show how the folk interpret them, to some degree (Grimes 18).

The most obvious and perhaps the most important example of folk material in Their Eyes Were Watching God is the storefront porch. The storefront porch serves as a vehicle for communication and fellowship among the men of the community. Also, Joe Stark's storefront becomes a political platform where Starks exhibits his prestige and authority within the town. The men who assemble on the porch become his audience and the activity of sitting on the porch and telling "lies" (as the stories and yarns are

referred to) is a primary male ritual in the town. Robert Hemenway notes,

When Hurston writes of Eatonville, the store porch is all-important. It is the center of the community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it is where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior. The store porch, in Zora's language, is the "center of the world." To describe the porch's activities she often uses the phrase: "crayon enlargements of life"--"When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to." It is on the store porch that the lying competition takes place, "a contest in hyperbole and carried out for no other reason." The store porch is where "big picture talkers" use "a side of the world for a canvas" as they create a portrait of communal values. (ZNH 239)

As a narrative strategy, Hurston's storefront porch has a function similar to the chorus in classical Greek literature. The group of townsmen assemble there regularly to comment upon the happenings (action) and issues (themes) of the townspeople. They mention specific characters and

give details which a reader might not learn from other characters or means within the narrative. Also, similar to the chorus of classical literature, there may be one or several voices which provide the comments and enlighten the reader about the culture and customs. Attention to these functions and realistic specific detail and folk materials make Hurston's storefront porch a unique example of folkloric setting, a place, time, and/or atmosphere which characterizes a specific group or community of people. Hurston has been aware of this communal setting in her own hometown and has depicted it in most of her short stories and novels. The proprietor is usually Joe Clarke, who in this novel is represented by the major character Joe Starks.

The language of the folk of Eatonville is vividly exemplified in the dialogues of the men who sit on the porch of Joe Stark's general store. Also, their discussions concerning women, relationships between husbands and wives, and issues about the town reveal the importance of this fraternizing (camaraderie) and sense of community to the people of the town. For example, the men observe Joe Starks giving Mrs. Tony Robbins some meat for herself and her children. After begging and persuading Starks to give her a larger piece of meat, she leaves the store and the men begin to talk about her antics and how she disgraces her husband. Several men boast about what

they would do if she were married to them. The men enjoy bragging, boasting, and commenting upon this situation and what they believe to be true about women in general.

Significantly, this incident ends with the first time Janie thrusts her own opinions into the men's conversations on the porch and she tells them that they don't know all they think they know about women.

In another instance, the men joke about Matt Bonner and his skinny mule, but in their joking they exaggerate the circumstances and appearance of the mule. When the mule dies, the men and Joe Starks give him a funeral: "Out on the swamp they made great ceremony over the mule. They mocked everything human in death . . ." (95). The events leading up to the funeral for the mule and the funeral itself are examples of Hurston's use of the storytelling mode and the call-response technique. Hurston even exaggerates the scene after the funeral as the buzzards take over the mule's body. The buzzards have a chance to give the mule a funeral involving a call-response ritual. Call-response is the "spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all the speaker's statements ('calls') are punctuated by expressions ('responses') from the listener" (Smitherman 104). This technique is evident in sermons such as those Hurston incorporates in Jonah's Gourd Vine, but in this context the call-response is more secular, since it is part

of the mock ceremony of buzzards. The lead buzzard lights on the ground and walks around the body. He peers into the mule's nose and mouth and then leaps upon the body and bows as if in a dance. The other buzzards begin to dance in response and the lead buzzard pauses and begins the chant:

"What killed this man?"

The chorus answered, "Bare, bare fat."

"What killed this man?"

"Bare, bare fat."

"What killed this man?"

"Bare, bare fat."

"Who'll stand his funeral?"

"We!!!!!"

"Well, all right now." (TEWWG 97)

After this ritual, the leader picks the mule's eyes out "in the ceremonial way" and the others proceed in the feast. Hurston uses this animal ritual to accentuate the mock sermon that Joe Starks has performed prior to this scene, while using folk materials such as animal tales and call-response to heighten the storytelling mode of the novel.

The idiom of the characters is realistic and words, phrases, and expressions used often force the reader to laugh, become perplexed about what is meant, or certainly acknowledge the uniqueness of the expressions. For example, Joe Starks says to the townspeople about the hospitality needed to show off their new street light:

"Y'all know we can't invite people to our town just dry long so. I god Naw" (TEWWG 71). He then proceeds to plan a lavish celebration for the new street light. His use of the term drylongso, meaning ordinary or plain, indicates his unwillingness to have people see the city just as it is in its ordinary state.

Another influence of the folk material is evidenced in the name of at least one of Hurston's characters. Janie's happiness with Tea Cake brings to mind a folktale recorded by J. Mason Brewer in American Negro Folklore and classified by Brewer as a reality-thinking tale, an anecdote or folktale portraying real life situations with human beings as characters. Hurston collected a large body of these type of tales in Mules and Men. The tale "Little Nero and the Magic Tea Cakes" tells of a little boy whose mother is killed in a wreck and he goes to live with his grandmother. Although the grandmother tries in every way to make him happy, little Nero is sad. He doesn't even eat the many cakes, pies, and other sweets that his grandmother bakes for him. One night, he wakes after feeling something hot blow on his face. He finds a puff of smoke, and as it gets to his bed, the puff of smoke turns into a big white dog that starts to cough up tea cakes. Nero goes over and eats the teacakes and finds that they satisfy his appetite. As the dog continues to cough up the teacakes, little Nero goes into the kitchen and gets a flour sack and puts as

many cakes as he can into the sack to save for another day. The next morning, his grandmother finds Nero acting so happy that she asks what has happened. He shows her the sack full of teacakes and explains what has happened during the night. Although she doubts what he says happened, she is glad that something has happened to make the boy happy. They notice that no matter how many tea cakes Nero eats in a day, the sack refills every night. Later, when the boy's father comes to visit, he sees the cakes and says that those are the same kind of teacakes that the boy's mother used to bake for him.

Hurston's familiarity with reality-tales may be the basis for the name Tea Cake. He is for Janie more than just the "sweet man" figure that the other folk in the community believe; he is the person that can satisfy her yearning to live. He teaches her to enjoy life, and she becomes the free spirit that she has felt inside herself trying to get out since she first came into womanhood. Janie's years of unhappiness are similar to little Nero's, and she must have her Tea Cake to satisfy her appetite for life.

Other folktales abound as sources for Hurston's narrative situations and tales. Early in the novel, Nanny's statements on the status of women contain a motif which is also found in a tale in Mules and Men. A tale told to Hurston explains "Why the Sister in Black Works

Hardest." According to the tale, after God finished creating the world, he made a big bundle and set it in the middle of the road. After it was there for a long time (thousands of years), "Ole Missus" told "Ole Massa" to pick it up. The white man told the black man to pick up the load and the black man told the black woman to pick up the load. The black woman thought that such a big box must have something good in it, so she picked it up. She looked in the box to find it full of hard work (101-102).

This notion of hard work as the plight of the black woman is compatible with Nanny's reference to the status of the black woman and the mule. She tells Janie, "De Nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see." Of course, the mule is a recurring symbol in the book and is clearly a symbol for the patience and long-suffering that is characteristic of the black woman.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a display of Hurston's use of folk setting, folk idiom and expressions, call-response, and folktales to advance the plot, to characterize, and to explain or exemplify the nature of the community/society. However, the more complex use of folk materials is seen through her use of folk ideas, "traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world" (Dundes 95).

These ideas have particular significance for Hurston's message about the African-American woman and her relationship to herself, her family, and her community. Hurston refutes the traditional ideal of women by creating Janie Crawford, a character who cannot live with the traditional ideas about women and who becomes for us a folk heroine. Underlying all the ideas is the general folk idea that material gain is not compatible with happiness. This folk idea becomes a major theme within the novel, although it must be presented as a "counteridea" to what other characters believe and communicate to Janie.

Sherley Anne Williams in Give Birth to Brightness defines the folk hero as a hero of the lower classes, who champions the rights of the poor against the rich. She qualifies this hero in Neo-Black literature, since the folk hero approaches the "anti-hero," who appears in many forms. However, she notes that the "basic characteristic which is common to all (anti-heroes, thus folk heroes) and which links them in a kind of impotent rebellion against society is their quarrel with the culture from which they come" (53). Hurston's familiarity with larger than life folk figures and traditional folklore provides background for her development of a heroine who is in conflict with the ideas of her community.

Janie Crawford is significant as a folk heroine because she searches for her identity and rejects the

materialistic values of her community, which is emerging from slavery and moving toward becoming a more upwardly mobile city of the post-war era. Because she champions the ideas and positions of the underclass, in this case women, Janie becomes a symbol for the self-aware, self-defining woman. It is no wonder that Hurston's character has become a major image for women of the later twentieth century and a key figure for discussions about self-consciousness in Women's Studies classes. However, Janie's articulation of her own desires and values comes only after a prolonged search which represents a historical continuum that ends in a profound statement regarding the relationships of men and women, while mirroring the economic and political history of this country.

In Specifying, Susan Willis discusses history as a dialectical process and maintains that Their Eyes Were Watching God works through three historically produced economic modes (46). Willis states:

. . . the novel welds the authorial persona to the figure of the protagonist, Janie . . . , and articulates its dialectic through her movements through geography and through three very different relationships to men. The economics of marriage are, in this novel, the figuration of larger historical forms. (46)

This dialectic along with images of particular political perspectives espoused by blacks form an interesting examination of Janie's marriages.

Janie's first marriage is a relationship that suggests the system of sharecropping (Willis 46). Logan Killicks, her first husband, knows only the value of hard work and gaining property. Since he is part of the generation recently removed from slavery, he espouses the ethics of Booker T. Washington and other former slaves and children of slaves--work hard and save. Janie's dreams have little time for flourishing in this rural environment which promotes backbending work and little relaxation for every member of the family. As Willis notes, "Killicks has never laid a hostile hand on Janie. Rather, [the oppression] resides in the stifling of dreams; the denial of art, imagination and creativity" (47). Hurston's name for Killicks hints at the conflict between creativity and the unbearable work load which can "kill it." The image of the mule as beast of burden vividly comes to mind as we remember Granny's words and consider Janie's work in the fields and household of Logan Killicks.

For Janie, Joe Starks presents a totally new perspective on life. He represents the black man's move from the agrarian environment to the city, even though this is not a migration to the large cities of the north. Joe's move to the city introduces entrepreneurship, political

leadership and independence as possibilities for black people. Starks wants to own a general store in a new town and recognizes the value of property ownership as a means of influence. He wants to provide in his store a meeting place for the townspeople. The lifestyle which is sought and achieved is the bourgeois life. Starks becomes the New Negro landowner and merchant. Commenting upon the economic factors of Janie's second marriage, Willis states, "Joe Starks represents the nascent black bourgeoisie, hell-bent for progress and ready to beat white society at its own game" (47). He imitates the southern landowner even in his attitudes toward women. Janie becomes for Joe a commodity for other men to view but not touch or involve any personal contact. He forces Janie to wear a scarf over her long, beautiful hair while she works in the store so, that he saves her actual beauty for himself, the master of the house. "With her second marriage, Janie's sexuality enters into a system of display and exchange defined by the market under capitalism" (Willis 50). For Starks, Janie resembles the traditional notion of the southern belle who must be viewed from afar and kept on a pedestal. Willis makes a comparison between the way Starks turns Matt Boner's mule into an object at the mock funeral and his treatment of Janie. "If Janie was a beast of burden in her first life, she has, in her bourgeois life, become a domestic pet" (50). She is for him an object, a possession, or an

extension of himself as "Mrs. Mayor Starks" and not a person on her own. Hurston reminds the reader of the barrenness of this relationship in the name Starks. He is the blunt, loud voice of the town who in reality has no real substance and provides for Janie only material things, no life. Michael Awkward points out how this relationship approximates the white man's almost total control of America and observes that "Starks' capitalist text is derived from theories that whites used to justify the commodification of blacks" (28). By insisting that Janie can "see ten things and don't understand one" (TEWWG 101), he asserts that as a woman she is inferior to him; thus, he justifies his virtual enslavement of her.

As Janie becomes more disillusioned with her marriage to Joe Starks, she thinks, "He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it" (111). After Janie's realization, Hurston's narrator comments that the "spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor" (111). Janie lives with her disillusionment and struggles to maintain some respect for Starks. However, when he slaps her in a scene at dinner, Janie experiences a total change in her image of Starks:

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her

image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. (112)

Hurston employs imagery that recalls the commodities of the store to detail Janie's disillusionment with her oppressive second marriage and assert her psychological rejection of Joe Starks' marital proprietorship. Nevertheless, Janie takes no action against Starks and continues to play the part of the dutiful wife until his death. The periods of waiting and silence before Joe's death are significant for Janie, since through these silences she is able to reflect on and examine her own life. Much earlier in the narrative, Hurston has observed, "Janie [was] full of that oldest human longing--self revelation" (18). Self-revelation emerges by the end of the story, and the reader is privy to many of the elements of that awareness.

The marriage with Killicks has mimicked the oppressive sharecropping system which ties its subjects to the land with no consideration of human needs, and the relationship with Starks has demonstrated the capitalist system with its trade, acquisition, and domination by the businessman with greatest gain. Thus, Janie's third marriage, with Tea Cake, holds positive contrast. The relationship with Tea Cake, as Willis indicates, "offers a utopian betrayal of history's dialectic" (48). Rather than allow Janie to flee the South in search of a new life, Hurston proposes the

idea of happiness even farther south than Eatonville in the Everglades. Tea Cake offers an ideal relationship of happiness and reciprocity with little use for the conventional economic systems. He works long enough to get the money he needs, then, enjoys spending it. Unlike Killicks and Starks, his life is not dominated with work or acquisition of property. His only real possession is his guitar and, when given an opportunity, he splurges with Janie's money in order to find out "how rich people feel" (TEWWG 185). Even after this spree, all he really needs is a kiss and hug from Janie. Tea Cake introduces Janie to the more affective mode of living that she has dreamed about. Janie concedes that her marriage to Tea Cake is different from the others. This time she intends to satisfy her own desires and leaves Eatonville so that comparisons are not made and he is not forced to deal with the values of the community. She tells Phoeby that they are going "off somewhere to start all over in Tea Cake's way. Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game" (171). She and Tea Cake plan a relationship of caring and mutual respect which is not bound by the notions of other people. Tea Cake teaches her to have fun, play cards and other games, and, most of all, to become involved in the life of the community on the muck. Janie becomes a participant rather

than a slave, possession, or an object, and this participation brings a new sense of freedom and self-worth.

Hurston's political solution for the relationship with Tea Cake is a broader concept than in the other marriages. Killicks has espoused a kind of post-slavery accommodationism, while Starks reveals the post-Reconstruction assimilationist attitude of developing himself and gaining wealth so that he is an acceptable member of the mainstream society. Tea Cake rejects these positions and moves among the people. In assessing this development, one might consider Willis' notions that Hurston proposes a contrast to the historical migrations of black people to the industrialized cities and shows people happy in the rural south, or even more south than the rural South on the "muck," articulating the recovery of Caribbean culture (48). This is certainly a valid possibility, since Hurston is aware of the African traditions in Caribbean culture and provides for Janie and Tea Cake an environment which recalls their African origins and traditions. While Tea Cake's choice of the muck may also be a manifestation of the Washingtonian theory of "Cast down your buckets where you are," thriving and producing in the environment and among the people you have known, it may also be a call for collectivism as advocated by black nationalists who recognize the value of black people working together for the good of all, toward self-determinism for the race.

However one interprets this choice of place and community, the difference in Janie's life with Tea Cake and that with her two previous husbands underscores the happiness, equality, and sensuality that she desires but has never encountered.

The blissful coexistence with Tea Cake is a new and different experience for Janie, but all is not always equal. Several critics have noted that the novel does not support the notion that Janie and Tea Cake are coequal voices in their relationship. Michael Awkward sees clearly that

Tea Cake differs significantly from Starks in his view of the role of women, or, more specifically, of Janie in marriage. . . . However, his difference should not necessarily be taken as evidence that he holds a late-twentieth-century, liberated male's attitude toward women. For, in a number of instances, he, too, exhibits traditionally sexist behavior that undermines a reader's ability to interpret his character in a wholly positive way. (36).

Since Janie has lived in a very passive mode most of her life--first with Granny, then under Killicks' rules, then as Starks' wife and helper--she is often passive toward Tea Cake's "aggressively sexist behavior" (36). She has been shielded and protected, even though she may not have wanted

that treatment; thus, she is hesitant to participate in life. Her hesitancy is normal for those who have had restraints, and her expectations of men have been influenced by the men she has known, even though her dreams are for something else. Janie is quite content to participate in Tea Cake's world, but she approaches this world with caution, because she has been so sheltered. On the other hand, one must consider that Tea Cake is a product of his time, and for a time before the Sixties, one would not expect a man of his time to be totally without some sexist behavior. As Cheryl Wall notes:

Even Tea Cake, strongly idealized character though he is, had had difficulty accepting Janie's full participation in their life together. Zora Hurston knew that Tea Cake, a son of the folk culture, would have inherited its negative attitudes toward women. . . . Under pressure, Tea Cake occasionally falls back on the prerogatives of his sex. . . . In the main, though, Tea Cake transcends his chauvinistic attitudes of the group. He largely keeps his pledge to Janie that she "partake wid everything." (388)

In this setting, a man with no major flaws who will on occasion participate in the sexist rituals of the group, such as beating his wife, can have redeeming qualities for

a woman who is growing into her own sense of self. Tea Cake

offers Janie an active participation in the traditions and rituals of her culture. He also provides the means for Janie to create a sincere appreciation of her own physical and spiritual beauty. This knowledge allows her to experience, through the customs and lore of her people, her culture's power. (Awkward 52)

As Janie gains knowledge about her culture, she develops an awareness of herself and her own voice, her own beliefs, her own text.

In Janie's search for self she becomes a storyteller and develops a voice as a narrator. Much critical speculation concerning the shifts in point of view in Their Eyes Were Watching God focuses upon Janie's silences and Hurston's shifts to an omniscient narrator at several points in the novel. Michael Awkward notes that Janie's text, the delineation of her life story, "has presented problems for critics who see her sometimes painful experience as concluding ultimately in a self-possessed liberation symbolized by and, indeed, accomplished by means of her achievement of a powerful cultural voice" (44). Awkward sees such a reading as problematic "primarily because Janie does not (after insisting in her conversation

with Phoeby that she will) narrate her own story in the novel" (44).¹

According to Karla Holloway's explanation, Janie Crawford achieves her voice as storyteller and character while gradually absorbing the blended voice of an omniscient narrator/storyteller which embodies the black mythology or cultural elements of the story.² Although

¹Critics have found the narrative shifts to be problematic. Darwin Turner and Robert Hemenway note the awkward shifts in person. Some critics have merely indicated the problem or have suggested revisionist interpretations and reasons for the shifts as they relate to Janie's development. Awkward briefly discusses the concerns of critics including Robert Stepto in From Behind the Veil, Deborah McDowell in her essay "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," and Wendy McCredie in "Authority and Authorization in Their Eyes Were Watching God." He agrees that Hurston was concerned with discussing the possible potency of voice and the consequences of its absence and sees the faulty narrative strategies to be a successful act in the denigration of the novel," which is his term for successful transformations of Western cultural and expressive systems to reflect Afro-American "intention" and "accent" (48). In other words, Hurston's narrative, however faulty, achieves its flavor and context through Hurston's focus on folkways and folk material.

²Another interesting interpretation is Karla Holloway's view of the narrator's role as "the key to understanding Hurston's system that blended her knowledge of literary universes and linguistic systems" (49). Rather than identifying narrative shifts in Hurston's novels, Holloway explores the "disembodied nature of the narrative voice." The narrative voice "presides over the activity of the novel; it is omniscient, and it functions as a link between the conscious and visible activity of the novel and the unconscious passive awareness." Holloway explains the division between narrator and character by using linguistic terminology to show how a "final marriage of voices is accomplished almost without the reader's awareness" (52). She equates the narrator with the deep structure of the novel, representing the underlying competence of a

Janie doesn't actually narrate the entire story, her ascending consciousness allows her to achieve the knowledge or "poetic understanding" of the omniscient narrator. As Holloway states, "In the novels, the voice will eventually release its knowledge to the character and blend its consciousness with the protagonist" (52-53).

Another feature of the characterization of the folk hero, or heroine, is imagery which binds the figure to particular ideas or notions. Hurston emphasizes the importance of nature to folk life by showing the relationship of narrative and character through nature images associated with Janie. As Holloway has determined:

Most frequently, the narrative relationship established with the character who is to come to self-actualization within the course of the story complements this character with parallels drawn between him and nature. It is a choice that grounds the text in African mythology and does so to enable the dialogue of the characters to be surrounded with some measure of the truth that they will eventually come to recognize. (53)

character who is brought to a realization of self, and equates the character with the surface structure, participating only externally in the text until this level of self-knowledge is attained.

This point is made clear through an examination of the parallels between Janie and nature which occur throughout the novel, beginning with her earliest vision of the blossoming pear tree as she feels the urge to struggle with life. She wishes, "Oh to be a pear tree--any tree in bloom" (TEWWG 25). Later as she reflects upon the deterioration of her marriage with Joe Starks: "The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. . . . She wasn't petal-open anymore with him" (112). Her image of Joe changes, as seen in the images of merchandising cited earlier. Joe's concern with merchandise exacerbates the situation for Janie, who recognizes that ambition and monetary success are not part of the vision she has had since girlhood. Her vision includes the responses and images of living organisms, and her life with Starks no longer reveals those responses and images: "She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be" (112).

After Joe's death, when she thinks "resisting thoughts" (160) about Tea Cake, the images of nature, not of store merchandising, recur; her connection with folk life is restored; and her vision of happiness returns:

He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps.

Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took.

Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God.

(161)

Unlike the image of merchandise on a shelf connected with Joe Starks, a concept of enclosure and rigid order, Tea Cake is associated with openness and the blossoms and smells of nature. In their life together they enjoy work in the fields picking beans, which reinforces the images of collectivity in the community and the openness of nature.

The storm, another nature image paralleling Janie's life on the muck, reinforces the sense of meaning found in a setting where commercialism is meaningless. The storm is described by personification and by how other forms of nature respond to it: "The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel" (239); "The lake was coming on" (240); the "wind had romped among lakes and trees" (247); a man clings to a cypress tree; and Janie and Tea Cake are confronted by rattlesnakes, a cow, and a rabid dog, which bites Tea Cake as he wrestles in order to protect Janie. The storm signals the change in Janie's life, since she must shoot her husband when he, suffering from rabies, tries to kill her. After her trial, she journeys to Eatonville and tells her story to Phoeby. Now, Janie has the experience she lacked when she left Eatonville, and she is able to articulate her ideas about love, which are clearly explained in nature imagery. She tells Phoeby, "Love is

lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (284). Her metaphor changes from the image of her youth, a blossoming tree, to her experienced image of the vast sea. She realizes that each of her own experiences has been different.

At the end of the novel, Janie thinks of Tea Cake prancing around her as singing and sighing surrounds her and she feels relief from the trial, his death, and her suffering. Tea Cake comes with the "sun for a shawl"; he is wrapped in the primary source of light and energy and relieves Janie. She has found peace. Now, Janie has completed her self-actuating process by focusing upon the horizon. "She pulled in her horizon like a great fish net" (286). The image of the horizon, which she had years before, has returned. Earlier, she "had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; . . . (but) she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after things" (138). She has searched for happiness through material things and property and has been detoured by people who believed that possessions and a man for protection were what a woman by herself needed. Hurston's imagery paints Janie as a fisherman on the sea of life looking for people and experiences, just as Langston Hughes pictured himself in his autobiography The Big Sea.

The images of nature are significant in examining the folk idea about materialism and happiness. For Hurston, the elements of nature are significant factors in the development of self-awareness and happiness, not property and other material things which Nanny, Starks, and the community believe make for the good life. Through these nature images and their enhancement of folk setting and characterization, especially the folk hero and heroine, Hurston negates the folk idea that material gain will provide the "good life." Rather, Hurston provides realistic portrayals of the black community and black life in order to assert that material gain is incompatible with a fulfilled life or spiritual wholeness. In so doing, she transforms folk materials to illustrate her version of the folk idea and skillfully advances from the apprentice novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine, to Their Eyes Were Watching God, a novel which shows her more sophisticated craftsmanship.

CHAPTER III

PAULE MARSHALL:

STUDENT OF WEST INDIAN FOLK TRADITION

Similar to Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall is aware of the richness of her folk heritage and the vast possibilities for delineating the struggles of Black humanity by focusing on the folk rituals and language of her heritage. Paule Marshall was born of parents who emigrated to the United States from Barbados during World War I. She grew up in Brooklyn during the Depression and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Brooklyn College in 1953. She worked as a writer and researcher for a magazine with assignments in Brazil and the West Indies. She has taught creative writing at various universities, but has lived most of her life in New York. Marshall's study of West Indian folk tradition begins with her background in folk history, her depiction of legend situated in community as narrative consciousness, and her symbolism of the carnival as the embodiment of activity of the folk community which involves festive moments of celebration and kinship.

Her first novel, Brown Girl, Brownstones, was published in 1961, and was followed in 1963 by her collection of four novellas about the problems of aging, Soul Clap Hands and Sing. Her longest and most ambitious

novel, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People was published in 1969. Praisesong to the Widow, her third novel, was published in 1983. These books and several short stories comprise a significant body of fiction focused on the search for identity through understanding heritage and personal sense of worth. Her characters, usually carefully and sensitively developed, have internalized the traditions of their West Indian/American heritage and are influenced by the folk ideology of that heritage. As Barbara Christian notes, "Marshall's entire opus focuses on the consciousness of black people as they remember, retain, develop their sense of spiritual/sensual integrity and individual selves, against the materialism that characterizes American societies" ("Ritualistic" 74).

Marshall employs varied folk material to develop her narratives. Throughout the novels there are folk expressions, selections from folk songs, representative folk characters and unique folkloric settings which accentuate the significance of West Indian folk culture. But Marshall's own understanding of the significance of that folk culture began when she was a young girl. As she ponders the influences upon her own writing, she considers her experience as a young girl listening to her mother and the other Barbadian (Bajan) women of the Brooklyn neighborhood where she grew up. She acknowledges the influence of writers she read at the public

library--"everything from Jane Austen to Zane Grey." And she gives to black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar an even more influential place in her development: "Dunbar--his dark eloquent face, his large volume of poems--permitted me to dream that I might someday write, and with something of the power with words my mother and her friends possessed" (Marshall, "Poets in Kitchen" 30). But an even greater recognition is extended her mother and her friends as she writes:

I grew up among poets. Now they didn't look like poets--whatever that breed is supposed to look like. Nothing about them suggested that poetry was their calling. They were just a group of ordinary housewives and mothers, my mother included, who dressed in a way (shapeless housedresses, dowdy felt hats and long dark, solemn coats) that made it impossible for me to imagine they had ever been young. . . . Nor did they do what poets were supposed to do--spend their days . . . writing verses. They never put pen to paper except to write occasionally to their relatives in Barbados. ("Poets in Kitchen" 24)

Marshall's mother and her friends were part of the group of emigrant women who came to America seeking the promise of opportunity--the American Dream. They left their native Barbados in search of a better life for

themselves and their children. At the heart of their search were the strong belief in the American Dream and a strong work ethic. They worked hard at several jobs to "buy house." They left Barbados--or Bimshire, as they referred to it--because of the poor economy and the impossibility of making a better living. They thought of their homeland as "Poor--poor but sweet."

When Selina in Brown Girl, Brownstones, influenced by her father's idyllic notions about his homeland, says to Silla that Bimshire must be a nice place, Silla responds,

Nice? Bimshire nice? . . . Lemme tell you how nice it is. You know what I was doing when I was your age? . . . I was in the Third Class. You know what that is? . . . The Third Class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in his heaven till it set. With some woman called a Driver to wash yuh tail in licks if yuh dare look up. Yes, working harder than a man at the age of ten. . . ." (BG 45)

In the narrative, Marshall notes how Silla's response represents the attitude toward Bimshire of all her fellow female immigrants: "she became the collective voice of all the Bajan women, the vehicle through which their former suffering found utterance" (45). Even when the women reflect together about the war and its influence upon their

own families, especially their male children, Silla insists that they remember that life in the United States affords them greater opportunities than life in their homeland.

Silla reminds her friend Iris:

You know what it is to work hard and still never make a head-way? That's Bimshire. One crop. People having to work for next skin to nothing. The white people treating we like slaves still and we taking it. The shop and the church join together to keep we pacify and in ignorance.

That's Barbados. (BG 70)

The island was home to them but not a home where they could earn money for adequate subsistence. They had moved from an impoverished agrarian community to the industrialized city. Even though their jobs are service oriented and not industrial, life for them is better.

These women are not poets in our usual sense of verse writing and publishing, but they are artists of the kind Alice Walker refers to in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." They are the unsung, everyday artists whose natural expression and work produce the folk art of a culture. These women, through their language, were able to overcome the humiliations of their workday in the homes of white people, "scrubbing floor," as they described their work. Their talks after work became a time of communal therapy, of culture retention, and a chance to reaffirm

their own self worth after exposure to the degradation and racism of the larger society. As Marshall notes

But more than therapy, that freewheeling, wide-ranging, exuberant talk functioned as an outlet for the tremendous creative energy they possessed. They were women in whom the need for self-expression was strong, and since language was the only vehicle readily available to them they made of it an art form that--in keeping with the African tradition in which art and life are one--was an integral part of their lives. ("Poets in Kitchen" 26)

It is not just any talking that Marshall celebrates but stories with distinctive style--insight, irony, wit, humor, and inventive, colorful, and daring language. This language becomes even more distinctive as Marshall recreates the folkloric setting of the kitchen and the expressive language of the women in her first novel, Brown Girl, Brownstones, and projects her worldview through the general folk idea that materialism brings happiness. She also responds to other less dominant folk ideas surrounding growing up female, marriage, family, and religion.

Brown Girl, Brownstones is a novel about Selina Boyce and her family. Marshall traces Selina's development into a self-determined young woman, while revealing the familial and community conflicts that are grounded in the American

Dream and its materialism. These conflicts are best seen in the lives of the parents and their friends. Marshall's use of folkloric setting, folk expressions, and folk ideas provides the elements of her design focusing on the destruction of self when heritage and materialism are not reconciled.

The four books of the novel--"A Long Day and a Long Night," "Pastorale," "The War," and "Selina"--chronicle the stages in Selina's maturation while presenting key elements of the major conflicts of the story. The central event of the story is Deighton Boyce's inheritance of land in Barbados. The news of the inheritance initiates incidents all aimed at the fate of the "ground home," the property in Barbados. Deighton begins to dream of how he will build a large house with Greek columns on the land and how the family will go to live there someday; Silla, his wife, begins to maneuver to get him to sell the land so that they can use the money as a down payment for the brownstone in which they live; Selina attempts to keep her mother from forcing her father to sell the property. Additionally in this section, Selina reflects upon and interacts with the occupants of their brownstone. The family and the boarders seem to make the house come alive. The boarders are Suggie Skeete, who due to her affairs and passionate response to life, is scorned by the women of the community, and Miss

Mary, an elderly woman with a daughter who pays little attention to her mother.

The second book, "Pastorale," highlights Selina's development as a young woman, while in the background the family continues to be involved in a debate about what should happen to the land. This section of the novel allows the reader to focus on Selina, who dreams about other families who have lived in her house; asks questions of Suggie, Miss Thompson and other adults; and indulges in the signifying and questioning of adolescent girls with her friend Beryl.

In the third book, "The War," World War I serves as the basic historical event, but the struggle over the land between Deighton and Silla comes to a climax, when Silla manages to sell the land without Deighton's knowledge and Deighton seduces her, gets the money, and spends it all on clothes and gifts. Deighton has squandered away the money for his dream and Silla becomes more determined to buy the brownstone: "I'll get the house despite! . . . I'll buy it yet" (BG 13). The war continues as Deighton finally leaves home for Father Peace's Haven and Silla later has him deported. Before the ship docks, Deighton jumps or falls overboard.

In the last book, Selina, although unable to forget her mother's scheme and her father's death, conforms to "the mother's" wishes and enters community college. But

she advances her own scheme to reject the values of the community and avenge her father's death as she joins the Barbadian Homeowners Association and plots to win their scholarship so that she can use the money to "go far away" with Clive, her lover. She doesn't complete her scheme because she comes to realize that her own values and interests are not as much in conflict with her mother's as she believes. Finally, she plans to leave New York to learn more about herself and her West Indian heritage.

Books I and II establish the background and setting of the novel, present the players, and set the story in motion. Books III and IV are longer, since they show the culmination of the family struggle about the land and Selina's decision to make some decisions about her own life. Marshall's strong sequential plot structure, however, is essential for a greater understanding of her characters and how they have become the complex beings who have internalized their culture.

The brownstones of Brooklyn are the setting for the novel. Marshall's description in the first chapter of the novel sets the stage for the dialectic between these houses and the people of the Barbadian-American community:

Glancing down the interminable Brooklyn street you thought of those joined brownstones as one house reflected through a train of mirrors, with no walls between the houses but only vast rooms

yawning endlessly one into the other. Yet, looking close, you saw that under the thick ivy each house had something distinctively its own. Some touch that was Gothic, Romanesque, baroque or Greek triumphed amid the Victorian clutter. Here, Ionic columns framed the windows while next door gargoyles scowled up at the sun. There, the cornices were hung with carved foliage while Gorgon heads decorated others. Many houses had bay windows or Gothic stonework; a few boasted turrets raised high above the other roofs. Yet they all shared the same brown monotony. All seemed doomed by the confusion in their design.

(BG 3)

Things are now seen only indirectly--as the indirect aggressiveness socialized into women. The individual and romantic personalities are surrounded by modernism but are not erased. Marshall's point, which Morrison also makes in Song of Solomon, is that the history of a people can be overshadowed and repressed but not erased. The symbols of irrationality (gorgon heads), space and time ("bay windows" and "Gothic stonework"), and the human compulsion for competition, conquest, and sexual violence ("turrets") reflect the confusion of the architectural design as well as the confusion about the human destiny of these immigrants as urban inhabitants and a people.

This description, while presenting the eclectic neighborhood, suggests the cultural diversity of the people who have lived in these houses. Generations of immigrants (Dutch-English, Scotch-Irish, and West Indian) have inhabited the neighborhood and its current inhabitants, the Barbadians, harbor the same desires and experience the same adjustments as others before them. All have come to America to better themselves, economically, but they find they must also adjust their cultural values in order to blend into the melting pot. And for most, especially the Black immigrants, the confusion which ensues often leads to problems of cultural identity and values.

The brownstones become a symbol of advancement for the immigrant community. For the West Indian immigrants, leasing the large brownstones and subleasing to tenants is normal, but to actually purchase the house represents even more social and economic status for the family. "The West Indians, especially the Barbarians who had never owned anything perhaps but a few poor acres in a poor land, loved the houses with the same fierce idolatry as they had the land on their obscure islands" (BG 4). While some residents may own several brownstones, every Barbadian family is striving "to buy house." Selina's mother, Silla, is bewildered and outraged at her husband Deighton Boyce's lack of ambition: "But what kind of man he is, nuh? Here every Bajan is saving if it's only a dollar a week and

buying house and he wun save a penny. He ain got nothing and ain looking to get nothing . . ." (BG 24).

While the house becomes a materialistic fetish, it also serves as a haven for these families and their cultural values. "The brownstones . . . are not just buildings or even homes. They are the embodiment of the community's will to overcome all obstacles, to create a protective barrier between it and the hostile world" (Christian, Novelists 82). The kitchen of the Boyce home becomes a communal gathering place where the women come together after a hard day at "scrubbing floor" and discuss topics ranging from their own personal jobs, families and dreams to national and international interests, particularly the War and the economy. These gatherings have the same folkloric value as the storefront porch in Hurston's fiction, and the women become a chorus for the narrative action.

For example, when Silla complains about her boarders, the Bajan women suggest that she evict them and take in tenants who will pay more. Florrie suggests that she "put down something to make them move." When they ask what she means, she says, "I mean, if I must explain my explanatories, that Silla should go to a spiritualist and get something and put down outside their door and make them move" (71). Florrie refers to "obeah" or conjure which will provide a solution to the problem of unprofitable

tenants. When Silla says about Florrie to the others, "You know Florrie does still believe in obeah and does walk 'bout with piece of coal tie round she waist and carrying finny and goat foot for luck" (71), she refers to the common folk beliefs and remedies to provide good luck that they all remember from home, but which they refuse to admit they still practice or believe in their new environment. For the people in their homeland, these remedies and practices have been a means for resolving situations for generations.

At a small table in the kitchen, Selina learns many of the answers to her questions about life by listening to the women speak about their men, their jobs, their children, their homeland. Also, these sessions in the kitchen reveal the inside/outside status of women within the family and the community. There exists uncertainty about the commitment to spouse at the expense of their commitment to their children and employment which allows the family and home to flourish. Their discussions highlight the values of the immigrant community and, as a chorus-like narrative device, they comment upon the actions of the characters and demonstrate the attitude of the group.

Selina's development into a young woman is the primary concern of the novel. She is partial to her father, the artist who lacks a form, but always stands up to her mother. Silla is challenged by her but recognizes her

strength. Her mother says of her, "look how I has gone and brought something into this world to whip me" (BG 47).

Selina recognizes the complexity of this woman, "the mother," and eventually sees the similarities between the two of them. This similarity is one of the few perceptions that her sister Ina shows in the novel when she tells Selina that she and the mother are just alike. Other characters make constant references to the fact that Selina is her mother's child. First Deighton mentions their similarities, as he reprimands her for fighting her sister, "always fighting like some boar-cat. You's yuh mother child, in truth!" (91). Later Clive notes qualities he sees in her. In response she exclaims, "But is that the way you see me? That's the way my mother is, not me!" He responds, "Then I guess it proves that you are truly your mother's child" (248).

Selina is curious and questions adults and friends to learn about those things in life that she doesn't understand. Her inquiries prompt one of the boarders to call her "womanish" because she is concerned about what Suggie considers adult concerns. Alice Walker notes in her inscription to In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, as she defines the term womanist as "from womanish," the term is "from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish,' i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or

willful behavior" (xi). Selina's behavior demonstrates this term in many instances. Yet her experience is similar to that of other young black female characters in fiction by black women. Her concerns about growing up suggest folk ideas about growing up female.

Some of the best scenes of the novel that remind the reader of Selina's development as a young woman are the discussion of Selina and her friend Beryl. Typical of all young women, these two discuss topics of all sorts: The menstrual period, "bleeding," and developing breasts (60); death (59); what is to be in the future (59)--Selina indicates that her father has no specific expectations for her as Beryl's father does; Doris, a light skinned girl who has "good hair" and all the boys like her (60) (this reminds us of scenes in other development novels such as The Bluest Eye--Claudia and Maureen Peal (Meringue Pie) and Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John, another West Indian American novel; and Selina as an artist--Beryl asks about her poem about the sky (62). This may be the first hint of Selina's own sensibility as an artist, although she has exhibited compassion for her father's music.

Also, Selina's development reflects the frustration of being a young woman from the Barbadian community--one of those "New York children," as the Bajan women call them, who "don't like work" and are developing ways unlike their parents. Their parents have great expectations for them to

succeed in America. As Selina notes of the young Barbadian-Americans at the wedding: "Most of them were in college, becoming professionals whether they wanted to be or not" (BG 141). While she struggles to develop her own sense of self and define what is important to her, Selina rejects many of the expectations of the community and her mother. She strives to define herself and values which are not bound in the acquisition and glorification of property and other material things.

Selina functions as a folk griot who, as a messianic artist or peacemaker, interprets and resolves conflicts: "The small, willful, quiet Selina, always listening unnoticed in the corners of rooms, absorbing culture and tradition, is the griot of this community, the preserver of its near and ancient past" (Washington 318). Marshall achieves this purpose by establishing the rites of passage through the images and symbols of her bangles and clothes and through sound imagery. Selina's sense of sound is acute throughout the novel as she listens to the distinctive tones of her environment: the noises of the brownstone, the neighborhood, the talk of the Bajan women in the kitchen, and the upwardly mobile house owners of the Barbadian Homeowners Association. Thus, the reverberations of the castaway bangle striking the broken pavement serve only as a culmination of Selina's auditory awareness. Selina, as a Marshall creation, defines an approach to

biculturalism necessary for reconciling the duality of life in America. Marshall employs her narrative to show once more the blending of Caribbean and American strands of the African diaspora. She achieves a plot structure which sets into relief ideological foils. These foils heighten awareness of the conflicts of biculturalism as well as individual personalities.

The contrasts of girls growing up to accept and reject aspects of their heritage is best seen in the contrasts between Selina and her sister Ina and Selina and her friend Beryl. As sisters, Selina and Ina have little in common. Selina is independent, inquisitive, aggressive, and extroverted, while Ina is dependent, passive, delicate, and introverted. Selina learns to confront her problems head-on and relies on little more than her own intuition and analysis, while Ina passively accepts the values of the family and community and finds consolation in the church. As Selina observes of her sister: "She was like the college girls, They all had something she would never have. Grace, quiet poses, and the mildness" (BG 146). Selina even clashes with her best friend, Beryl, who takes the direction of a traditional Barbadian-American life as directed by her parents, even though she is able to see the restrictions of that practical life. On the other hand, Selina rebels against the values of the immigrants and insists on more control and definition of her own life.

Probably the most pronounced foils are the characters who represent variations on the dialectic between the realistic and the artistic. Included in these contrasts are Beryl and Selina, the friends; Silla and Deighton, the mother and father who struggle against Silla's concern with practical matters such as a job, house, and raising a family and Deighton's music, clothes, passion and dreams; Silla and the other Barbadian women and their practical notions about living and morality and Suggie Skeete and her sensuality and zest for life; the Barbadian-American community and their work ethic, and Clive, the radical artist.

For Marshall, Selina fuses the artistic and realistic. She is revealed early in the novel to be a poet whose poetry Beryl admires. Later she studies dance and sees herself as a cultural avatar: "And she danced well, expressing with deft movements the life cycle, capturing its beauty and exceeding sadness . . . she was dancing, she imagined, in the audience, through the rows of seats, and giving each one there something of herself, just as the priest in Ina's church, she remembered, passed along the row of communicants, giving them the wafer and the transmuted blood. . . ." (281). She envisions her role as artist to the audience as similar to that of the clergy who ministers to the parishioner. But more realistically, Selina's artistic nature makes her aware of her culture,

and she creates her own world by her sensual responses, through her movements and by the way she hears it. She has learned about life and the culture from the women around the kitchen table and this process of acculturation--a cyclical process where she sits still, learns, moves, sits and listens again--has grounded her with the practical means of understanding the rituals of her people.

Marshall's character development is central since Selina becomes a kind of culture-bearer for the Barbadian Americans. Also, we see Marshall's worldview, since it is through Selina's consciousness and awareness that we see Marshall's prescription for racial survival: respect for and knowledge of all aspects of your cultural heritage. The bangle, mentioned early in the novel as the symbol all West Indian girls wear, becomes the symbol of Selina's acknowledgment of her Brooklyn home as she heads for Barbados. As she views the wreckage of brownstones which symbolize progress in the community, she reflects upon her leaving:

She wanted, suddenly, to leave something with them. But she had nothing. . . . Then, she remembered the two silver bangles she had always worn. She pushed up her coat sleeve and stretched one until it passed over her wrist, and, without turning, hurled it high over her shoulder. (BG 310)

This ritual of leaving something of herself with the old neighborhood solidifies Selina's awareness of home and the neighborhood as an entity that responds to her leaving: "The bangle rose behind her, a bit of silver against the moon, then curved swiftly downward and struck a stone. A frail sound in the utter silence" (BG 310). The "frail sound" reminds us of Selina's struggling and yearning for a powerful voice and words like the other women. She learns, however, to become part of the whole without relinquishing her own principles and self-respect. This incident is a private ritual that affirms other group rituals of which Selina has been a part, particularly the wedding and the meeting of the Homeowner's Association, yet confirms her own place in the community.

In Selina's development and the conflicts of Brown Girl, Brownstones, Paule Marshall clearly demonstrates a rejection of the idea that property and material gain bring happiness. Instead she inverts the folk idea to assert that Selina's true happiness can be attained only by self-knowledge and awareness of history and culture. Selina is the first of a trio of women in Marshall's works who seek to resolve bicultural tension. This strategy continues to reveal itself diversely through Merle Kimbona in The Chosen Place, the Timeless People and through Avey Johnson in Praisesong for the Widow.

Paule Marshall's second novel, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, depicts the efforts of several diverse individuals to improve the life for people in Bournehills, the more static and undeveloped part of Bourne Island in the Caribbean. Bournehills is firmly rooted in the past. The community is characterized by its inability and unwillingness to change; this tendency becomes the main focus of the novel: "the culture in its depth and timelessness becomes the major character in the novel to which personalities are subordinated" (Christian, Novelists 105). Rather than creating a novel which focuses on character development, as with Selina in Brown Girl, Brownstones, Marshall has written one in which the characters must confront the setting. Since these characters are not growing up, but are realizing themselves in relationship to their environment and history, ". . . the development of the novel consists of their recognition of themselves because of their unwitting confrontation with its dominant character, the Chosen Place: Bournehills" (105).

Marshall employs a major theme of Black and Marxian literature--the process of struggle between the controllers of the world and those who are controlled, the conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed. The longstanding conflict between capitalist and socialist ideas coupled with the greater concern with humanity frames Marshall's

presentation of the folk idea that materialism is incompatible with wholeness. But, the focus is upon the broader and more complex concepts of social morality and the interpretation of history. The development of characters who must struggle with morality and history, often while observing or participating in the rituals and mores of the Bournehills culture and reconciling their own histories is Marshall's means for illustrating the interdependence of individuals of the communal past and present.

The four books in the novel are: "Heirs and Descendants," "Bournehills," "Carnival," and "Whitsun." In the first of them, the characters, who represent various classes of people, are introduced. In the second book, those characters who are new to the island and those who have returned there make for a dramatic dialectic with the Bournehills people. Here, the history and character of the island appear a bit more abstractly and metaphorically. In the last two books, both groups of characters previously foils to each other, must accept the rituals and customs of the island, hence becoming a communal synthesis. The annual carnival which celebrates the slave revolt of Cuffee Ned, the islanders' folk hero, is the key event of the third book, and the resolutions of the characters after the realizations made apparent at the carnival become the focus of "Whitsun," the last book.

The story tells about the relationships of a number of people who reside upon the island, some for a lifetime, some for a few months, but all affected by the island and its history of colonial rule and resistance to change. The key characters are representatives of many types of people--male, female, black, white, upper, middle, and lower class. "Marshall dramatizes how the rituals of the members of the oppressed society affect and are affected by the culture of the ruling society" (Christian, Novelists 105).

Merle Kimbona, the central character in The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, is the second figure in Marshall's trinity of Black womanhood. Selina of Brown Girl, Brownstones is the initial figure who represents the struggle of development of the young black girl-woman and attempts to make sense of past and present by reconciling diverse cultural heritages and affirming humanity. Through Merle, Marshall continues the depiction of the struggle for reconciliation. The forty-year old Merle is described in contradictions: she "looked shorter than she was." She is no longer young, but "her legs were still those of a young woman." "She was dressed like a much younger woman." Her dress displays a cultural mix which is also evident:

a flared print dress made from cloth of a vivid abstract tribal motif cloth from the sun, from another cosmos, which could have been found draped

woman. Pendant silver earrings carved in the form of those saints to be found on certain European churches adorned her ears. The saints, their tiny faces gaunt with piety, their eyes closed in prayer, were trembling anxiously from the force of her annoyance. Numerous bracelets, also of silver, bound her wrists. But these, unlike the earrings, were heavy, crudely made, and noisy. They lent a clangorous, unsettling note to her every move. (CP,TP 4-5)

Merle's outfit makes us aware of her heritage, African and European, while providing a cultural tie to Selina of Brown Girl, Brownstones, who wears the traditional bangles like most West Indian girls. Also, Marshall shows Merle's dress to reflect her state of consciousness:

She had donned this somewhat bizarre outfit, each item of which stood opposed to, at war even, with the other, to express rather a diversity and disunity within herself, and her attempt, unconscious probably, to reconcile these opposing parts, to make of them a whole. (CP,TP 5)

While we are aware of the sense of duality Merle reflects, she also depicts a sense of lost identity: "Moreover, in dressing in this manner, she appeared to be trying . . . to recover something in herself . . . " "the sense and certainty of herself as a woman perhaps" (CP,TP 5). This

struggle to determine herself as a woman is inextricably tied to the struggle that Marshall depicts of the people of the island.

Merle is a Bournehill native who has been educated in England and is a descendant of Duncan Vaughn, a wealthy colonial landowner. Her mix in heritage is a key factor in her confusion, but her marriage to an African who has taken their child and left Merle because of rumors about her relationship with a white woman while in London becomes the factor that Merle must confront. By the end of the novel, Merle has reconciled herself to her situation and prepares to go to Africa to find her daughter. Merle's reconciliation comes only after she faces the inevitability of the struggle of the islanders. Thus, the events which occur after the research team from America arrives allow Merle and all of the islanders to gain perspective on their own situations and the history and progress of their homeland.

Of the other major characters of the novel, three are white outsiders to the island: Saul Amron, a social scientist who heads the research team from the Center for Applied Social Research (CASR), the philanthropic arm of a major corporation in the United States, which makes money from salt fish like those from the island; his wife Harriet, a wealthy heiress, from Philadelphia who experiences fears and guilt from her upperclass upbringing;

and Allan Fuso, a statistician who has been to the island before and returns now as part of the CASR project. All struggle with the new environment.

Of these three characters, Saul is the most heroic. He possesses the tendency to see human life for what it is and desires to see the best possible solutions for the people of Bournehills. His immersion in his work as anthropologist and director of the experimental project at Bournehills "helps Saul to accept his past and find new meaning in life" (Kapai 52). In fact, among Marshall's male characters, Saul is, according to Kapai, "the best creation of her fictional world. She notes that he "is strong, yet has his weaknesses" and "is very much aware of the common bond that unites all human beings. Thus, he is a very human character" (57).

Saul Amron's relationships with the Bournehills natives help his understanding of humanity and of the island. Saul is the outsider who attempts to aide the people by analyzing the situation and posing workable methods for improvement. His understanding that things won't change drastically allows him to pose immediate solutions and work to help the people develop for themselves. He realizes that self-determination is the necessary ingredient for change. As the people learn to share and pull together, their sense of direction and pride

force changes. But Saul learns the lesson through observation and interaction with the people.

Saul observes first hand the work of the people and begins to understand their problems. One of the most significant scenes he observes presents Stinger and Gwen, a native Bournehills couple who work in the fields. Stinger, the boss of his own work crew, goes to the fields every morning with his pregnant wife, Gwen. The men chop the cane while the women, called "headers," gather the sheaves and place them on their heads to transport them to the trucks which wait to haul them away. The couple comes to the field energetic and youthful and, as Saul watches, they work hard all day until they become so exhausted that they cannot see and can barely move at the end of the work day. Saul notes how they age during the day's work: "He tried describing them to himself some days later when he could bring himself to think of them. But he could not except to say they had had the same slightly turned up, fixed flat stare that you find upon drawing back the lids of someone asleep or dead" (CP 163). Weakened and stunned by the heat himself, Saul flees the field, as he realizes that the ritual of continuous drudgery in the hot sun must affect the spirit of the workers and account for the attitudes of the people of the island. Saul's observations and interaction with the islanders cause him to become more conscious of their humanity and his own life. He recalls

his mother and her stories about her ancestry. He recollects that her tales, "assuming the proportions of an archetype, a paradigm, in his youthful imagination, also came to embody, without his realizing it . . . all that any other people had had to endure. It became the means by which he understood the suffering of others" (164).

While Saul Amron has a model for relating to the suffering people of the world, his wife Harriet has no such reference. She is from a wealthy white family which has made its fortune through slavery and low wage production of sugar cane in areas like Bournehills. Her perception of the project is missionary rather than anthropological like her husband's. Thus, she maintains little interaction with the people and finally works almost exclusively typing the report and has little human interaction.

The third member of the research group is a statistician, Allen Fuso, who has been to the island before and is well liked by the natives. He spends time with the young men of the island and shares some interests with Vere, a young native who has just returned from the United States after working there for several months. These two men serve as foils to each other, for Vere is independent and skilled in mechanics--characteristics not encouraged in native islanders who must be passive--and Allen is dependent upon the rules and customs of his society and adapts to change slowly. The white characters of the

research team have come to right the wrongs done to the island over hundreds of years, though no one group has such power.

Of the Bournehills characters, there are basically two groups: those who have journeyed to other places and returned to the island--including Merle, Vere, and Lyle Huston, a barrister--and those for whom Bournehills is the world and have never left the island--including Stinger and Gwen, Ferguson and Delbert, two men who assist Saul and serve on the council established to improve the quality of life on the island; Leasy, Vere's grandmother and a spiritual ancestor for Merle and other natives; Carrington, an old woman who is Merle's housekeeper, and many others who participate in the Bournehills festival and pageant. These groups form a microcosm of the western world, both black and white (Christian 107).

Because of the vast scope of this novel, Marshall's use of ideological foils serves to distinguish the major conflicts of the narrative. Tension exists between three major groups: the Bournehills natives and the white outsiders, the Bournehills educated blacks and the uneducated folk with traditional notions, and the colonial white rulers who maintain the status quo on the island and the progressive white outsiders who provide solutions for the existing problems. The history of the island and its struggle for economic survival informs each of these

conflicts. The conflicts between each of these groups almost necessarily involves their concept of change and progress. Because the islanders are disillusioned by all the studies that have been done about the island, since they have seen no progress, they are reluctant to relinquish their customs for progress. They cling to one radical idea, the revolt of Cuffee Ned, a slave insurrection leader who held Pyre Hill and the colonial rulers at bay for a time. They reenact this historic revolt each year at the carnival and all are emotionally charged by the preparation and pageant.

When the masque was first performed long ago, it won the award for "Best Local Historical." Now, the Bournehills people persist in performing it. Marshall describes the parade with its marching steel bands, people dressed in uniforms and the solidarity among the Bournehills people as they walk down the street. Of their preparation for and devotion to the pageant she writes,

All the days, weeks, and months they had spent loafing under the tamarind tree, too lazy or caught up in their games sometimes to return the waves of those passing, might have been a storing up of strength on their part, a careful preparation for this one day when they would parade New Bristol's streets spelling out on their converted oil drums the story of Cuffee and the

revolt. This was perhaps the only thing they deemed worthy of their energy, the one thing to which they were willing to give themselves. (CP 281)

As they walk along in the parade, a sense of reverence and pride is evident in the participants. As the masque is enacted, all of the participants are quiet and at attention, for they long to see the recreated revolt. The rebellion becomes a vicarious victory for the descendants of Cuffee and his comrades.

The sense of community and direction that is apparent during the carnival is only an annual expression. Although the residents are engaged in other more practical rituals such as cutting cane or hog-killing, little sense of progressive community exists on the island. The dynamics of the community pose conflicts which can be resolved only through understanding the history of the island and recognizing the cyclical nature of history as exhibited in the Bournehills people. They long for times to be "like when Cuffee was alive." But they have little initiative and leadership to recreate those times in their own practical situations. Saul Amron and the council work to create such a situation when they must pull together in order to get all of the cane crop to the mill when the local mill is shut down. Musing over the efforts of people like himself who try to help the natives, Saul Amron thinks:

Only an act on the scale of Cuffee's could redeem them. And only then would Bournehills itself, its mission fulfilled, perhaps forgo that wounding past and take on the present, the future. But it would hold out until then, resisting, defying all efforts, all the halfway measures, including his, to reclaim it; refusing to settle for anything less than what Cuffee had demanded in his time. (402)

But such effort is made and new hope is raised in the community. Even though many of the principals involved in uniting the people--Saul, Merle, Allen--plan to leave, the people have had a victory. Marshall's message is about people and their need to know and believe in their history in order to maintain the spirit and vitality needed to survive. The survivors are all people who have reconciled their past with the present and who can now go on to a future. Saul and Allen will leave the island; Merle will leave to seek her daughter and plans to return home; the Bournehills natives have learned to pull together.

Marshall's creation of a folkloric setting in this novel, the island culture and its history, provides the frame for the social conflict. Some characters meet these conflicts and resolve them, others succumb to the forces of the conflict. Again, at the center of the novel is a woman character who must reconcile her heritage and history.

Merle serves as a crossroads character who is caught between two worlds--the Bournehills culture and western culture as she experienced it in London. She is, as Barbara Christian notes, the "unifying force throughout the novel" (108). In this role she shares the spirit which is evident in Cuffee Ned. As a culture bearer, she remains the middle figure in Marshall's trinity of characters; she looks back to Selina in her independence and spirit and looks forward to Avey in her conflict with her life.

Praisesong for the Widow, Paule Marshall's third novel, is the story of Avey Johnson, the widow of Jerome (Jay) Johnson, who, while on vacation in the Caribbean, has recurring dreams and decides to leave her traveling companions and return home to White Plains, New York. When Avey misses her plane flight, she must stay on the island of Grenada, where she becomes involved in a celebration of the islanders. During this yearly celebration, an excursion to the island of Carriacou, she becomes more attuned to her own heritage. She begins to remember the summers that she spent as a girl with her great-aunt Cuney in South Carolina. The Carriocou excursion provides the experience of the rituals of an earlier culture through which Avey recalls the legend Aunt Cuney taught about the Ibos, who, when brought to the United States as slaves, turned around and walked on the water to go back to their homeland. Like Toni Morrison's flying Africans in Song of

Solomon, this myth provides an unusually mystic way of going home. Marshall's version, however, suggests the water rights of purification and recalls the Christian story of Christ's walking on water. The use of the folk tale of the Ibos and the rituals of the people on the island provide a completion of Marshall's message about the importance of heritage/history and the discovery of self. Avey is constantly concerned about who she is and how others see her.

Avey is the final component of Marshall's trinity of female heroines who strive to resolve bi-cultural tension. Her struggle with the past and present is more internal than have been the struggles of Selina and Merle. Her dreams, visions, hallucinations and flood of memories provide much of the action of the novel, while contributing to spiritual and cultural wholeness.

The novel has four sections that achieve the recollection of past and a cleansing experience to a more directed future. The first of them, "Runagate," the title of which alludes to Robert Hayden's poem "Runagate, Runagate" about slave escapes, introduces the main character. The term "runagate" means deserter, or a vagabond, which metaphorically names Avey Johnson, who rebels against the image of the widow and searches for meaning in life after the death of her husband.

Section II, "Sleeper's Wake" enacts a dream in which Avey believes that she hears Jerome. During the dream she reviews their life on Halsey Street in Brooklyn before their move to the suburb of White Plains. She remembers Jerome's constant fear of returning to Halsey Street, for him a painful reminder of poverty and struggle.

It was Halsey Street, for example, which prompted him over her objections--to build an additional pantry in the house in North White Plains, which he kept stocked with enough canned goods to last out a war. That street in Brooklyn accounted for the raft of insurance policies he took out to cover everything--fire, theft, life, loss of limb--that might happen to them or the house. It was also Halsey Street, and specifically the block they had lived on, with its noisy trolley and the knot of old tenements down the street from their apartment house, which kept him going at the same unrelenting pace long after his business was firmly established, both mortgages on the house had been paid up and Marion, their youngest, was out of college, teaching, on her own. (Praisesong 88-89)

And it was Halsey Street that haunted him as he cried out the night before his last stroke.

The fear of the past haunts the upwardly mobile Johnsons, but Avey learns on her cruise that the fear of the past is unnecessary. Instead, she unravels the source of her current frustration and fear and learns that it is caused by her detachment from her past, when things were simpler and there was meaning and rhythm in her life. She and Jerome enjoyed each other and life. They played music and danced in the evenings after work and they were not afraid to enjoy the music. The move to White Plains makes them more conscious of material possessions and less interested in the fun and vitality of their own life--the folk life.

In Section III, "Lave Tete," Avey dreams of a soiled baby whom she recognizes as herself, and she has memories of community rituals from her childhood. The title is an appropriate image for this situation. It "refers to the Haitian voodoo ceremony in which one is washed clean. It is an appropriate title for this section, since in reviewing and assessing her past Avey's mind is 'like a slate that has been wiped clean, a tabula rase upon which a whole new history could be written'" (Christian Ritualistic 79). The ceremony is similar to baptism in Christian ritual. Lebert Joseph is the dominant person in this section.

The fourth section of the novel, "The Beg Pardon," addresses Marshall's concern with the people's expression

of the links between the past and the present; the emphasis is upon a collective community of people, though Avey remains the central figure. Through the laying on of hands, an African ritual which embodies the concept that the spirit and body are one, Avey approaches wholeness.

Marshall's obvious concern with ritual shapes a novel that reflects the relationship between the individual and his heritage--in this case a Pan-African inheritance reflected in the juxtaposition of rituals that at once are Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean and African. Through her portrayals, Marshall insists that the rituals of black people express themselves dynamically in the wholeness of body and spirit.

The narrative technique of interior monologue structures a ritual of self-discovery. While setting in this novel is not limited to one community, it is a very important element. As the novel begins, Avey and her friends are passengers on the cruise ship, Bianca Pride (White Pride), while indulging in a middle-class luxury vacation cruise to the Caribbean. This cruise is significant, because the purpose of the trip is to provide diversion for the ladies. Instead, the journey provides confusion, though providing a means of awareness for Avey. Her decision to leave the cruise invites the reader into her thoughts and hallucinations about her home of Tatum, South Carolina, one of the Sea Islands where slaves were

brought to port. From this landing, according to Aunt Cuney and the legends, the Ibos were brought and walked by water back to their homeland.

The other important aspect of setting is the festival in Carriacou, a contemporary way of reliving the epic journey back home. The people leave Grenada, the larger more commercial port and go to the smaller island for a holiday. This ritual provides the basis for a people to relive in a specially designated space the cultural magic that they seem to have lost in time.

Avey's guide to the festival is Lebert Joseph, a small man who wears sunglasses with mirrors, so that Avey is unable to see his eyes. He has "special powers of seeing and knowing, Li gain connaissance" (Praisesong 218). Joseph, who has never missed a trip, explains why the people go on the excursion. One reason is family. As Joseph states, "A man lives in this place all year he must go look for his family. His old father and mother if they's still in life, and the rest of his people" (164). Also, one might go to relax. But most important for Joseph is to perform a ritual of remembrance to his ancestors. He explains: "'Is the Old Parents, oui,' The Long-time People. Each year this time they does look for us to come and give them their remembrance" (165).

Lebert Joseph describes the ritual of the Big Drum in which he performs the "Beg Pardon," asking for pardon on

his knees. The dancing at the Big Drum includes a dance for each tribe or family. Descendants should dance for their families. And all families participate in the Carriacou Tramp, with particular families having special versions of the dance. When asked to what nation or family she belongs, Avey is stunned. She doesn't relate to any of the festivities and prefers not to be bothered. But Lebert Joseph is persistent, and Avey joins in the festivities. As they prepare to leave the island, Joseph and his daughter, who lives on the island, decide that Avey must be from the Arada family because of the way she dances. Like Selina, but more informally, Avey becomes an artist who expresses her heritage through her form. She is revived after the excursion and has a "strange compulsion to talk" after her experience. She has found means to happiness and it is not through middle class possessions and luxuries; it is through recollections of her past and affirmation of her cultural ties with other black people.

Avey wants to tell Joseph about her history:

She would tell--she didn't know why but she would--about the living room floor in Halsey Street: of how when she would put on the records after coming in from work, the hardwood floor, reverberating with the music, used to feel like rich and solid ground under her. She had felt

centered and sustained then, she would tell him,
restored to her proper axis. (254)

Revived and properly centered, Avey plans to change her life and take on the appropriate role as ancestor-teacher to her grandchildren as Aunt Cuney has been for her. Her dreams and hallucinations have brought her back to wholeness.

Though Praisesong for the Widow is Marshall's shortest novel, it is by technique one of the most complex. Her use of interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness, and flashbacks, along with her use of folk materials especially in songs, rituals, expressions, and myth, provide unique narrative devices. The debate and monologue that Avey has with herself, along with her conversations with Lebert Joseph and her memories provide insight into Avey's struggle. By the end of the excursion and as she plans for her return to White Plains, Avey admits that there is a need for bonds with her homeland. Marshall completes her trinity with the older woman who discovers her need for history and heritage and, as usual for Marshall's characters, that need is global.

With the three novels and the central characters of each, Paule Marshall emphasizes the cyclical nature of history; hence, rejecting the theory of the linear nature of time, she posits a continuum between past and present that is revealed through knowledge of self and heritage and

affirmation of life. The symbols and symbolic characters of her novels--the bangles of Selina and Merle, the brownstones and Bournehills, Cuffee Ned and Pyre Hill, the dance of Selina and Avey--provide the elements of unification between the women, their times, and their histories. Each journeys in search of herself, whether consciously or unconsciously. Selina leaves Brooklyn for Barbados with a promise of return; Merle has left Bourne Island for Europe to study, has returned to her homeland, and, at the end of the novel, resolves to leave again to reconcile her life by finding her daughter and husband; Avey travels with her friends on a vacation cruise but must leave, because uneasy feelings and recurring dreams of her past lead her through a psychic journey to South Carolina and a physical outing on the island of Carriacou and finally back home to White Plains, New York. All of these women struggle with and reject the trappings of a materialistic Western culture that kills the spirit of those who fail to recognize the value of cultural awareness and spiritual totality.

With this worldview, Marshall has added great complexity and consciousness to a tradition inherited from Zora Neale Hurston. Better yet, she prepares for the equality rewarding world and literary strategies of Toni Morrison.

CHAPTER IV

TONI MORRISON:

A MODERNIST STORYTELLER IN THE FOLK TRADITION

Following a tradition which encompasses the folk romances of Zora Neale Hurston and the realistic novels analyzing the role of heritage by Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, a superb storyteller, raises questions about the role of creativity, individuality and heritage in modern life. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison, after completing schools in Lorain, went to Howard University and majored in English. After completing her B.A. in 1953, she enrolled in Cornell University and received an M.A. in 1955. For nine years, she taught English and humanities at Texas Southern University and Howard University. In 1964, she became an editor and currently is a senior editor for Random House. In her capacity as editor, she has been instrumental in bringing to the public's attention many black writers such as Gayl Jones and Gloria Naylor and books about the black experience such as The Black Book (1974). She has published five novels: The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby (1981), and Beloved (1987). Also, she has written one play, Dreaming Emmett, which was produced in 1986.

Morrison has enjoyed recognition and acclaim unknown to Hurston during her lifetime or to Marshall so far in hers. Her third novel, Song of Solomon, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction in 1978. As publicity abounded for her novels, her picture was featured on the cover of Newsweek magazine. Even with much critical acclaim, Morrison remains a very private author and respected person as an editor for many other Black writers.

Barbara Christian, in Black Women Novelists, calls Morrison's works "fantastic earthy realism." Christian asserts that

Deeply rooted in history and mythology, her work resonates with mixtures of pleasure and pain, wonder and horror. . . . Her work is sensuality combined with an intrigue that only a piercing intellect could create. . . . Double-faced, her focal characters look outward and search inward, trying to find some continuity between the seasons, the earth, other people, the cycles of life, and their own particular lives. (137)

Like Christian, Bernard Bell underscores the realism of Morrison's technique and, classifying her as a neorealist and characterizes her work as "poetic realism" and Gothic fables. Bell notes, "Morrison has published two of the best recent examples of this tradition (Gothic) in what I call the Gothic fable: generally short poetic

narratives whose celebration of the beauty, truth, and possibilities of life is derived from the exploitation of its magic, mystery, and terror" (270).

Morrison writes out of her curiosity about human beings and their interaction, particularly that which is steeped in ambivalence. Bell says, "Since her childhood in Lorain, she was fascinated by the uncommon efforts of common black people to cope with socialized ambivalence. How do they deal with the sexist rules and racist absurdities of life in a small town?" (272). Morrison, drawing on her family's tradition of telling ghost stories and her long-standing commitment to literature, began attempting to answer this question and expanding her commitment in 1962 by joining a writers' workshop at Howard. The short story she began in this workshop became the nucleus of The Bluest Eye (272).

Morrison's mastery of the inversion of reality and the ideal make her an extraordinary storyteller. Through the technique of inversion, her depiction of a folk idea--the proposition that materialism is compatible with happiness and fulfillment--shows a consequent confusion, rebellion, madness, and death. Clearly, her works reflect the disappointment of the American Dream. She draws freely upon folk material as a medium for exhibiting the distortion and disillusionment of situations and characters. Like Hurston, she uses the folktale, ritual,

language, and setting as folk elements in her work. And like Marshall, she is uniquely concerned with character, particularly as ideological and ideational foils, and with the folk hero. She focuses on the importance of the ancestor in the life of the community. Whereas in Marshall's literary world, the ancestor is usually a collective figure, although some particular characters are created, as with Aunt Cuney in Praisesong for the Widow, for Morrison, the ancestor is more individualized as a particular character who provides insight for another one. The idea of the ancestor is more significant in her literary world, since her works detail the deterioration of the family, including the physical and ideological distancing of individuals from their communities and the pursuit of material wealth. Like both Hurston and Marshall, Morrison creates folkloric setting through a specific regional area--midwestern locations of her novels. These locales reflect mid-America, and the values associated with the American middle class provide the focal point for contrasting the incidents. The return to the spiritual roots and cultural heritage of characters is also a theme that binds the excellent revoicing of folkloric setting and folk ideas. Morrison's role as modernist storyteller in the folk tradition embodies her depiction of the social pressure to abandon the aesthetic derived from Black folk tradition, the community's need for scapegoats

and banishment of the "other" or the unusual, character as complement to her revelation of folk taboos, and her adaptation and transformation of the folktale into sifted narrative.

Both The Bluest Eye and Sula address the issue of the destructiveness of Western cultural ideas and explore the search for womanhood by young Black girls. The two novels, as Barbara Christian correctly explains,

reveal a consistency of vision, for they illustrate the growth of a theme as it goes through many transformations in much the same way as a good jazz musician finds the hidden melodies within a musical phrase. Both novels chronicle the search for beauty amidst the restrictions of life, both from within and without. In both novels, the black woman, as girl and grown woman is the turning character, and the friendship between two women or girls serves as the yardstick by which the overwhelming contradictions of life are measured. (137)

Christian's unique analysis cites "dominant chord progressions," "unifying sound idea[s]" and "variations on the theme played throughout," but Morrison's music recounts discord. Her characters are often trapped by the tensions between their own nature and their environment, particularly the mores of the midwestern towns in which

they live. Morrison's literary technique is to create inversions, symbols, and ideological foils which aptly delineate character. Also, this outstanding storyteller's first two novels have been described as fables, because they present "a culture's philosophy about life and death, good and evil" (Christian Novelists 164), and they present a moral lesson. Accordingly, folkloric setting, ritual, and folk ideas demonstrate Morrison's role in enhancing the tradition of Black women writers who adapt folk materials to reinforce the idea that knowing one's cultural heritage and history is a key element in achieving happiness or spiritual wholeness.

The Bluest Eye, a female initiation novel, focuses on the development of two young girls, Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, who, as a more mature young woman, narrates portions of the story. Morrison presents her examination of the girls' development through contrasting motifs and subtexts which denote the difficulty and horror of their experiences. Three contrasting motifs of the novel are "the backdrop of the Dick-and-Jane primer, the modulated voice of Claudia, and the constant continuum between the mean, precious seasons and the growth of young black girls" (Christian Novelists 142). The first two are particularly important for this study of the tension between material gain and spiritual wholeness.

The inscription to the novel displays a section from the traditional pre-1970s first grade reader. The passage focuses on the house, family, pet, and friends of Dick and Jane, the American ideal, the white middle class family. The three versions of the passage show the distortion and deviation from the ideal. The neat, clearly spaced sentences become jumbled with no punctuation and little space between words in the second section and progress to total distortion, no space, no air in the third section. Morrison foreshadows the progression into madness of Pecola, and, conceivably others who accept the idea as the norm. Throughout, the headnotes of the run-on parts of the inscription introduce each section of the narrative concerning Pecola and her family.

Claudia, who meets Pecola after Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, has set fire to their house and left them homeless, tells the story of Pecola's decline. As an ideological foil to Pecola, Claudia possesses astute perceptions of nature and her community, of adults in particular. These qualities sustain her determination, curiosity, and compassion. Since Pecola comes to live with the MacTeers while her family is without a house, she tends to rely on Claudia and her sister, Frieda, as companions who can help explain the curiosities of life. Claudia, who is a year younger than Frieda, seems to be placed in the center of this triumverate; she is not as knowledgeable as

Frieda, but not as innocent and inexperienced as Pecola. For example, when Pecola begins "ministratin'," Frieda knows what is happening and quickly sets in motion the things they must do. Claudia is not sure about what is happening. Later that night, Pecola asks of the girls, "Is it true that I can have a baby now?" and Frieda drowsily answers, "Sure yu can." To Pecola's resulting question of "How?" Frieda answers, "Oh . . . somebody has to love you." Speculating upon this response, Claudia says,

There was a long pause in which Pecola and I thought this over. It would involve, I suppose, "my man," who before leaving me, would love me, but there weren't any babies in the songs my mother sang. Maybe that's why the women were sad: the men left before they could make a baby. (BE 29)

Here, Claudia shows her curiosity, innocence, but an initiation into the folk forms of the community through listening to the blues songs sung by her mother. They do not answer all of her questions but they do offer some explanations for some occurrences in life.

Claudia's spirit, sense of self, and perceptions about middle class values are evidenced in a number of incidents within the novel. Her responses to the Christmas gift that adults expect a girl child to appreciate--dolls--at once show rebellion and self-determination. She says, "The big,

the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish" (BE 20). But Claudia is instead "bemused" by the dolls, and even rejects the cuddly, soft-to-sleep-with Raggedy Ann, for she "was physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair" (20). Claudia is incensed by the expectations and presumptions of adults as she remarks of her doll,

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs--all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." (20)

Claudia recognizes the inherent bargaining in the orientation of children to accept the values of the dominant culture. Fingering some features of the doll-- "red bowline lips," "turned-up nose,"--and defiling others-- "poked the glassy blue eyeballs," "twisted yellow hair," "[broke] off the tiny fingers," "bent the flat feet,"

"twist the head around," Claudia reports, "I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable" (20). She is willing to analyze this value system thrust upon her. But she continues to dismantle the doll, who cries, "Mama."

Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, "Ahhhhh," take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauze back would split, and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness.
(21)

Claudia's narrative imitates ritual as she dismembers the symbol of American girlhood and adult ideas to find only a cold, metal disk. Her strong outrage matches that of the grown people who "frowned and fussed" because she has destroyed and rejected their sign of upward mobility.

Morrison's sentence style mimics their whiny complaint with words connected by a hyphen:

"You-don't-know-how-to-take-care-of-nothing. I-never-had-a-baby-doll-in-my-whole-life-and-used-to-cry-my-eyes-out-for-them. Now-you-got-one-a-beautiful-one-and-you-tear-it-up-what's-the-matter-with-you?" (21)

The author's silent, rhetorical reply for Claudia is "Nothing. I'm me." She implies Claudia's selfhood and

individuality, strong traits developed later in Morrison's Sula.

Claudia's assertion of herself dismays the adults who want to live their "years of unfulfilled longing" through this child's Christmas. But they have failed to know Claudia. As she admits,

I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. Had any adult with the power to fulfill desires taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted, they would have known that I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been, "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" (21)

The response from adults that irritates Claudia is one of the very things that Pecola misses in an even greater way. So, while Claudia's desire to have a Christmas experience seems trivial, it corresponds to Pecola's desire to have someone love her and give her the attention she yearns and the request for an experience for Christmas foreshadows Pecola's petition for blue eyes. Claudia seems loved and, compared to many young girls, is quite fortunate to have the love of her parents, a home, and gifts. Unlike Pecola, who is so charmed by the blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup

from which, to Mrs. MacTeer's dismay, she drinks quarts of milk for the experience of using this prized possession, Claudia has the personal qualities which enable her to distance herself from the values of the dominant society and choose for herself a way to maturity, to wholeness.

The obsession with things is not just experienced by children like Pecola. People must have the requisite material possessions and restraint to maintain them or they might find themselves "outdoors," as the Breedloves do when Cholly burns down their house. As narrator Claudia explains,

Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life. The threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days. Every possibility of excess was curtailed with it. If somebody ate too much, he could end up outdoors. If somebody used too much coal, he could end up outdoors. . . . Sometimes mothers put their sons outdoors, and when that happened, regardless of what the son had done, all sympathy was with him. . . . But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one's own kin outdoors--that was criminal. (18)

"Outdoors" refers to a state of estrangement or forced alienation that is unthinkable. The image of outsider extends to encompass more than physical alienation, but

also implies psychological and cultural alienation, a state foisted on all of the members of the Breedlove family by Cholly. Claudia's description is general and explains the attitude of the community toward irresponsible behavior. The community comprehends the severity of this state since there is "a difference between being put out and being put outdoors." Claudia further explains,

If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (18)

This state is characterized by a "concreteness," "like the difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead. Dead doesn't change, and outdoors is here to stay" (18). Since being "outdoors" is a condition to be avoided at all costs, people strive harder:

Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. The firm possession of a yard, a porch, a grape arbor. Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests. . . . Renting blacks cast furtive glances at those owned yards and porches, and made firmer commitments to buy themselves "some nice little old place." (18)

Everyone looks forward to the day they own property as protection against alienation. Thus, "Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals . . ." (18-19). Consequently, all the events that follow involving the Breedlove family are foreshadowed by this definition of their state. They take on the attributes of the rejected and believe they are ugly. Their house, a storefront, and the family personify their psychological, physical, and cultural alienation from the community. Morrison notes, "Although their property was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly" (34). Morrison clearly denotes that the source of their "ugliness" is their own belief in it: "You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction" (34).

The story of this family's distorted sense of beauty and lack of self-price echoes the tales of countless Black people who have migrated from the south because of racism and in search of opportunity for economic and personal happiness. Cholly meets Pauline, marries her, and they "go 'way up north,'" where Cholly said "steel mills were

begging for workers" (92). He works in the mill, while she keeps house, and for a time all is happy. But as Pauline becomes bored and lonely and Cholly becomes frustrated by her dependence and their lack of money, they begin to quarrel. Pauline struggles with her loneliness, which she describes as "lonesomeness," different from being at home alone as she has always been. She begins to go to the movies and there her earlier dreams of romantic love are refreshed. Morrison provides a brilliant critique of Pauline's education in the movies, which later guides her standard of beauty and, eventually, her own self-worth. Through the movies,

Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another--physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in security, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. (97)

Pauline equates her own happiness to the movies and makes attempts to fashion herself after the movie stars. She is acutely aware of the discrepancy between this fantasy and her real life, but this serves only to make living the real life harder. Even her own daughter is judged by the standards she acquires from the movies. When

she sees her newborn daughter for the first time she says, "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but she was ugly" (100). The values of the silver screen, so easily imposed, prevent Pauline's motherly instinct from dominating her response to her own child. This first reaction and her later choice of being cruel to her own daughter and sweet and protective of the daughter of her white employer show Pauline's distortion of values. She finds all the "meaningfulness of her life . . . in her work." She finds pride and pleasure at work and she never allows these feelings to enter her storefront home. Thus, as she tries to move her children toward respectability, she teaches them fear, fear of being drunk, frustrated, and outcast like their father and fear of not being loved. "Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (102). Pauline and Cholly's inability to be responsive parents cause Pecola to seek the standard of ideal projected by Pauline--a more perfect life with blue eyes. Because this ideal cannot be obtained, Pecola also inherits the fear and, eventually, madness.

Pecola is an inverted folk hero who, because of her fear and distorted values, is unable to champion the cause of her people or even her own. She believes that the Shirley Temples, Mary Janes, and Dick-and-Jane are the beautiful and loved of the world and thus cannot reconcile

her own beauty and existence. She must be like them or she cannot be. Unlike Claudia, who knows what she wants, who she is, and can assert these, Pecola is confused and unsure of herself. Her insecurity leaves her open to abusive rape by her father, neglect by her mother, and the misguided assistance of Soaphead Church.

Probably more than any other character in the novel, Soaphead Church illustrates the folk elements and technique of inversion Morrison employs. His story begins like a totally new narrative but is identified by the parts of the run-on inscription referring to the dog and Jane's playing with it. The heading foreshadows the deed that Pecola must accomplish in order to receive Soaphead Church's help. She must kill the animal which has annoyed him. Also in this part of the narrative, Pecola is provided a savior, who fashions himself a "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (130), and becomes her medium for change. The omniscient narrator reveals Soaphead's obsession with things and his distaste for humans: "Once there was an old man who loved things, for the slightest contact with people produced in him a faint but persistent nausea" (130).

All of his life he had a fondness for things--not the acquisition of wealth or beautiful objects, but a genuine love of worn objects: a coffee pot that had been his mother's, a welcome mat from the door of a rooming house he once lived in, a quilt

from a Salvation Army store counter. It was as though his disdain of human contact had converted itself into a craving for things humans had touched. The residue of the human spirit smeared on inanimate objects was all he could withstand of humanity. (131)

Different from the property-seeking acquirers of things who have accepted middle class values, Soaphead Church has rejected his middle class background and chooses a counterculture existence. Barbara Christian says he is "a tragic mulatto, yet he is aware of the waste in the urge to acculterize" (Novelist 149). Pecola has seen his card offering to help people who are "overcome with trouble and conditions that are not natural" (BE 137). But Church is personally outraged because he cannot really perform the miracles she has requested, "the most logical petition he had ever received . . . an ugly little girl asking for beauty" (137). Once he has convinced her that he has granted the petition, he writes a letter to God reporting his own benevolence: "I did what You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her. I played You. And it was a very good show! I, I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes" (143). The irony is overwhelming; this self-righteous, emotionally troubled misanthrope helps this innocent little girl who so desperately needs a miracle to boost her sense of self!

Soaphead Church, who makes a living from the superstitions and insecurities of people, but who holds them in great disdain, becomes a savior for Pecola, albeit an inverted savior, since she does not really get the blue eyes. She gains a kind of satisfaction in her own madness, since only she can see her beautiful appearance. She has come for reconciliation and salvation and receives it from a conman, a conjurer.

Pecola's conversation with her imaginary friend, near the end of the novel, shows her desire for the bluest eyes of all. As Claudia's story ends and merges with Pecola's, Claudia notes "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (158). Claudia comments on the society and those "acceptable" people who need a Pecola or someone who is discarded in order to feel themselves worthwhile:

"All of us--all who knew her--felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. . . . We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (159)

Morrison critically depicts a society that must have its discarded people, its scapegoats, in order to feel good. But a society should project communal values that

nurture. As Barbara Christian notes, Pecola should not want blue eyes and straight hair. "But since that image is imposed on her as the means to wealth, love, and happiness, she is defeated by her own culture's inability to separate image from substance" (Novelists 177). Pecola as the inverted folk hero falls, like the hero in classical literature, because of her flaw--a need to be part of the community which has failed to nurture her, a need to be whole.

In The Bluest Eye, Pecola displays a lack of selfhood because the society has failed to nurture her, even though she accepts their values and symbols. In Sula, the title character's failure to accept the life of the community only enhances her sense of self, but leaves her an outcast. Again, Morrison demonstrates the tendency of the community to reject those who refuse to live by its standards.

Sula is another novel about girlhood friends, who grow into women and must choose to live by or reject the mores of their society. The novel, set between 1919 and 1965, tells the story of Sula Peace and Nel Wright and the changes in their lives and the life of their community. The setting for the novel is Medallion, Ohio, a midwestern community. A key feature of this setting is the area of town called the Bottoms, although the area is really on a hill. Deriving its name from "a nigger joke," which the narrator explains as the "kind white folks tell when the

mill closes down and they're looking for a little comfort somewhere. The kind colored folks tell on themselves when the rain doesn't come, or comes for weeks, and they're looking for a little comfort somehow" (Sula 4). The story is that a good white farmer had promised freedom and a piece of land to his slave if he performed a specific task. When the slave completed the task and asked for his freedom and land, the farmer had no objection to granting the freedom but had a problem with giving him the land. He tells the slave that he was very sorry that he had to give him land in the valley, since he had hoped to give him land in the Bottom, which he said was rich and fertile, "the bottom of heaven--the best land there is." Believing that the white farmer is trying to trick him, he asks for some of the Bottom land, saying that he preferred it to the valley. So, the Black man got the hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter. So that is how the Black people of Medallion lived on the hilly land and the white people lived on the rich valley floor. But as the years progressed and the town grew into a village, the Bottoms was a wonderful place to see. The people are concerned with living and had no time to think about these tales or whether justice had been served. They are concerned about living, "preoccupied with earthly things" (5). Morrison

creates the Bottoms, folkloric setting, as a community which is identifiable in many northern industrial cities. She uses this inverted truth in the folk genre of the joke to emphasize the trickery and deceit underlying business deals between whites and Blacks historically, while setting the stage for a story about the individual's struggle to find self and the relationship of the community to that struggle.

Morrison's focus within this community is two households--those of Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, and Helene Wright, Nel's mother--although we have glimpses of other places and houses. Those houses are best described by the narrator, as Nel reflects on her strict, orderly home when Sula visits:

Nel, who regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread, felt comfortable in it with Sula, who loved it and would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten to twenty minutes at a time--still as dawn. As for Nel, she preferred Sula's woolly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove; the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave directions; where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink, and where a one-legged grandmother named Eva

handed you goobers from deep inside her pockets or read you a dream. (25)

Nel much prefers the casualness, disorder, and human interaction she finds at the Peace home.

There in the "enormous house" Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother directs the lives of the people in it from her upstairs bedroom. Since her husband left her, she has managed to rear her three children and run the household by keeping boarders. Eva's determination to keep her family together gives impetus to the story that she put her legs under a train to get the insurance money so her family can live. But Eva's other unorthodox actions lend even more interest to the stories about her. She refers to dreambooks as a way of foretelling what is going to happen; she takes in stray children and dubs them all with the same name, Dewey; she argues with Sula about right and wrong. Probably the most unique incident surrounding Eva is that she set fire to Plum, her only son, to save his manhood when he became addicted to drugs. This woman is a great influence upon her granddaughter, Sula, who develops to become an even more unique personality.

Sula's appearance is distinctive. She has a birthmark which "spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose. It gave her otherwise plain face a broken excitement, a blue blade threat like the keloid scar of the razored man" (Sula 45).

Nel sees the scar as a rose; Jude as a serpent; Ajax, her lover, as a fish; and Shadrack sees it as a tadpole. But to some people in the community the scar is the embodiment of evil. Johnanna Grimes asserts that the birthmark is of significance since "birthmarks have been associated with individuals who exhibit special capabilities," particularly witch doctors and conjure-doctors (155-56). Grimes notes that the community associates Sula's mark with evil occurrences such as the "sudden choking death of Mr. Findley" and "as a portent of the tortured death Hannah eventually suffers" (156). In discussing Sula and Shadrack, another unique character, and their relationship to African culture, Vashti Crutcher Lewis describes them as "Black sons and daughters of America who would be more at home in Africa" (317). There they would not be pariahs but would represent tradition and rootedness in African cosmology. She writes that

Sula's birthmark links her ontologically to Shadrack, the water spirit, priest, oracle of the river god. Some see Sula's birthmark as a rose, to some it is a serpent; Shadrack, her spiritual protector and kindred spirit, sees it correctly as a tadpole--a water creature. Priestesses of West Africa were often noted for their hierarchical body markings, which were often water creatures, and experts would know from the markings on a

particular woman to what god the priestess had been vowed. Sula, a water spirit/priestess, is vowed to the same river god as Shadrack and bound spiritually to Shadrack by the word "always."

(317)

To Nel, Sula is the completion of herself. Nel finds new awareness and life in the friendship with Sula. When the two, both as only children, find each other in elementary school, they recognize that they have been waiting for this friendship:

they had already made each other's acquaintance in the delirium of their noon dreams. . . . So when they met, . . . they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. (44)

Both are only children who complete each other. They share in the usual childhood adventures and dreams: they fight children who harass them; they discover the opposite sex; they share secrets. In fact, they share the not so secret experience of watching a little boy drown as he calls them to help him. But throughout their girlhood, Sula and Nel remain loyal to each other.

As the girls mature, they make different choices about life. Sula chooses her freedom and leaves Medallion for a period of time. Nel, on the other hand, chooses the traditional life of marriage and family and adopts the middle class values of her family. Her choice of marriage supersedes the friendship with Sula; for the first time she experiences "this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly" (72). The wedding of Nel and Jude is the traditional ritual for the community; ". . . they danced up in the Bottom on the second Saturday in June, danced at the wedding. . . ." (72), as the couple begins family life.

Sula returns to Medallion after ten years, "accompanied by a plague of robins" (77). Coming back to town, because she has met only boredom in every place she has been, Sula is a free spirit who lives by her own rules and accepts few others. She is seen as a threat to women, since she sleeps indiscriminately with their husbands and actually gets little satisfaction from it. When Sula sleeps with Jude, Nel can no longer be the friend she had been. Sula feels that Nel and the others in the town are afraid to be alive. As Dorothy H. Lee writes, "Like the robins, Sula is seen by the community as a defilement. Like the birds also, she is trying to soar freely. The people do not stone her, but they avoid her, exile her, and

let her run her course" (352). She realizes that the town and Nel reject her:

She was pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men. Which was true. She went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow.

(106)

Sula recognizes her inability to feel and care. She yearns for some feeling and finds her source in Ajax, who eventually rejects her as she has so many others. His abandonment becomes the impetus for her own decline.

The narrator explains Sula's lack of sensitivity or expression of compassion in terms of her fractured self:

In a way, her strangeness, her naivete, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like

any artist with no art form, she became dangerous.

(105)

Morrison suggests that Sula's lack of a medium for the expression of her creativity and imagination, no art form, causes the boredom which engulfs Sula. As a person who wants to make herself rather than make others, one who "pursues her own divinity" (Christian, Novelists 177), Sula rejects the mores of her community for her own personal freedom. Her negative selfishness leaves no room for caring, the caring that the community holds as a redeeming quality:

The black people [the community] would have disagreed but they had no time to think about it. They were mightily preoccupied with earthly things--and each other, wondering even as early as 1920 what Shadrack was all about, what that little girl Sula who grew into a woman in their town was all about, and what they themselves were all about (5)

Even though they see Sula as evil, the community folk care about what she has become. Sula can never return that concern. She is, like Pecola, an inverted folk hero. She has the sense of self and the resources, but she lacks the moral conviction and consistency needed to survive and be spiritually whole, able to care what other people are "all about."

In addition to awareness of the folk setting and the folk hero, Morrison creates an assortment of other characters in the novel who further demonstrate her use of folk elements to enhance and enrich her fiction. Ajax, whose mother is a conjure woman, becomes the only man that Sula cares about but who in return fails to care about her and chooses his own freedom. Tar Baby, a boarder at the Peace house, serves as a character complement to Plum, Eva's son. The dewey's, who recall the monkey figures "hear-no-evil; see-no-evil; speak-no-evil," symbolize Eva's power of suggestion and the way people fail to discriminate between the nature of people in similar groups. Within the novel, they serve as topics of conversation and measures of time passed. However, the most memorable folk figure is Shadrack, the originator of National Suicide Day, a holiday in the Bottoms. He is a folk hero for the people of the Bottoms because he helped them to stop worrying about death. But as Lewis claims, "Shadrack is Sula's ancestral presence--a representation of an ancestral spirit, a husband, a father, a provider dispensed by the gods to 'always' be there for the displaced Sula" (317). Thus, Morrison reaches for African folk material for meaning in her second novel.

Although Sula may be of lesser importance for delineating the theme of material gain or the acquisition of wealth than other of Morrison's novels, it is of much

significance to this study because of the representations concerning the relationship of individual self and the community. Morrison asserts the need to reconcile the self with heritage and society.

In Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison, rather than implanting or adapting folk material, transforms folk material into great art. In this practice, she uses folk material similar to that derived from earlier actual folk expression to develop a narrative worldview. Through transformation of folklore about flying Africans, she inscribes total self identity as a three-stage process of metaphoric naming, singing, and flying.

Hence, the basic folklore source of Morrison's story is the folktale about flying Africans. Most folklore collections record a tale about slaves who work in the field for long hours under the direction of a merciless overseer, who beats them when they don't produce fast enough and when they look weary. As the overseer chastises them, the slaves speak to each other in a language that the overseer doesn't understand. When the beatings and work get to be too much for them to bear, they, at the encouragement of an old slave who remembers Africa, say some words, leap into the air, and fly off back to Africa. (Hughes and Bontemps and Brewer have versions.) This folktale presents the theme of transcendence and escape from a life of burden and struggle under the system of

slavery. It presents a solution to the unbearable life and offers hope for return to the homeland of spiritual fulfillment. Morrison's Blacks go back by air as did Marshall's by water, but still they do go in their variously ritualistic ways, and the African homeland at the end of their journeys promises the same personal rewards. No matter how diverse and unique their metaphors, the writers display a shared folk value translated into metaphor. They are, in other words, narrative writers of the communal spirit.

Morrison transforms the essence of this folktale by allowing her major characters Pilate, Milkman and Macon Dead, to be descendants of "one of those flying African children" (SS 325). Through various points of consciousness, the story of Solomon and his descendants unfolds itself. Milkman, the youngest of these descendants and a central figure of the novel, travels in search of lost gold and finds out valuable information about his family history. Although Milkman has two sisters--First Corinthians and Magdalene, called Lena--and a mother, and Pilate has a daughter, Reba, and a granddaughter, Hagar, the real search for history is most significant for Milkman, his father, Macon, and his aunt, Pilate. Although the process of self-identification is focused on these characters, the fact that identity is not realized by other

characters is important. Most people, in other words, never make it to the Promised Land.

Morrison depicts people in a society which casts them "outside." Often, the desire for opportunity, material wealth, and physical appearance acceptable within a spiritually bankrupt culture limits one's sense of personal worth as a human. Morrison asserts that to value self is requisite to the struggle against systems that turn people against themselves or foster self hatred. Thus Morrison believes that people must know who they are; they must be able to convey the knowledge of their identity, self-worth and cultural heritage to their children. In other words, they can learn to fly, to transcend the trappings of the mundane, and soar to great spiritual and moral heights.

The primary stage of the process of attaining total self-identity is discovering one's name or the meaning of that name. Naming is a very curious matter in Song of Solomon, and especially curious in relation to the three major characters, Macon, Pilate and Milkman. Macon Dead, Milkman's father, carries the name of his own deceased father. Macon II was given this name at birth. But Macon II has always been curious about why his own father, whose real name was Jake, never changed this strange appellation. Jake had been misnamed, after Emancipation, when a drunken Yankee soldier recorded information in the incorrect blanks on his registration papers. Jake had kept

the misname because his wife had preferred it. Macon II feels the uncertainty and gap in history which the name creates for him. He thinks:

Surely, he and his sister had some ancestor, some young man with onyx skin and legs straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, not a disguise, not a brand name. (SS 17-18)

While Macon has been named for his father, a ritual surrounds the naming of his younger sister, Pilate. At the death of his wife and the birth of his daughter, who has no navel, Macon Dead I (Jake) takes a Bible, points to a name, and records it on a piece of brown paper. After their father is killed, Pilate takes the piece of paper with her name on it and wears it in a box fashioned into an earring, which becomes her way of knowing her name and keeping it with her. After a disagreement with her brother this little girl, with no navel--no physical connection to her mother and her past--not even knowing her mother's name, heads toward Virginia while seeking a spiritual link to her identity. Although Pilate's name suggests immediately the Biblical personage who ordered the crucifixion of Christ, it is also important to consider the homonym, pilot, and its meaning here. Pilate becomes the one who controls and guides the moral and spiritual growth of her nephew

Milkman. She points out to Milkman's mother Ruth that Macon "ought to have a son. Otherwise that be the end of us" (SS 125). Pilate becomes responsible for Milkman's life by giving Ruth "greenish gray grassy looking stuff" (SS 125) to help Macon make love to her, by protecting Ruth and the baby when an attempt at abortion is tried, by seeing that the baby is delivered safely, and by watching over Milkman and teaching him some of the more basic concepts about living.

Even though naming has been a curious matter within the Dead family, Macon II continues the unusual tradition in the naming of his own daughters. He takes the Bible and randomly chooses names for both--thus, First Corinthians and Magdalene called Lena. But he is very concerned about how his only son has acquired the nickname, Milkman, since "the giving of names in his family was always surrounded by what he believed to be monumental foolishness" (SS 15). Milkman acquired the nickname because Ruth, his mother, breast fed him until he was "old, too old" (SS 126) but the people who know the boy grow to regard him favorably despite the signifying.

Like his father, Milkman at birth has assumed the name Macon Dead. He jokes with his friends, "my name is Macon and I'm already dead" (SS 118). While he suggests that nothing can harm him, actually he really is dead in a spiritual way. Cut off from his ancestral roots, he learns

to live a very self-centered life because everyone--his mother, sisters, Pilate--has always catered to him. He has had little worry, responsibility or experience. "All he knew in the world about the world was what other people had told him" (SS 120). He must make the decision to stand on his own and live his own life. As his friend Guitar tells him, ". . . if a man don't have a chance, then he has to take a chance. . . . You got a life? Live it! . . . Live it!" (SS 184). Milkman thinks that his quest should be for a new life that separates him from his father and the business he will inherit. He thinks that he must find independent financial means and physical distance in order to become his own person. Thus, he sets out on a journey looking for gold that his father and Pilate left in a cave. Little does he know that this journey will create links to his family's past and transform his own sense of self.

Milkman is a folk hero, estranged from the folk culture. He seeks self but he doesn't know enough about his ancestry to find it. He has been trained and encouraged by his property-seeking, money-hungry father, who is incapable of giving him the history that he needs, since he has rejected his folk history and strives for the materialistic dream. Again, Pilate becomes the source by which he gains contact with his heritage. She has never forgotten the experiences of her life, and she keeps contact with her dead father through visions. As a little

girl, when she was afraid, her father told her to sing. He was, unknown to her, uttering her mother's name, Sing, short for Singing Bird. Pilate's own song is the medium for the preservation of this tradition and history.

When Pilate first appears in the novel, she is walking down the street singing her blues song:

Sugarman done fly away
 Sugarman done gone
 Sugarman cut across the sky
 Sugarman gone home

(SS 5)

Pilate sings this song while making wine and working around her house. Milkman becomes so acquainted with the song that he is able to recognize it as a verse of the rhythmic, rhyming action game which the children of Shalimar sing later in a round over and over again. He recognizes that "Jake, the only son of Solomon," in the rhyme, is his own grandfather later renamed Macon Dead. He finds his own family immortalized in song--the song Pilate has carried with her for years.

In addition to hearing their name in song, Pilate and Milkman learn that singing brings emotional release. Pilate and her daughter Reba sing a song of mourning at the funeral for Hagar. They sing for mercy in gospel response to each other:

In the nighttime.

Mercy.

In the darkness

Mercy.

(SS 318-318)

Afterward, softly and sweetly Pilate sings the melody she sang to her granddaughter when she was younger:

Who's been botherin my sweet sugar lumpkin?

Who's been botherin my baby?

Who's been botherin my sweet sugar lumpkin?

Who's been botherin my baby girl?

(SS 318)

Her singing brings release and calmness during her grief for Hagar, her dead granddaughter. Her song is the art form which provides solace and cultural sustenance.

After finding out all about his ancestor Solomon, who was one of "those flying Africans," who left his wife Ryna crying for his return, Milkman is better able to understand himself and his cousin/lover, Hagar. Morrison inserts the historical subtext of the desertion of Black families by Black men--for socioeconomic or whatever other reasons--and the pervasive song the abandoned children acquire which gives them the verbal skills to keep their history alive. In fact, they even translate into a lasting myth and fiction, "the Song of Solomon." Although it is too late to help Hagar, he is able to reveal to Pilate that she still

has her father's bones in the bag she calls her inheritance; she has been carrying her history all along. Milkman's discovery of history helps him to understand and love Pilate and at her death, he, too, learns the magic of song. As he holds her and tries to wrap her wound, she tells him "Sing . . . Sing a little somethin for me" (SS 340). But Milkman knows no songs and has no voice. He responds to the urgency in her voice by revealing his new found relationship to his heritage. He sings:

Sugargirl don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
Sugargirl don't leave me here
Bachra's arms to yoke me.

(SS 340)

He adopts her song, the song of those abandoned children left behind by the flying Africans, left them to work the cotton fields and be enslaved or "yoked" by the white man. Milkman learns the calmness which comes from singing, yet hardly realizes that Pilate has died in his arms. He has passed through the intermediate stage of the process of discovering self-identity as he learns to sing and discovers an art form. Pilate has transmitted to him the art form--song--by which their name, history and meaning are passed from one generation to another.

At Pilate's death, Milkman's previous fascination and joy with flight is seen as not only a desire for escape but

also a negation of his identity and his heritage. When as a little boy he "discovered (what Smith had learned earlier) that only birds and airplanes could fly--he lost all interest in himself. To have to live without that single gift saddened him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull. . . ." (SS). He has not been able to find joy in himself, but with his acceptance of Pilate's command to sing, he completes the intermediate stage in self-discovery and enters the more complex stage--that of flying. For Morrison, Milkman parallels the peacock he watches. He notes about the bird, "some jive flying, but look at her strut" (SS 179). But Milkman must be told why the peacock "can't fly no better than a chicken" because he has "Too much tail. All that jewelry weights it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (SS 179). Both Solomon and Pilate have realized the art to flying. Solomon leaves Ryna, all his children, and the problems of his slavery existence, and Pilate leaves the gold and other trappings of status and appearance that weigh her down. They become spiritually free to fly, unlike Macon Dead, who is weighted down by his love of material possessions and property, and unlike Smith the insurance man who riggs himself with an elaborate fanfare and gimmick. Solomon and Pilate learn to trust and value themselves. And now, Milkman becomes like those "flying

Africans"; he loses the peacock qualities of vanity and self-centeredness and acquires the characteristics of the birds that circle Pilate's body at her death; he can fly with purpose.

At the end of the novel, Milkman is more like the phoenix, for Pilate and Solomon seem to be reborn in him. He leaps freely, "for now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (SS 337). Thus, the novel is circular. It begins with Smith the insurance man's elaborate attempt at flight and ends with Milkman's leap. But these are different flights. Smith's attempt is a yearning for acceptance or recognition, attained in this society through the material and the bizarre. It is suicidal and void of self-love. Milkman's flight is one of comprehension and transcendence, of struggle. He no longer tries merely to save his own life, but flies for self-fulfillment. He knows the meaning of life that allows him to live, as do Solomon and the flying Africans who live on eternally through legend.

As in The Bluest Eye and Sula, Morrison's transformation of folk narrative of the flying Africans reveals a knowledge and acceptance of history to be self-liberating. The need for understanding of folk heritage is clear in Song of Solomon and continues the worldview concerning the incompatibility of materialism or any

outside manifestations of society which impede growth and fulfillment and spiritual wholeness.

Toni Morrison's fourth novel, Tar Baby, is the story of Jadine Childs, a beautiful fashion model, who has returned to the Caribbean island where she was raised by her aunt and uncle, Ondine and Sydney. They are Black servants of Valerian Street, a wealthy, retired, white Philadelphia businessman who sits in his greenhouse listening to music all day, and his wife, Margaret. Jadine has been educated abroad at Valerian's expense and now works in New York and Paris. She arrives at the island for the Christmas holidays. As the group prepares to eat dinner one evening, Margaret goes to her room and discovers a Black man hiding in her closet. Immediately feared by all of the household, except Valerian, who chooses to invite him in rather than have him arrested, the intruder, Son, whose real name is William Green, becomes the catalyst for change in all of their lives. In the course of the story, Margaret reveals a troubled and deceptive past of abusing her son, Michael; Valerian becomes more depressed and aloof; Sydney and Ondine must admit their illusions about their past and their future; and Jadine and Son become lovers and must confront the ambivalence of their lives--past, present, and future.

The time of the story is a one year period in the later twentieth century, probably the nineteen eighties.

The action of the story begins on the small Caribbean island, Isle de Chevaliers, with the six major characters preparing for dinner; it then moves to the small northern Florida town of Eloë, Son's hometown where he takes Jadine to meet his people; then, Jadine and Son go to New York where she works and they live together for several months; and back to the island where both Jadine and Son retreat separately--Jadine to L'Arbre de le Croix, the Street mansion, and Son, in search of information about her by way of the hills of the legendary Black horsemen--but both to regain their personal ideals.

In this novel, Morrison employs folk materials to explore the consequences of accepting the signs and values of the dominant culture which deny true freedom and happiness because of the attendant physical and psychological distancing from cultural and individual history. Folk materials, such as the transformation of the Tar Baby folktale, the creation of folk characters which embody a liberation myth, folkloric setting, and motifs which employ folk elements, are used to empower the storyteller.

The tale of the tar baby as told by Joel Chandler Harris' folk storyteller, Uncle Remus, is about another of Brer Fox's attempts to capture Brer Rabbit for his dinner. In most of the tales, Brer Rabbit actually outsmarts Brer Fox, so he avoids the life-threatening situation. One day

as Uncle Remus pauses to tell his young white companion another of the tales, the child asks if Brer Fox ever really catches Brer Rabbit. Uncle Remus' reply is in the form of the tar baby tale. The fox concocts the tar baby, a bundle of tar and turpentine, and watches as the curious rabbit speaks to it, touches it, and gets ensnared in it. As Uncle Remus finishes the tale, the boy asks if the rabbit ever got loose, and Uncle Remus responds that that is the end of the tale. In her transformation of this tale, Morrison leaves the reader with a similar response regarding the ending, but her message is clear--people can easily become ensnared by the notions and values of middle-class society, which may not be compatible with their own happiness or cultural and spiritual wholeness.

Three of Morrison's characters, though complex, readily resemble the characters of the tar baby tale. Jadine is the tar baby whose refined composure reflects her upbringing and shaping and who falls in love with Son but is unable to compromise her ideals. As Susan Willis notes:

For the "tar baby," Jadine, fashioned out of the rich white man's indulgence and the notions of culture most appealing to bourgeois America (European education and Paris "haute couture") the past is irretrievable and no longer perceived as desirable. As the individual whose cultural exile

is the most profound, Jadine is haunted by waking visions, born out of guilt and fear. (92-93)

Jadine is "fashioned" by the ideas and dreams of her aunt and uncle, Ondine and Sydney, who reared her after her mother's death, and Valerian Street, their employer who has provided the money for her education and through their long conversations has directed her thinking about life and culture. Since of these three Valerian is the symbol of the dominant white society which actually influences Jadine and her aunt and uncle, he is equated with Brer Fox. Valerian owns the island mansion and creates a game of ensnarement and indoctrination for Son, the Black hide-away who joins their Christmas celebration. Son is equated with Brer Rabbit. A fugitive from the states, he hops around the island after jumping ship, becomes intrigued by the beautiful Jadine, and falls in love. Like Brer Rabbit, Son, curious about the beautiful woman he has watched sleeping each night before he was discovered in the mansion, talks with her at length, makes love to her touching her with his big hands, and finds himself totally enamored but struggling to maintain his own spirit and identity.

Christmas dinner is the time when the havoc is created in the otherwise peaceful and orderly Street household. Valerian reveals that because they were stealing apples, he has fired Gideon, whom they call Yardman, and Therese, two

local black people who also work at the mansion assisting Sydney and Ondine. Sydney and Ondine are insulted that Valerian has fired the servants without consulting or notifying them. At this point, we begin to see how little authority these black servants, who have devoted their lives to making this family comfortable, have and how Street regards his authority as landowner. He is taken aback that they even feel that he needs to discuss his actions with them, the servants. But Sydney and Ondine feel they have more influence with him. Ondine becomes emotional and reveals the secret she has kept for years about Margaret's abuse of their son. The entire dinner is disrupted. As Son observes the arguments at the table, he relates Valerian's attitude to the posture of American industry and western colonization:

That was the sole lesson of their world: how to make waste, how to make machines that made more waste, how to make wasteful products, how to talk waste, how to study waste, how to design waste, how to cure people who were sickened by waste so they could be well enough to endure it, how to mobilize waste, legalize waste and how to despise the culture that lived in cloth houses and shit on the ground far away from where they ate. And it would drown them one day, they would all sink into their own waste and the waste they had made of the

world and then, finally they would know true peace and the happiness they had been looking for all along. In the meantime this one here would chew a morsel of ham and drink white wine secure in the knowledge that he had defecated on two people who had dared to want some of his apples. (TB 203-204)

Son is irritated by Valerian's lack of compassion for two poor people, but notices that Jadine "had defended him" (204) and "was doing the bidding of her boss and 'patron.'" Keeping the dinner going smoothly, quietly chastising everybody . . . soothing Margaret, agreeing with Valerian. . . ." At once we see the opposite political stances of the two men: "The man who respected industry looked over a gulf at the man who prized fraternity" (205), the fox meets the rabbit. Later when Jadine and Son discuss what has happened at dinner, Jadine asks, "What does it mean?" Son responds, "It means . . . that white folks and black folks should not sit down and eat together. . . . They should work together sometimes, but they should not eat together or love together or sleep together. Do any of those personal things in life" (210). In an echo of Booker T. Washington's separate but equal statement, Son states what is to him a very practical solution to the problem. He is concerned about the respect for human life and human dignity and recognizes the loss of dignity suffered by

Gideon and Therese as well as Ondine and Sydney at Valerian's show of power and authority.

Morrison's primary focus in the use of the transformed tar baby tale is to show the changes in ideas and attitudes of the Black woman. She offers Jadine as the new career woman, an image not developed in her other novels. This new woman, the "model of industry and planning" (267), works hard to maintain her own freedom and prosperity. Jadine has worked hard to become a successful model and relishes the opportunity for travel, material possessions and fun that her hard work has afforded her. One of the things that she is most thrilled about is the sealskin coat that she receives from an admirer for Christmas. But life with Son presents a new challenge. He has illicit new responses from her, but she is more concerned about "making it" in New York. She is also afraid of what Son demands of her. She admits,

She had not seen a Black like him in ten years.

. . . the black people she knew wanted what she wanted--either steadily and carefully like Sydney and Ondine or uproariously and flashily like theater or media types. But whatever their scam, "making it" was on their minds and they played the game with house cards, each deck issued and dealt by the house. With white people the rules were even simpler. She needed only to be stunning, and

to convince them she was not as smart as they were. Say the obvious, ask stupid questions, laugh with abandon, look interested, and light up at any display of their humanity if they showed it. Most of it required only charm occasionally panache. (126-127)

Her life is jaded, dull and spiritless, a game in which she feels comfortable as a player. But life with Son will require questioning many of her values and honesty about her discomfort, especially with women like those she meets in Eloë.

She feels estranged from all the women she meets in Eloë and even her aunt, Ondine. They all have a sense of nurturing and maternal instincts which Jadine cannot accept for herself. As she thinks about being with Rosa on her visit to Eloë, "No man had made her feel that naked, that unclothed. Leerers, lovers, doctors, artists--none of them had made her feel exposed. More than exposed. Obscene" (253). She feels insecure and strange because of her separation from her culture. She is uncomfortable.

In fact, her greatest fear comes in a recurring vision. In it, a group of Black women, some of whom she knows, some whom she does not know, crowd into her room. They expose their breasts to her and wave them. One of the women dressed in yellow carries three big eggs. The vision condemns her for rejecting the traditional maternal role of

Black women. The vision comes first while she visits Eloë and she is plagued by this vision wherever she goes after the trip. This vision is much like another she has while in a supermarket in Paris when a tall African woman, whose eyes had burnt away their lashes, balances three eggs on her shoulder and wearing a "canary yellow dress" and with tar-black fingers looks directly at her as she strides through the store.

These visions symbolize her repression of her cultural heritage just as her inability to consider caring for Ondine and Sydney in their retirement threatens her ideals. She fails to realize that caring for people, especially elderly people and children is a traditional role for Black women. Ondine tells her:

"Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man--good enough even for the respect of other women." (281)

What Ondine tries to tell Jadine, and Jadine doesn't want to learn or hear, is that a woman must be compassionate, must care about people other than herself. Jadine's selfish life has never forced her to care enough to sacrifice and she is not willing--even for Son. As the transformed tar baby, she has functioned to ensnare Son but

chooses not to remain with him, since he forces her to consider a history she would just as soon forget.

Jadine becomes the perfectly crafted middle-class career woman who knows only the new woman and is estranged from her heritage. This estrangement and her preference for European culture is clearly seen in a discussion she has with Valerian about his son Michael's attempt to teach her the value of Black folk art. She says of their conversation,

"Picasso is better than an Itumba mask. The fact that he was intrigued by them is proof of his genius, not the mask-makers'. I wish it weren't so, but . . ." She gave a tiny shrug. Little matches of embarrassment burned even now in her face as she thought of all those black art shows mounted two or three times a year in the States.

(74)

She has accepted the western concept of art and fails to consider the individual value of an art form.

While the tar baby folktale is one element of folklore Morrison uses to develop her story, she also develops another myth--the myth of the horsemen. This story, used as a counter-myth by Morrison, is told by the locals of the island. Son learns about the people called "the blind race" from Gideon who says that Therese is one of the people who are "descended from some slaves who went blind

the minute they saw Dominique." The island where the rich white Americans live was named from these people.

According to the fisherman's tale that Gideon tells:

Their ship foundered and sank with Frenchmen, horses and slaves aboard. The blinded slaves could not see how or where to swim so they were at the mercy of the current and the tide. They floated and trod water and ended up on that island along with the horses that had swum ashore. Some of them were only partially blinded and were rescued later by the French, and returned to Queen of France and indenture. The others, totally blind, hid. The ones who came back had children who, as they got on into middle age, went blind too. What they saw, they saw with the eye of the mind, and that of course was not to be trusted.

(152)

This folktale recurs in the novel in several ways. It is recalled by both Valerian and Son during their discussion after Gideon and Therese are fired. Telling Son he has caused his wife enough mischief, Valerian thinks of "one hundred French chevaliers . . . roaming the hills on horses. Their swords were in their scabbards and their epaulets glittered in the sun. Backs straight, shoulders high--alert but restful in the security of the Napoleonic

Code" (206). Before responding to Valerian, Son has a thought on the same subject:

Somewhere in the back of Son's mind one hundred black men on one hundred unshod horses rode blind and naked through the hills and had done so for hundreds of years. They knew the rain forest when it was a rain forest, they knew where the river began, where the roots twisted above the ground; they knew all there was to know about the island and had not even seen it. They had floated in strange waters blind, but they were still there racing each other for sport in the hills behind this white man's house. (206)

The two men see different visions of ownership of the land and each believes that horsemen who share their political views roam the land. The folktale serves as a liberation myth for the island people and for Son, while for Valerian the folktale corroborates his own values and the history he knows about the island.

Finally, it is Therese, a descendant of the blind race, who guides Son to the island so that he can find out where Jadine was going. Therese, a folk griot and seer, warns him against searching for Jadine and tries to get him to forget her. She says, "Forget her. There is nothing in her parts for you. She has forgotten her ancient properties" (305). She believes that Son must have a woman

who knows her heritage and her cultural traditions and Jadine has forgotten these. Their journey to the island is unfamiliar to Son, but Therese leads him to the side of the island where the horsemen roam. They will help Son choose between a disappointing search for Jadine and a re-emersion in his own culture. The story has a problematic ending with choices for Son.

Morrison creates a folkloric setting which recalls the setting of Marshall's The Chosen Place, the Timeless People. Both feature Caribbean islands where there is great discrepancy between the lifestyles of the local Black people and the alien whites. The Isle de Chevalier, like Bourne Island, has clearly defined sections of the island where Blacks and whites live. The Blacks must use a boat to get to the island where the large mansions of the whites are located. Their customs and beliefs are different, as can be seen in the concepts the two groups have about the mythical horsemen of the island. In both cases, the whites come from Philadelphia, the "City of Brotherly Love," but display little regard for people and their needs. The irony is acute in Tar Baby, since Valerian has exiled himself and wants little to do with the people, but has made his wealth from a candy business which imported the chocolate and sugar from the island for production. Son, whose only ideal is fraternity, recognizes the insensitivity of the white man to other people. On the

other hand, Ondine and Sydney, Philadelphia Negroes, referring to the title of the book by E. Franklin Frazier, feel pride in their bourgeoisie status and accomplishments and believe that they are a credit to the race and to themselves. They have made distinctions between themselves and the islanders such as "the mulatto," although Valerian sees no real difference in the two groups. Sydney and Ondine, too, want little to do with the native Black islanders and feel more kindred to the whites from America. The physical and political distancing of the people of the island serves to dramatize the discrepancy between their cultures and beliefs. Using folkloric setting to accentuate the tensions between the two cultures is a useful technique employed by Morrison in the same manner as Marshall before her.

The folk tradition as evidenced in the fiction of Toni Morrison serves as bridge between the past and the present, the old and the new. Folk materials such as the folktale, joke, myth, songs, rhyme, and folk expressions serve as the means for depicting the search for identity, the assertion of self, and pride in cultural heritage in Morrison's canon. However, her utilization of folk materials has progressed from the profuse stringing together of folk elements most prevalent in Zora Neale Hurston's works to a well-sustained, crystallized narrative in which folk elements are present, but more deftly interwoven. This

strategy combines the history of a people with a tradition in Black women's fiction.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The traditions of Black fiction writing have embraced many perspectives. William Adams offers a useful analysis of traditions in his introductory essay to Afro-American Authors. He divides the writings into three traditions: historical, awareness or awakening, and assertive. The historical tradition embodies works by Black writers who wrote for a largely white audience and its purpose was to plead for the conditions of people of color and correct the unjust ways of the society. The awakening tradition is characterized by a consciousness or "awakening" of a Black reading public and Black writers who addressed this widened audience. The ultimate aim of the writers of this tradition was to apprise Black readers of their rights and their place in society. This tradition embodies the writings of the Harlem Renaissance, a major Black cultural movement. Adam's third category is the assertive mode, which is dominated by the works of the 1960s and after. The writer in the assertive mode tells about the experience as he or she sees it and recognizes that experience as only one in the totality of Black experience.

Adam's framework offers an approach to understanding the trends in Afro-American literature and corresponds to

the analyses of other critics of the literature. Early fiction conformed to the dictates of white propagandists who preferred Black writers who created works which revealed the stereotypes and ideas of a segregated society. Later trends in Black fiction writing saw the development of a protest tradition, which often competed with a more bourgeois and elitist "literature for art's sake" which flourished around the 1920s and 30s. Both of these traditions, as Addison Gayle has remarked, "represented dead ends and neither led to a realistic confrontation with the problems facing black people in American society" (377). Black women as writers embrace these general descriptions but extend their approach to include more realism. The fiction of Black women writers has evolved into a more realistic approach to literature by balancing romantic and pragmatic notions. Even the earliest fiction by Black women writers posed realistic problems, though often domestic ones with romantic themes. One example of this early fiction is Frances E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted (1892) whose main character struggles for her own personal development as well as the uplift of the race. Although the problems posed by Harper are realistic domestic problems, her approach to the solution is through the same assimilationist theory for the uplift of the race espoused by male writers before her such as William Wells Brown and Frank J. Webb. Gayle asserts that the

continuation of this approach rather than taking the nationalist or protest approach fostered by Martin Delany in Blake was detrimental to the development of Black fiction. He asserts

What is most important about this continuation, in fictional form, of the assimilationist theory is that after emancipation, through an unprecedented push for education, via the freedmen's schools and private and church colleges, Blacks were ready for fiction far different in terms of content. If any literary genre was to gain their support, the novel had a clear advantage if only for the reason that reading and writing novels evidenced educational attainment. . . . Freedom in a total sense, however, which is to say mentally, was possible only when a race was certain of its own worth and conscious of its own identity. (Gayle 31)

While Harper expressed the correct problems, her solutions were presented as images to counter the stereotypes and impose moral uplift for the race. As Majorie Pryse notes

Yet for all of Harper's (and her contemporary Pauline Hopkins's) achievements, breaking into fiction by means of didactic "uplift" themes would not in and of itself give black women

literary authority or provide the basis for a strong literary tradition. Ironically, the very strategy that . . . nineteenth-century black women preachers and writers employed to enable them to write at all, claiming that they spoke with divine aid, may also have limited their confidence in their own voices therefore also inhibited the development of artistic self-consciousness, a quality that would not begin to characterized black women's fiction until Zora Neale Hurston. (Pryse 8)

So, it is with Zora Neale Hurston that a new tradition in the fiction of Black women writers begins. Rather than the moral uplift that so concerned Harper, Hopkins, and a host of Hurston's contemporaries, Hurston's concern was the realistic portrayal of her people and their ways. Barbara Christian calls Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God "a significant novel, a transitional one, in the development of black woman images in literature. In it Hurston revised the mulatta images that had preceded her and led the way toward the presentation of more varied and complex women characters" (57). In the figure of Janie Crawford, Hurston creates a new Black woman character who discovers self-fulfillment through modes of discovery and experience. Moreover, she is a character who develops within a particular cultural milieu and seeks to understand rather

than reject that environment. For Hurston, self-discovery and community, rather than security and material gain and social status within a larger or dominant culture, are paramount.

Accordingly, Black women writers have focused on the concerns of the community of which they are a part. As Dexter Fisher notes, "Unlike the male writers, who tend to focus their literature on the confrontation between the white and black worlds, black women writers concentrate more intensely on the black community alone and the human relationships within that community" (143). Also, she notes "that community must be located in a cultural space that can be defined by geography as well as by history and tradition" (144).

The writers discussed in this study, Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison, are bound by the tradition of realistic fiction that identifies and extols the virtues of a community located in a cultural space. That cultural space holds a rich folk tradition that extends from the history and tradition of Black people in the diaspora, especially those traditions proclaimed and preserved by women. As Black women, the writers examined in this study are heirs to a rich tradition which has been transmitted orally over centuries of prosperity, assault, travail, and struggle. That tradition has been informed by folk materials of a varied nature. These materials include

ritual, legend, customs, folklore, myth, superstitions, folk expressions, folkloric setting and the folk idea. These folk materials, though often subtly inserted in the text, add to the writers' depiction of particular communities and the relationships of the people therein.

The folk tradition in the fiction of Black women must be examined through a broad view of folklore and folk elements. Folklore is comprised of those expressions or ways of a people or group which recall a given or accepted fact or ritual, those traditions which are part of what "people used to say" or do or what "the old people used to say." Folklore as an artistic process may be valuable to the student or critic of literature for the purpose of examining folkloric sources for literature, examining cultural or literary devices found in the literature of a group or people, and analyzing the degree to which the first two combine to create a worldview or system of communal or community values.

A precise construct for examining the extent to which folk materials inform the work of Black women who are perceived to be part of this tradition in fiction writing is difficult, since folk influence is more subtle and sophisticated in more modern literature. However, consideration of Alan Dundes' concept of folk ideas as units of worldview has provided a much needed framework for identifying and examining those notions which inform the

Black fiction writer. As Dundes noted, "It is perfectly conceivable that the identification of sets of folk ideas from different cultures will facilitate valuable comparative analyses. No doubt when two cultures come into contact, it is the conflict of folk ideas which causes the most difficulty" (103). This conflict is evident as women writers struggle with the diversity of the cultures in which we live and about which they write, and there must be more constructs for examining the ways that cultural ideas and historical influences define the impulses and inspiration of their writing.

This study proposes that the women writers examined express in their works some influence, whether consciously or unconsciously, of one particular folk idea--that material gain is not compatible with happiness or spiritual wholeness. These writers are constantly rewriting or revising the images and narrative strategies of earlier writers to present some new perspective on realistic problems and situations within the Black community. Just as Hurston creates characters with human shortcomings as with John Pearson and recreates the life choices for her mulatto character, Janie Crawford, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison design a more complex cultural symbolism with broader scope, embracing Pan-Africanism and a larger view of humanity. Marshall uses legend, customs, and expressions of West Indian culture, while advancing the

notion of the importance of history for understanding those cultural elements and for achieving personal identity in the modern world. Her trinity of female heroines--Selina Boyce, Merle Kimbona, and Avey Johnson--point to a resolution of bi-culturalism and double-consciousness by a return to cultural and historical roots and a rejection of the struggle for upward mobility and capitalistic ideas so intrinsic to American life. Similarly, Toni Morrison asserts the inadequacies of traditional American values and family life. Morrison employs folk materials, particularly folktale, ritual, customs, expressions, but expands these forms to invent more sophisticated and decentralized plot structures which depend upon extended interior monologue and inversions of time and idea. Confusion and disparity symbolic of modern life are projected through inversions in plot, situation, and idea. Though, like Marshall, she makes use of ideological foils, hers become necessary counterparts of the other half as in Sula Peace and Nel Wright, Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, or Milkman Dead and Guitar Baines. In addition to character studies, these writers address significant issues which concern the Black community, such as alienation and estrangement, anger and rage, and the conflict of old rituals and New World values. Some of these are depicted in the rituals which come through art forms as in dance for Selina and Avey, song for Pilate and Milkman or Janie Crawford, the guitar

for Teacake and Guitar, the sermon for John Pearson, and planting a garden for Claudia and Frieda. But more often than not the art form is not adequate and characters lack adequate means of expression as with Sula, Pauline, Deighton, and Pecola.

Creative though they are and forging new images of the entire community of humankind, these writers are not concerned about the stereotypes of the past. As Christian notes they "are not interested in creating counter images to the stereotypes imposed on black women. Nor are they concerned only with protesting to whites the conditions of blacks. Their language, their characters, their analyses, seem to be directed at their own communities or more precisely at that part of themselves that is their community" (246). Theirs is fiction with a nurturing and inclusive nature which is focused on the community and the harmony and diversity therein.

These three writers have set the tone and figures for others such as Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Sherley Anne Williams, Toni Cade Bambara, Terry McMillan and Jamaica Kincaid to follow. These women all focus on the concept of community and the strength of the community that knows its history and its people. Also, they concentrate on the community that includes women and focus on the concerns of women and their relationships. This approach does not exclude the development of male characters or a focus on

male concerns, but it does highlight the relationships of women and men, women and women, and women and children. Alice Walker, who considers herself a spiritual sister of Zora Neale Hurston and who has written several works about Hurston, depicts the human acts of violence often in Black male-female relationships. The violent scenes of The Third Life of Grange Copeland and The Color Purple are memorable scenes for any reader. However, it is also Walker's Southern setting and recreation of familiar folk ritual and belief that make both these works and other shorter stories part of the folk tradition.

Just as Walker easily qualifies as a spiritual and artistic sister to Zora Neale Hurston, the other writers mentioned share kinship. Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place, Linden Hills, and Mama Day all deal with women and their relationships. Naylor's concern with place, especially in her first two novels, recalls the concern for folkloric setting in Marshall and Morrison. In fact, Michael Awkward associates Naylor and Jean Toomer as he declares that The Women of Brewster Place evokes and refigures Cane (Awkward 132-33).

Similar to Toni Morrison in her later novel Beloved, a story about a slave who kills her child rather than see her sold away, Sherley Anne Williams draws upon slave narratives and folkways in her novel Dessa Rose. Williams

recalls folk rituals such as hair combing, cornhuskings, and slave marriages to depict realistically a love story.

Toni Cade Bambara and Terry McMillam provide even more telling depictions of women characters who are immersed in Black folk life. Bambara's Gorilla My Love, The Seabirds Are Alive, and The Salteaters as well as McMillam's Mamma and her more recent Disappearing Acts depict the Black community and focus on women and their relationships. In fact, McMillam's main character in Disappearing Acts is named Zora, suggesting a kinship with Hurston. And Jamaica Kincaid follows Marshall's lead in writing novels which show the development of West Indian deescendants who struggle with the adjustments of growing up and coming to America in her novels Annie John and Lucy. Kincaid focuses on individual awareness and cultural traditions.

Writing of some of these writers and others, Majorie Pryse says in Conjuring that Black women writers of the '70s are "metaphorical conjure women" since they are reestablishing connections between "ancestors" in the Black narrative tradition. These women forge new images and experiment with form but continue to remember the ways of the people. Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison develop worldviews which place women as central figures in the Black community, which call for survival through knowledge of history and heritage, and that create cultural heroes or heroines whether through figures within the novels--as with

Cuffee Ned and Shadrack--or through the main characters themselves--as with Janie, Selina, Claudia, Merle, Avey, and Pilate. At odds, in many cases, are the New World values and rituals which must suppress or compete with those of the Old World, and for many people as with Jerome Johnson and later Avey, the New World is not enough. This struggle with values is evident in the struggle for happiness and the notion that material gain brings happiness. But, as seen through the examination of specific works, this folk idea must be inverted and the vision is clear from Hurston, Marshall, and Morrison.

Within the larger context of Afro-American writing, this study is valuable because of its interdisciplinary nature and its focus on a little-discussed construct, the folk idea. While only one folk idea has been examined, it is clear that other folk ideas inform the fiction of Black women writers. More study of specific folkloric sources and examination of other folk ideas may provide much greater insight into how cultural premises and notions about life are preserved or altered from one generation to the next. Such studies can only increase the understanding among human beings and provide for the study of folklore and literature much needed methods for analyzing cultural influences.

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