Université de Montréal

The Word in the World:

"Fallen Preachers" in Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*

par

Wiebke Omnus

Département d'études anglaises

Faculté des arts et des sciences

Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures

en vue de l'obtention du grade de doctorat

en études anglaises

April 2009

Université de Montréal

Faculté des études supérieures

Cette thèse intitulée :

The Word in the World

présentée par :

Wiebke Omnus

a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

.....

président-rapporteur

.....

directeur de recherche

.....

membre du jury

.....

examinateur externe

.....

représentant du doyen de la FES

Résumé

Ma dissertation examine comment deux femmes du Sud des États-Unis, l'anthropologiste Zora Neale Hurston d'origine africaine-américaine et de foi protestante et l'européenne-américaine infirme et catholique Flannery O'Connor, considèrent la relation entre le sacré et le séculaire, ou "la Parole et le monde", à partir de points de vue différents. En mettant l'emphase sur l'œuvre de Hurston *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) et celle de O'Connor *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), ma dissertation met en évidence comment les deux écrivaines exposent la lutte menée par les personnages contre l'interférence du spirituel et du sensuel dans leur vie. Finalement, l'univers des protagonistes s'effondre parce que, de façon très différente, ils ne peuvent accepter une séparation entre le monde spirituel et le monde séculaire et sensuel dans leur vie, sans non plus pouvoir les y intégrer confortablement.

J'étudie *Jonah's Gourd Vine* et *The Violent Bear It Away* en utilisant des modèles philosophiques et d'intertextes, incluant la Bible, qui est centrale dans les deux textes avec la présence de ministères chrétiens, et je place ces romans dans des contextes historique et littéraire, en les considérant comme des œuvres de la Renaissance du Sud des États-Unis qui a eu lieu du début au milieu du vingtième siècle. Écrire à propos du Sud a influencé O'Connor, dont l'intérêt premier est la religion chrétienne, à discuter de la question pressante sur le temps, et Hurston, dont l'intérêt premier est la culture noire, à se préoccuper du sujet de la religion. Je démontre comment, dans leur roman respectif, ces écrivaines réévaluent et réapproprient certains aspects de la culture du Sud des États-Unis.

Par conséquent, chacune répond a un appel prophétique et s'embarque dans un voyage vers une libération personnelle qui s'avère être significatif tant au niveau personnel qu'au niveau social.

Mots-clés : Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O'Connor, le Sud des États-Unis, religion chrétienne, race, religion, écrits féminins

Abstract

My dissertation examines how two Southern women writers, the African-American Protestant anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, and the European-American Catholic invalid Flannery O'Connor, ponder the relationship between the sacred and the secular, "the Word and the world," from distinctly different standpoints. In my analysis, which foregrounds Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), I demonstrate how both writers introduce characters who struggle with the interplay between spirituality and sensuality in their lives. Ultimately their universes collapse because the protagonists, in vastly different ways, cannot uphold a division between the spiritual and the secular and sensual, nor can they comfortably integrate them.

I read *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* through the lens of various philosophical models and intertexts, including the Bible, which is central to both texts as they engage with Christian ministry, and I place these novels in a historical and a literary context, understanding them as part of the Southern Renaissance, a larger process of the redefinition of the American South that took place in the early to mid-twentieth century. Writing about this region causes O'Connor, whose primary interest is Christianity, to engage with the pressing issues of the time, and Hurston, whose primary interest is black culture, to concern herself with religion. I show how, in their respective novels, these writers re-evaluate and reclaim aspects of Southern culture; each thus answers a prophetic call and maps a journey towards liberation that is meaningful both on a personal and a societal level.

Keywords : Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O'Connor, the American South, Christianity, race, religion, women's writing

Table of Contents

"Amid the eternal silences
God's endless Word was spoken;
None heard but He who always spake,
And the silence was unbroken.
Oh marvellous! Oh worshipful!
No song or sound is heard,
But everywhere and every hour,
In love, in wisdom, and in power,
The Father speaks His dear Eternal Word!"

From "The Eternal Word"
by Frederick William Faber

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor, Professor Caroline Brown, for all her advice and guidance. This dissertation would not have been possible without your insight. Thank you for working with me, for giving so much of your time, and for your kindness and patience. I am also indebted to Professor Eric Savoy for his steady help throughout this project. I have benefited much from your scholarship and careful judgment, and I am forever grateful. My sincere thanks to Professor Andrew Miller for his valuable input. I learned so much from your classes and our conversations. I am thankful to Professor Lianne Moyes for her wise counsel throughout my time at the UdeM. I thank Johanne Simard and France Giasson for never allowing my limited French to hinder me. My gratitude to the Département d'études anglaises for supporting me financially and for giving me the opportunity to teach.

I thank my friends, especially Marc for formatting; Jen-Kai for printing; Diana, James and Kamin for proofreading; Sarah for translating, Kelly for his advice; and everyone at Grace Montreal Church for their prayers. My thanks to Anna for introducing me to O'Connor, for proofreading even though she hates it, and for always encouraging me. I thank Isher-Paul for teaching me to write and for being so loyal even when we disagree. I owe my deepest gratitude to Mayjee for being there throughout the writing process – thank you so much for the innumerable things you did to make this work stronger, for laughing with me at my mistakes and for helping me focus on what really matters. I am thankful to my family for their endless support. I couldn't have done this without your love and encouragement. "Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy" (Psalm 28:6).

ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON

DTR	*Dust Tracks on a Road*
Folklore	*Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*
JGV	*Jonah's Gourd Vine*
Moses	*Moses, Man of the Mountain*
"Race"	"The Race Cannot Become Great Until It Recognizes Its Talent"
Sanctified Church	*The Sanctified Church*
EWWG	*Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Life	*Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*

ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Complete Stories	*The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor*
HB	*Flannery O'Connor: The Habit of Being*
Letters	*Letters*
MM	*Mystery and Manners*
VBIA	*The Violent Bear It Away*
WB	*Wise Blood*

The Word in the World: Introduction

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

1. Topic and Thesis Statement

The most-beloved and most-quoted verse in the Bible, John 3:16, leaves much room for interpretation. What, or who, exactly is the world so loved by God? How should prophets and believers go about communicating God's love to this world that does not recognize its own Creator (John 1:10), and "ha[s] abandoned its Saviour" (*VBIA* 5)? What is an appropriate relationship of the spiritual, to the secular, or even the sensual? Two Southern women writers, the African-American Protestant anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, and the European-American Catholic invalid Flannery O'Connor, attempt to answer these questions, as they engage similar issues regarding the affinity between religion and race from distinctly different standpoints. My dissertation, which foregrounds Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), demonstrates how both writers introduce characters whose universes collapse because they, in vastly different ways, cannot uphold a division between the spiritual and the secular and sensual, nor can they comfortably integrate them.

That the sacred and the profane are so intimately connected in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, I suggest, may be illuminated by considering the fact that both novels are set in the so-called Bible Belt, a predominantly Protestant area of the Southern United States. O'Connor argues in her essay "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South" that the Southern writer must reflect his or her surroundings in order to produce successful fiction (*MM* 198), and that the Bible is central because it is so well-

known by a rural, Southern Protestant, population (*MM* 202). In Catholic circles, only the educated tend to read Scripture,[1] O'Connor writes, "but in the South the Bible is known by the ignorant as well" (*MM* 203). The South is not only known for its religiosity, however, but also for its conflicts between racial groups. Writing about the American South in the early to mid-twentieth century forces Hurston, whose primary interest is black culture, to concern herself with the phenomenon of religion, and O'Connor, whose primary interest is Christianity, to engage with the pressing issues of the time, such as race. In the American South, race and religion are intertwined, inseparable entities, and my dissertation shows how Hurston views religion through the lens of race, and O'Connor views race through the lens of religion. While the backgrounds and standpoints of these writers are vastly different, they arrive at similar conclusions regarding the lost state of humanity, but differ in how they anticipate possible redemption. Hurston leaves the ending of her novel open, as she herself continues to seek spiritual answers (*DTR* 226), while the conclusion of O'Connor's work points to the person of Christ, who, she says, is the "center of meaning" in her fiction (*MM* 197).

Hurston's and O'Connor's novels are sustained by a tension with Scripture, as they not only build on the many stories contained therein, but also embrace the overall structure of the Bible: creation, fall, and redemption/restoration. The Bible in its entirety leads to Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for the sake of humanity, as He suggests to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection: "[B]eginning with Moses and

[1] In my dissertation, "Scripture" refers to the sacred writings of the Bible exclusively.

all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).[2] Textually, one could argue that all verses in the Bible anticipate, and reflect on, the verse I use as an epigraph, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* capture a quest for salvation as the characters desperately search for meaning. However, they fail to look beyond themselves and thus end up standing defeated by their own inadequacies, and an inability to overcome the self-destructive tendencies within themselves. My dissertation seeks to illuminate *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, highlighting ways in which Hurston's and O'Connor's works are both different and similar in their respective descriptions of a journey of faith.

2. State of Research on the Topic

A large number of studies on Christianity and/in early to mid-twentieth century American literature exist; however, most of them were written prior to 1980. There is certainly a need for scholarship that examines the role of Christianity in modernist literature, since faith, or a loss thereof, resulting in religious skepticism, is a concern for so many writers. In light of this interest in the Christian religion, manifested in the many allusions to, and quotations from, the Bible, an analysis that is informed by Scripture is

[2] Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

often helpful in discovering otherwise overlooked shades of meaning in the texts. Twentieth century literature has seen variegated answers to questions such as that of the purpose of life; however, many facets of this quest for meaning have not been adequately discussed in critical literature.

There are various studies of O'Connor's treatment of religion, but very few touch on the relationship between the spiritual and the secular, or issues of race specifically, in any depth. Ralph C. Wood discusses O'Connor's assessment of race in a chapter on "The Problem of the Color Line" in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (2004), but much remains to be said on the issue, especially regarding the specific fictional works in which O'Connor discusses the "racial other." Critics tend to focus on details of O'Connor's Catholic theology, but not specifically on how she attempts to challenge the turn towards secularism and a denial of the supernatural that Christianity had taken in the twentieth century, and how her fiction is deeply apologetic in nature, as she parodies popular philosophical notions and attempts to answer theological questions.

Hurston is usually read in connection with her interest in folklore, and in studies of African-American women's writing, but rarely regarding her treatment of Christianity. Facts such as that her father was a minister to whom she devoted much attention in a chapter of *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), that she has written various essays on African-American Christianity and has pondered the Christian faith in many of her fictional works, including her most famous and somewhat autobiographical novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), are mentioned only in passing. Instead, much attention is given to

her work on African-American myth and conjure, which scholars apparently consider to be more explicitly anthropological.

Additionally, Hurston and O'Connor are very rarely analyzed together, because there is no biographical connection between them, while other Southern writers frequently interacted. It is a known fact that O'Connor dialogued with William Faulkner, as did Hurston with Richard Wright, and, more indirectly, Hurston with Faulkner and O'Connor with Wright (Caron 2). There is, however, no clear link between Hurston and O'Connor, which is perhaps one of the reasons why critics do not read these writers in combination. One work that discusses both O'Connor and Hurston regarding race and religion is Timothy P. Caron's *Struggles over the Word: Race and Religion in O'Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright* (2000). However, it attempts only in its conclusion to draw a brief connection between the two writers, after providing detailed discussions of Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) and O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952).

3. Contribution to the Field

My dissertation suggests that the works of Hurston and O'Connor benefit greatly from being read in combination, as they are shaped by, and frequently refer to, a third text: the Bible. They also both mirror the region and time with which they concern themselves: the American South in the early to mid-twentieth century. The two works I discuss, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, are especially similar in their quests for meaning

in a world that is lost and offers no comfort and rest for their protagonists on the run. The works differ greatly, however, as they reflect the two writers' personal backgrounds and agendas.

O'Connor's interest in her surroundings cannot be understood apart from her view of religion. As a self-identified follower of Christ with deep conviction, her perspective on all things is shaped by the cross. Her characters are, literally, ugly because they are fallen creatures, distorted by sin, and in desperate need of God's grace. Racism, for example, is yet another symptom of sin – it is not biblical, because all of humanity is one in Christ. For instance, Colossians 3:11 states that "there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." However, while O'Connor always expresses her desire for racial equality in official statements and documents, this is somewhat undermined by the way in which she actually portrays her African-American characters, who are strangely flat and underdeveloped. She often uses them to bring out the brokenness in her European-American characters, but fails to give them a purpose beyond being agents of provocation. Race certainly is a topic of importance to O'Connor, and one that, in its complexity, is well worth exploring.

Similarly, Hurston's interest in religion is deeply embedded in her cultural background and her agenda of authentically portraying the African-American community in all its uniqueness and beauty. While critics tend to be more interested in her works that are based on "exotic" African-American practices such as voodoo, one can learn much about Hurston as a folklorist by analyzing how she treats religion. Hurston's discussions of the

Christian faith are both anthropological and deeply personal, since *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is, to a certain extent, about her father. Christianity is certainly not Hurston's main concern, but it is also not as marginal to her as critics tend to suggest.

The quest for meaning in life that can be found in both Hurston's and O'Connor's work is one that is central to modernist literature. Hurston acknowledges a greater power in the universe; however, she submits to God's will without attempting to interfere or even communicate with Him:

> I do not pretend to read God's mind. If He has a plan of the Universe worked out to the smallest detail, it would be folly for me to presume to get down on my knees and attempt to revise it. . . . Life, as it is, does not frighten me, since I have made my peace with the universe as I find it, and bow to its laws. (*DTR* 225-226)

Furthermore, Hurston describes having struggled with the nature of God, and the gap between religious ceremonialism and true inner convictions, all her life. In the works of O'Connor, who considers herself a Christian apologist at times, Jesus Christ is the Answer. In one of her letters she states that "[m]y audience are people who think God is dead. At least these are the people I am consciously writing for" (*Letters* 943). My dissertation shows how Hurston's and O'Connor's personal beliefs are mirrored in their works; it is unique in its analysis of how *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, at points in similar, at points in opposite ways, deal with the tension between the spiritual and the secular.

4. Context and Methodology

Each of the chapters in my dissertation approaches *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* through a different theoretical lens. Each chapter seeks to analyze the characters' behavior from a different angle. In all chapters combined, my reading seeks to provide an understanding of humanity as Hurston and O'Connor see it, an engagement with the person of Christ that, at some moments, goes beyond these two texts and delves deeply into the authors' lives. I am interested in how Hurston's and O'Connor's faith commitments, or lack thereof, shape the way that they write about religion.

French critic Roland Barthes and other literary theorists have expressed a critique of "the author" as the ideological legacy of Romanticism. Barthes's "The Death of the Author" challenges the traditional focus of literary criticism on the author as the "inspired genius," arguing that a productive reading must not be shaped by considerations of the author of a work, because "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (1466). In the wake of post-1968 anti-authoritarianism, Barthes is attacking the cultural construct of "the author" as theocentric, seeking to dethrone what he calls "the Author-God" (1468). In fact, Barthes writes, his refusal to accept that a text might have a fixed meaning is "an anti-theological activity," a rejection of "God and his hypostases – reason, science, law" (1469). In "From Work to Text," where Barthes introduces a binary

opposition between a "work," which is associated with an author, and a "Text," which is a mere object, he similarly writes that "[t]he Text . . . is read without the Father's inscription" (61). While the work is closed and has a meaning in itself, the text is "active"; thus, Barthes's essay "spelled the end of any closed structuralism and opened the text to as many forces, connections and actualisations as possible" (Colebrook 22). It is important to note, however, that many subsequent schools of literary criticism, especially the ones that are socially or politically motivated, have considered the author in their reading of literary works.

My dissertation does precisely that; it considers the person of the author in great detail, reading Hurston's and O'Connor's letters to better understand their fiction, seeking to view the literature they produced through their lives, their personalities, their struggles. I examine what animates their writing, which is connected to the author's spirit, be it "secular" or "spiritual." We cannot read, I believe, without searching for meaning, without looking for authorial intention, because of the very nature of reality. Human beings often despair because their lives lack meaning. My dissertation suggests that there has to be meaning in writing, especially in writing about the Christian faith, because it sees God as the Author of life and Jesus Christ as the Word of God. The most profound meaning, to the Christian, lies in the verse on which my dissertation centers, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Seeking to understand Hurston's treatment of religion in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, it is helpful to survey her personal beliefs as she portrays them in a chapter of her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*.[3] Hurston describes how, as a young child, she had many questions about Christianity that were never answered and often responded to with punishment, which led her to stop asking for meaning altogether and rather engage in religious ritualism:

> As I grew, the questions went to sleep in me. I just said the words, made the motions and went on. My father being a preacher, and my mother superintendent of the Sunday School, I naturally was always having to do with religious ceremonies. I even enjoyed participation at times; I was moved, not by the spirit, but by action, more or less dramatic. (*DTR* 217)

Hurston shares with her reader that, while she might have changed outwardly as she participated in church rituals, she remained inwardly untransformed: "But of the inner thing, I was right where I was when I first began to seek answers" (*DTR* 221). She remained in a state of spiritual indifference until college, where her studies of philosophy caused her to tackle her deep childhood questions once again (*DTR* 222).

In college, Hurston was taught that the success of Christianity was largely due to the Apostle Paul's persuasive prowess as a speaker and the Emperor Constantine's violent military strength (*DTR* 222-223). Hurston contends that her studies of religion left her with "a certain peace" but that "perhaps the seeking after the inner heart of truth will never cease" (*DTR* 223). After admitting that she knows much about the "form" and next to

---

[3] Many of her critics argue that Hurston often was insincere in her autobiography, "us[ing] all sorts of manipulative and diversionary tactics . . . to avoid any real self-disclosure" (Washington 20). Nonetheless, statements concerning Hurston's childhood are generally considered to be more authentic than the rest of the book (Washington 20), and much of her religious background is obviously based on her younger years.

nothing about the "mystery" of faith, Hurston concludes that God is distant. Therefore, she argues, there is no need to plead with Him:

> So I do not pray. I accept the means at my disposal for working out my destiny. It seems to me that I have been given a mind and will-power for that very purpose. I do not expect God to single me out and grant me advantages over my fellow men. Prayer is for those who need it. Prayer seems to me a cry of weakness, and an attempt to avoid, by trickery, the rules of the game as laid down. (*DTR* 225-226)

Hurston has a holistic point of view and emphasizes her sense of oneness with the universe, claiming that she has always existed and will always exist. It seems, therefore, unfair to call Hurston a Christian, as she herself rejects a relationship with God through Jesus Christ as being "simply not for me" (*DTR* 226). Her fascination is with ritual – she remains an outsider, a spectator who observes the religious festivals of her people as purely artistic rather than transcendent manifestations. She enjoys the aesthetics without feeling conviction. Statements like "[t]he Lord of the wheel that turns on itself slept, but the world kept spinning, and the troubled years sped on" (*JGV* 141) are frequently found in her work because they represent Hurston's worldview, her belief in the remoteness and absence of God.

This view of the transcendent is mirrored in Hurston's understanding of the writing process. Hurston sees creativity as an inspiration from a higher power, acknowledging that she cannot control her own writing.

> . . . I regret all of my books. It is one of the tragedies of life that one cannot have all the wisdom one is ever to possess in the beginning. Perhaps, it is just as well to be rash and foolish for a while. If writers were too wise, perhaps no books would get written at all. It might be better to ask yourself "Why?" afterwards than before. Anyway, the force from somewhere in Space which commands you to write in the first place, gives you no choice. You take up the pen when you are told, and write

> what is commanded. There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you. (*DTR* 175-176)

Writing is a compulsion; it is an expression of something greater than the individual. Hurston did not want her writing to be about race in a conventional manner. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, when she speaks about the moment she conceived of her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston describes her desire to write "a story about a man, and from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color" (171). Writing about a universal quest for freedom, a minister's struggle with adultery, Hurston nonetheless manages to express important challenges regarding the very subject she claims to want to avoid.

While Hurston states that the mystery of God's grace escapes her, O'Connor is consumed by this mysterious grace, which she longs to make visible in her writing. Having grown up in a Catholic household, O'Connor contends that "I will never have the experience of the convert, or of the one who fails to be converted, or even in all probability of the formidable sinner" (*HB* 93). The fact that she was raised within the faith, however, does not mean that she did not engage with it intellectually. She studied Catholic dogma carefully, and came to the conclusion that it is not restrictive, but rather helps the individual maintain a sense of "mystery":

> Dogma can in no way limit a limitless God. The person outside the Church attaches a different meaning to it than the person in. For me a dogma is only a gateway to contemplation and is an instrument of freedom and not of restriction. It preserves mystery for the human mind. Henry James said the young woman of the future

> would know nothing of mystery or manners. He had no business to limit it to one sex. (*HB* 92)

To O'Connor, dogma is mysterious and religious expression needs to be meaningful. She expresses her suspicion of "pious phrases, particularly when they issue from my mouth. I try militantly never to be affected by the pious language of the faithful, but it is always coming out when you least expect it. In contrast to the pious language of the faithful, the liturgy is beautifully flat" (*HB* 92-93).

O'Connor's faith was deeply personal and also highly unsentimental. Witnessing her father's suffering and death affected her deeply (Gooch 69), yet she faced her own illness bravely and without indulging in what she considered to be self-pity. Though she endured much physically, O'Connor was not bitter. Her writings possess a kind of self-irony that is encouraging and uplifting to the reader. She proclaims that it is her faith in "the divinity of Christ" that gives her love for a world in which she struggled much, and for a Church that hindered her as much as it helped her (*HB* 90). Explaining her personal faith, O'Connor writes: ". . . I do not lead a holy life. Not that I can claim any interesting or pleasurable sins (my sense of the devil is strong) but I know all about the garden variety, pride, gluttony, envy and sloth, and what is more to the point, my virtues are as timid as my vices" (*HB* 92). Ultimately, O'Connor is driven by faith in a God who is sovereign: "I see God as all perfect, all complete, all powerful" (*HB* 102).

Throughout her career, O'Connor reflected much on what it means to be a Catholic fiction writer because she was often asked for advice by the aspiring writers she was corresponding with, in addition to frequently addressing the issue in lectures and her

nonfiction writing. In her essay "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," she defines the scope of her work as follows:

> The universe of the Catholic fiction writer is one that is founded on the theological truths of the Faith, but particularly on three of them which are basic – the Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment. These are doctrines that the modern secular world does not believe in. It does not believe in sin, or in the value that suffering can have, or in external responsibility, and since we live in a world that since the sixteenth century has been increasingly dominated by secular thought, the Catholic writer often finds himself writing in and for a world that is unprepared and unwilling to see the meaning of life as he sees it. This means frequently that he may resort to violent literary means to get his vision across to a hostile audience, and the images and actions he creates may seem distorted and exaggerated to the Catholic mind. (*MM* 185)

O'Connor writes for the non-believer rather than the believer, hoping to awaken her reader out of a stupor he or she has fallen into as a result of an assumed meaninglessness of existence. O'Connor contends that her contemporaries lack a greater vision of life, being "a generation of wingless chickens, which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said God was dead" (*HB* 90). O'Connor calls her writing "Christian realism," and she insists that her fiction is not "brutal and sarcastic," as many would have it, but rather, that it is "hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism" (*HB* 90). Writing for readers who did not share her faith, who in fact had proclaimed God to be dead, gave O'Connor many opportunities to answer questions about the Christian faith, as well as the Catholic Church. In some sense, she trained herself to answer the questions that Hurston asked in her childhood, but that remained unanswered. O'Connor was concerned for those who did not share her faith, professing that "I have the one-fold one-Shepherd instinct as strong as any, to see somebody I know out of the Church is a grief to me, it's to want him

in with great urgency" (*HB* 134). It is with this great concern in mind that she writes her short stories and novels, hoping to somehow shock her audience into reacting to the gospel.

In "The Fiction Writer & His Country," O'Connor explains the freedom she gains from her Christian perspective in writing fiction, describing how "belief in Christian dogma . . . frees the storyteller to observe. It is not a set of rules which fixes what he sees in the world. It affects his writing primarily by guaranteeing his respect for mystery" (*MM* 31). Her awareness of the spiritual realm profoundly shapes O'Connor's work. She frequently engages with the Christian Scriptures, believing that "the mind serves best when it is anchored in the word of God. There is no danger then of becoming an intellectual without integrity . . ." (*HB* 134). The Bible is a strong presence in O'Connor's work, which mirrors numerous accounts from both testaments. Her fiction is thus informed by the Word of God, and seeks to point the non-believing reader to Christ.

Though I take the person of the author into account, my dissertation is not interested in highlighting the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism as I read works by Hurston and O'Connor. Nor do I wish to highlight the concerns that are typically Catholic in O'Connor's writing, or typically Protestant in Hurston's. The particulars of Catholicism were of great importance to O'Connor, who disagreed with much Protestant doctrine, such as the Calvinist emphasis on predestination (*MM* 197). However, a close reading of her letters, essays and fictional works makes it clear that grace and its power to transform lives and liberate those in bondage is what mattered most to O'Connor, who proclaims that the

center of her fiction is Christ (*MM* 197). That is to say, as I am highlighting differences and similarities between the two writers' views, I do not emphasize doctrinal differences.

Furthermore, Hurston was not a conventional Protestant, and O'Connor was not a conventional Catholic. Hurston is interested in religion as part of folklore, rather than a way to salvation. Describing the ceremonial aspects of it, she focuses on Christianity because it is such an integral part of Southern African-American tradition, and because of her family background. O'Connor often blurs the line between Catholicism and Protestantism. Mason in *The Violent Bear It Away*, for example, is a Protestant character who represents many Catholic values (Baumgaertner 142-143). It is most important to both writers to communicate an understanding of humanity with which they can identify.

In a dissertation that deals with religion and race in the works of two women writers from the post-Reconstruction American South, an awareness of the historical context in which their writing is set is important and shapes my reading of these two texts. O'Connor and Hurston, I proffer, must be read in light of two important post-bellum Supreme Court Decisions. Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) initiated a period of racial segregation and extreme hostility, marked by Jim Crow Laws and Ku Klux Klan violence. Jim Crow Laws, based on the principle of "separate but equal," in fact undermined equality and promoted racism. The Brown v. Board of Education decision (1954) announced desegregation; however, it fell short of its promise, as the American South continued to be haunted by racism and violence. Using documents pertaining to Plessy v. Ferguson as anthologized by Brook Thomas in *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (1997), I place *Jonah's*

Gourd Vine and *The Violent Bear It Away* in an appropriate historical context, given my interest in questions of race.

The religious climate at the beginning of the twentieth century was equally turbulent, as the so-called Third Great Awakening, or Social Gospel Movement, came to an end (Abell 193). Religious modernism was defined by increasingly liberal attitudes and the desire to bring the teachings of the Bible into harmony with the scientific discoveries of the age by compromising claims to the literal nature or inerrancy of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. This tendency towards liberalism was strongly rejected by many branches of Protestantism, as well as the Catholic Church, which continued to hold that accounts like that of the creation of the world in seven days, or that of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, are literally, and not merely metaphorically, true. Hurston and O'Connor were sharply aware of the changes in the religious climate, as they were both, in vastly different ways, intimately connected to the institution of church. Their responses can be seen in their essays and works of fiction, as well as in their personal correspondence.

Hurston undermines traditional religious beliefs and dogma; however, she does so in a way that is different from the reforms that are happening on a larger scale in the modernist period. Rather than questioning the authority of the Bible and concerning herself with making Christianity more appealing to mainstream society, she incorporates her African-American background into her assessment of spirituality and questions the validity of the tradition she was raised in. Being an anthropologist, she examines practices such as conjure and voodoo and presents them as alternatives and supplements to the Christian

faith. Like other African-American writers, such as Charles Chesnutt, she presents Christianity and conjure not as being mutually exclusive, but as complimentary. Hurston is deeply interested in black religion and spirituality in the Southern United States, especially the kind which is strongly distinct from white mainstream Protestantism. She describes the so-called Sanctified Church, which, as an institution that is prominent in the South, positions itself against the practice of wealthy African Americans who adopt European-American religious behavior; the latter, Hurston argues, is quiet and formal compared to the rhythmic and expressive worship habits of African Americans (*Sanctified Church* 103). According to Hurston, "the Negro has not been christianized as extensively as is generally believed. The great masses are still standing before their pagan altars and calling old gods by a new name" (*Sanctified Church* 103). Thus, Christianity and ancient practices of Africa are linked intimately in Hurston's fiction.

An opposition to the liberalism that is inherent in religious modernism is very apparent in O'Connor's work. *The Violent Bear It Away* reflects the debate surrounding the Word as the novel draws heavily on one of Jesus's most central parables, which likens the way individuals react to hearing the gospel – literally the "good news" – to the sowing of seeds, and which Jesus Himself considers fundamental: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" (Mark 4:13). That the Bible takes center stage for O'Connor is evident in her fiction, as well as her own commentary on it. She suggests, for example, in a discussion of her novel *Wise Blood*, that "I have directed the irony against . . . a society that reads the Bible . . . wrong" (*Letters* 921). However,

O'Connor also has a sense of self-irony, as when she suggests that "I am not really so sanctimonious as I sound" and that "I already have one of them Bibles" (*Letters* 922). To a certain extent, she applies the mercilessness and parody that her fictional characters are subject to, to her own person and personal faith; however, she never goes so far as to compromise her religious principles that are reflected in all her works.

My dissertation applies different theoretical concepts in each chapter; however, the overarching methodological framework of my dissertation is based on the use of Scripture as a platform. I seek to apply biblical ideas and approach Hurston's and O'Connor's novels through structural and thematic concerns of the Bible, using those very concepts as lenses through which I read fiction that very heavily interacts with Christianity as a religion and the Bible as a text. That is, I examine how the structure of the Bible is reflected in these works and how they interact with specific accounts, such as that of the prophet Jonah. I also use the Bible to define certain concepts, such as the incarnation.

Furthermore, I apply specific theories of language and race in individual chapters. The philosophical concept of a double consciousness, which has been used by various thinkers from different disciplines and traditions, such as psychology and sociology, and, at the turn of the twentieth century, was adapted by philosophers of race, is central to my work. Another relevant issue in connection with questions of race and religion is that of language and/in society. I use the works of thinkers like Foucault to underline how power is executed through language. To substantiate this point, I examine the use of African American Vernacular English in American literature, beginning with white, racist

representations in minstrel shows, and describe how Hurston and O'Connor use the connection between language and the body to signify belonging, redemption and hope. I also read Hurston and O'Connor in a historical context and discuss their interaction with other literary works, such as the African-American slave narrative or the writings of the Harlem Renaissance.

5. Chapter Outline

My dissertation consists of four major chapters which seek to analyze the relationship between the sacred and the secular in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*. Hurston and O'Connor manage to write novels with powerful religious sensibilities that are also profoundly critical and of the moment. The two writers' concerns are in many ways similar to those of the Southern Renaissance, "that is, works written from approximately 1920 until right after World War II" (Brinkmeyer 3), as they engage with Southern history and culture in a way that is critical and nonetheless expresses love and respect for Southern traditions and is especially "grounded in a sense of place" (Brinkmeyer 14). In the fictional works of the Southern Renaissance, freedom is found not in a break from the community, but rather in the ability to become a part of it "while still maintaining . . . individuality and dignity – that is, without being completely subsumed by the community" (Brinkmeyer 4). Hurston and O'Connor write at opposite ends of the Southern Renaissance, Hurston being one of its early influences and O'Connor being one of

the writers inspired by it. In their respective novels, they re-evaluate and reclaim aspects of Southern culture from a past of slavery and oppression, mapping a journey towards spiritual liberation that does not imply a break from Southern tradition or space.

In my first chapter, I introduce Hurston and O'Connor as prophetic writers who express social criticism through their novels as they examine the American South from an insider's perspective. Posing challenges that are directly related to questions of form and content in religious discourse, as well as the concept of community, these prophetic voices present the prophet's call in their fiction as they engage with the biblical book of Jonah. Ultimately, both *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* show that the greatest obstacle for the prophet is the struggle of obedience to a higher purpose.

This consideration of Christ as the object of prophecy then leads to a discussion of the incarnation in my next chapter. I use "the Word made flesh" as a metaphor to underline how, in different ways, Hurston and O'Connor reclaim and empower the human body through their engagement with language. By means of sociolinguistic analysis, focusing on African American Vernacular English as an intersection of language and the body, I show how both novels present abstract concepts as physical realities and address important concerns of belonging and destiny. Ultimately, through engagement with the incarnation, the flesh becomes the bearer of a future hope that points beyond the present existence, which is marked by injustice and suffering.

In my third chapter, I analyze the intense spiritual struggle that divides the protagonists of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, reading the novels

through the nuanced concept of double consciousness, revealing its philosophical and biblical dimensions. I describe the tragedy of a divided existence that leaves the protagonists in utter despair. This leads to a discussion of how Hurston and O'Connor, once again in different ways, take a stance against a rigid self-centered individualism divorced from deeper feeling as they introduce characters that are highly educated and trained as teachers and orators and nonetheless remain unable to connect with reality.

Finally, in chapter four, I show how Hurston and O'Connor resolve the struggle caused by internal division. This chapter argues that, in their treatment of questions of religion and spirituality, the two novels can be read as types of slave narratives. Taking my cue from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), I show how the slave narrative's engagement with the gothic is extremely pertinent to *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* in their discussion of violence. I also apply the structure of this kind of literature, centered on a turning point, to these two texts in their expression of a longing for freedom.

The Word to the World: Prophetic Vision

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

1. Introduction

Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* recapture, retell and reinterpret the story of the runaway prophet Jonah, a biblical account of God's love for all nations. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, a novel whose title takes its cue from the Jonah narrative, Hurston expresses social critique and also illuminates the shortcomings of this prophet in her character John – his struggles to live up to a calling, his utter need of redemption. O'Connor portrays a society in rebellion against God in *The Violent Bear It Away*, and therefore, returning to the practices of Old Testament times, she envisions a prophet who, like the Hebrew prophet Jonah, proclaims destruction on a city while failing to develop compassion for those living in it. The novel describes the prophet's salvation experience rather than that of the people around him, as he first has to come to grips with his own failures. Reading these two works together, I show how, in the fallenness of their characters, both *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* point to Christ in different ways as they engage the account of Jonah.

This chapter of my dissertation begins with a discussion of the concept of prophecy in the Bible as a lens through which I read *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*. Paying close attention to issues of form and content, I analyze how both novels, in utterly different ways, show a disparity between the prophet's words and his own heart that cannot be sustained, as they interact with the Bible on different levels. Ultimately, I demonstrate how, just as the events surrounding the Jonah narrative anticipate and

prefigure the story of the Bible as a whole, which culminates in Jesus Christ, the two novels discussed here engage with the person of Christ in direct as well as indirect ways as they lean on Scripture.

2. "This is what the LORD says"

A prophet is an individual who mediates between a deity and human beings, usually within a specific nation, such as Israel, which "shared the phenomenon . . . with many nations in the Ancient Near East" (Carroll 59). My discussion, however, focuses on biblical prophecy, which in itself has different dimensions, as prophets both make proclamations about the future and interpret the present times, claiming authority due to having been called by "Yahweh, the God of Israel and ruler of history – past, present, and future" (Freedman 57). The Jewish and Christian traditions have understood these prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures differently: to a Jewish audience, they are the keepers of the law, the "guardians of the Torah" (Hutton 5), while Christian interpreters see the prophets as individuals who anticipate Christ, as can be seen clearly in the way that the New Testament authors quote the prophetic writings as predications of events of Jesus's life (Hutton 5-6).[4] In my discussion of the prophets, I argue from within Christianity, as both authors I am analyzing write from that perspective.

[4] In this context, it is helpful to read the progression "from Deuteronomy 18:5 to Deuteronomy 34:10 to Malachi 3:1-2 and then to the New Testament" (Hutton 6-7).

The Hebrew Scriptures introduce a long progression of prophets, beginning with Moses, "*the* prophet *par excellence*" (Moberly 4; emphasis in the original). The people of Israel express their desire for a mediator between themselves and God; terrified by the LORD,[5] they ask Moses to go and listen to what God has to say, promising to obey His commands as transmitted by the prophet (Deuteronomy 5:22-33). Moses is unsurpassed as a prophet, as he enjoys great intimacy with God and does his duty with faithfulness (Freedman 59). In Numbers 12, Moses's special position among God's prophets is clarified; while speaking to other prophets through visions and dreams, the LORD proclaims that He talks to Moses

> face to face,
> clearly and not in riddles;
> [Moses] sees the form of the LORD. (8)

Deuteronomy 34:10 states that there was never another prophet like him, "whom the LORD knew face to face." The author of the Letter to the Hebrews contends that Jesus "was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house" (3:2). Moses successfully intercedes for the Israelites, causing the LORD to relent after He has threatened to destroy Israel and to make Moses "into a great nation" instead of them, since they have turned away from Him and have worshipped an idol they have made, a golden calf (Exodus 32:7-14).

---

[5] English translations of the Bible generally use "LORD" in capital letters to signify the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), whereas "Lord" stands for the Hebrew word Adonai.

The book of Deuteronomy contains the following promise, delivered through the prophet Moses:

> The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."
>
> The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (18:15-19)

This is not only a reference to future prophets, but also an anticipation of the Messiah. In their respective speeches, both the Apostle Peter (Acts 3:22-23) and the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:37), identify Jesus as this ideal prophet.

The Hebrew word to describe prophets, "*n'vi-im*, includes not just the prophets of Yahweh . . . . It also includes false prophets, professional prophets, court prophets, and self-styled prophets" (McKenna 24; emphasis in the original). The LORD gives His people instructions regarding false prophets or prophets of other gods, whom they ought to "put to death" (Deuteronomy 18:20), and He also tells them how they can discern whether a prophet is genuine or not: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:22). It is not surprising that the true prophets were decidedly less popular than the false ones, as they challenged rather than reassured the people, who demanded of the prophets: "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophecy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 30:10-11). This leads to

an important observation: prophets are not considered to be true spokesmen of the LORD because their audience believed and obeyed them, which was usually not the case; rather, they were true prophets "because they faithfully reported what they heard from the mouth of God, regardless of the consequences for themselves and the people to whom they delivered the message" (Freedman 63). The Gospel writer Matthew, for example, records Jesus encouraging those who are persecuted and falsely accused because of their obedience to Him in these words: "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (5:12).

The idea of the "call narrative," the account of a prophet's commission, is central to biblical prophecy. It is God who chooses His servants, and He enables them to speak for Him. When approached by God, the great prophet Moses feels utterly inadequate and refuses his call several times, but God reassures him of His presence and favor during his mission and also promises him a sign: "God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain'" (Exodus 3:12). Other biblical call narratives contain similar elements. Isaiah, who trembles in fear after having seen God because he is "a man of unclean lips," can only speak for his Maker after a seraph touches his lips with a coal to make atonement for his sins (Isaiah 6:5-8). Similarly, Jeremiah considers himself to be unable to serve God as His prophet, until the Almighty reminds him that He is with him and touches his mouth (Jeremiah 1:6-9).

John the Baptist is the last in a long progression of prophets who proclaim Christ's first coming. He is prophesied about in the book of Isaiah as

> A voice of one calling:
> "In the desert prepare
> the way for the LORD
> make straight in the wilderness
> a highway for our God. . . .
> For the mouth of the
> LORD has spoken." (40:3-5)

All four Gospels confirm that John is the fulfillment of this prophecy (Dapaah 43). John the Baptist is a prophet who points to the end times; his baptism and his sermons suggest justice and redemption at the last hour (Ernst 55). He proclaims Jesus Christ and His salvation in the same way that the Old Testament prophets did; however, John the Baptist actually got to see his Lord and direct others to Christ in a physical sense, as the One who had been foretold by the prophets walked by him: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John exemplifies the humility that is inherent to the prophetic office. When his disciples are jealous because others are following Jesus rather than John, he explains that his sole task was to point to Jesus: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). Ultimately, at the heart of true biblical prophecy is the exaltation of Christ, not of the prophetic self.

The prophet is a messenger from another world, someone who puts into question the visible as the only reality and presents alternative interpretations (Brueggemann 223). Prophets challenge the assumption that the present system is all that is possible, and dare to dream of change. Much literature, in that sense, has been prophetic, and both Hurston and

O'Connor see their works in this vein, as my discussion below shows. Like the Hebrew prophets, these two writers interpret the present times and hope for a future that is different, even as they directly engage with the topic of prophecy. In this chapter of my dissertation, I show how Hurston and O'Connor understand their own mission as female writers that are, in many ways, marginalized, one as an African American who refuses to treat race in the same direct manner that her contemporaries do, the other as a Catholic invalid writing in the Protestant South. The prophet they choose to engage with, fascinatingly, is not the model prophet Moses, nor one of the prophetesses such as Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4) or Anna (Luke 2:36), but rather, Jonah, who "represents a kind of self-destruction of the prophetic office," as he became known as the prophet who refused to obey his calling (Seitz 23).

3. Love for a Great City

Jonah, son of Amittai, from Gath Hepher, prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel, "who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah" (2 Kings 14:25). To summarize the events of the book of Jonah: God commissions Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, asking its inhabitants to turn from their evil ways. The prophet refuses his calling and flees; however, after a series of dramatic events, he repents and goes to Nineveh to warn those who live in

the city of the coming destruction. As the citizens of Nineveh repent, God relents, to the prophet Jonah's great regret.

> He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee. . . . I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:2-3)

The overall message of the book of Jonah is God's mercy and love for all nations. The prophet, Jonah, does not share this conviction. He desires for Nineveh to be destroyed, and rejects God's generosity towards the city, because his people, the Israelites, had suffered much at the hands of the Assyrians.

Examining the historical context of the book of Jonah, it becomes clear why the prophet initially refuses to go to Nineveh and subsequently resents God's forgiveness for the Ninevites. The events recorded in the book of Jonah took place between 800 and 750 B.C., at a time when the Assyrian empire was a constant threat to Israel and Nineveh was synonymous with oppression (De La Torre 11). Assyria was "the cause of the desolation of [Israel's] Northern Kingdom, and once the terrifying besiegers of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 18:13-37)" (Spina 96). The Assyrians were able to dominate the entire region by using both the manpower and material resources of the objects of their violence (De La Torre 29). Thus, in human terms, Jonah's feelings towards the people he is called to preach to, his enemies, are understandable; however, they fade in light of God's sovereignty, of which the vine, which the LORD provides to give Jonah shade and then

takes away from him, becomes symbolic. Jonah's selfish motives and his ethnocentricity are sharply contrasted by God's forgiveness, which He extends to all nations.

The idea of community is central to the book of Jonah, which addresses concerns regarding the interaction between different groups of people, naturally leading to considerations about the insider and the outsider and the relationship between places and people(s), as well as the idea of belonging, which has been theorized repeatedly and, in contemporary thought, is often narrowed down to being "about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' and . . . feeling 'safe'" (Yual-Davis 2). Community as a concept is not easily defined, because the root word, "common," is somewhat ambiguous: "The Latin source for *common* is *communis*, but the derivation of *communis* is uncertain: either it is *com* (together) + *munis* (bound, under obligation); or it is *com* (together) + *unis* (one)" (Kawash 176; emphasis in the original). Each of these possible roots highlights a different facet of the word community as it is understood by contemporary thinkers:

> On the one hand, *com-munis* points toward juridical, economic, and social relations of obligation, reciprocity, indebtedness, and exchange. It indicates community formed in relation to the external principle imposed on each member of mutual obligation. On the other hand, *com-unis* suggests a foundational commonality, community as union, communion. Thus *com-unis* indicates community formed through the rule of commonality internal to each member. (Kawash 176-177; emphasis in the original)

In the context of the Hebrew Bible, the concept of community combines both aspects in the way it relates to insiders and outsiders, the Israelite versus the alien.

While the Old Testament presents a clear understanding of the fact that the Israelites, God's chosen people, are to be different from the nations that surround them,

"holy because [the LORD their God is] holy" (Leviticus 19:2), these differences never form a license to be unkind to others and to exclude them, as God had always envisioned the salvation of all mankind through the Israelites (e.g., Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 42:6-7) and has made provision for the alien in the law (Leviticus 24:10). God commands that "[y]ou must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born" (Numbers 9:14); the same concept is expressed in Exodus 12:49. Numbers 15:14-16 proclaims:

> For the generations to come, whenever an alien or anyone else living among you presents an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD, he must do exactly as you do. The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the alien shall be the same before the LORD: The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the alien living among you.

There is a clear command to love the outsider: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34).

The LORD even makes it possible for outsiders to participate in the Passover and thus integrates them into the religious life of the community if they choose to be circumcised: "An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it" (Exodus 12:48). This inclusiveness does not compromise the Israelites' strong sense of national identity that is tied in with the land of

Canaan, which God promises to Abram[6] in Genesis 15. The importance of the land is underlined after the Israelites have been taken into exile in Assyria in 722 B.C. and Samaria is resettled by the king of Assyria: "When [the people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim] first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people" (2 Kings 17:25). Thus, the land itself is set apart to God.

Walking across this very land, Jesus Christ tells a parable about a racial and spiritual outsider and despised enemy, a Samaritan, who takes a great personal risk in helping a dying Israelite who lies bleeding in the road (Luke 10:30-36). This parable radically expands the definition of the term neighbor and teaches a challenging paradigm of love and forgiveness. The audience learns that the kind of love that God demands is costly; furthermore, it puts up no walls and crosses boundaries. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus puts the challenge bluntly: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . . . If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?" (Matthew 5:44-46). Christ not only preached radical love, but He exemplified it at the greatest personal cost of all, as He bore the sins of mankind on the cross: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

---

[6] God changes the name Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many), as He confirms His covenant to make Abraham "the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4).

God's heart for all nations, having found its full expression on the cross, unites those who put their trust in Him. The apostle Peter announces to the community of believers: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Christ's sacrifice has created a new, inclusive community.

The parameters of inclusion and exclusion, so central in the Bible, affect society at large even today, as the practice of marginalizing people and people groups "continues to throw societies into serious crisis. . . ." (Yuval-Davis 7). Many societies have learned painful lessons regarding this subject, and so has the American South, where *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* are set. Thus, questions of belonging haunt these novels by the choice of biblical intertexts; their references and allusions to the vine in whose shade Jonah rests, hoping to observe the destruction of his enemies, remind their readers of God's mercy. Hurston and O'Connor transform the account of the runaway prophet who has lost track of the true nature of his calling and to whom and through whom God reveals Himself. Each in her own way captures how Jonah's adventure foreshadows Christ's teaching.

4. A Vine Chopped Down

Writers have always served as "prophetic voices," challenging and questioning established notions of society (Shulman 176), much like the Hebrew prophets had done for the Israelites. As an African-American female writer in the early twentieth century, Hurston is a prophet of her own time, struggling against the expectations of the community as she attempts to scrutinize "the Christian ethic" through *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Holloway, *Character* 16-17). Writing a semi-autobiographical account that explores details of her father's life as a Baptist minister in light of the biblical account of the prophet Jonah, Hurston expresses criticism of the Christian faith as it is lived around her. One of the central ways in which she does so is by referencing the Bible, puzzling many of her critics, as Hurston seems simultaneously to dismiss Scripture and yet integrates it into her work (Wright, Melanie 47). In novels like *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, she combines preaching by African-American pastors as well as biblical texts with "theoretical insights on narrative and myth, drawn from [her] anthropological studies" (Wright, Melanie 48).

The Jonah theme, central to Hurston's novel, is anticipated through its very title, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. She explains the significance of the title in a letter to Carl Van Vechten: "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. The book of a thousand million leaves was closed" (*Life*

291). *Jonah's Gourd Vine* traces John's rise to fame as it leads up to the "act of malice," describing the circumstances that shape him. The relationship between John as a pastor and his congregation is of specific significance in an analysis of John's prophetic voice, as his hearers are willing to tolerate John's moral flaws, so long as his sermons are to their liking. John's effectiveness in handling the Bible from the pulpit, despite the fact that he does not practice what he preaches, is central to Hurston's novel, which "gathers its massive strength not from its story, nor from the characters, but from the magical words that cause a congregation to enfold its wayward preacher in its compassion and force him back to a pulpit he has threatened to leave" (Holloway, "Emergent Voice" 69). John is literally uplifted and carried by the power of his own prophetic speech, and only his refusal to provide his congregation with his beautifully crafted sermons puts an end to his career as a pastor.

Writing to the prominent Harlem Renaissance writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson, Hurston elaborates on the vision she has for the character of John: "[M]erely being a good man is not enough to hold a Negro preacher in an important charge. He must also be an artist. He must be both a poet and an actor of a very high order, and then he must have the voice and figure" (*Life* 302). John is certainly not a virtuous man and he is capable of unkindness and violence, as the reader learns when he beats his dying wife, Lucy (*JGV* 129). He is, however, an excellent performer and thus fulfills the most important requirement for pastoral work. In a letter to one of her critics, Lewis Gannett, Hurston further explains her view on African-American religious practices and preachers:

> We are ceremonial – lovers of color and magnificence. While white people strive to achieve restraint, we strive to pile beauty on beauty, magnificence on glory. Our preachers are talented men even though many of them are barely literate. The masses do not read literature, do not visit theatres nor museums of fine arts. The preacher must satisfy their beauty-hunger himself. (*Life* 303-304; emphasis in the original)

In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston describes the verbal ability of African-American preachers. She explains that, especially at revival meetings, it is expected of the speaker to "let himself go, [as] God was called by all of His praise-giving names. The scenery of heaven was described in detail. . . . Hell was described in dramatic fury" (217-218). As Hurston traces the life of John, a man who develops his talent for speech alongside his inability to resist women, she celebrates African-American religious practices, but she also raises questions regarding the harmony of form and content, the talk and the walk, words and life.

From the very first pages of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, the reader discovers that John is gifted with words, especially in religious contexts; however, little is said of an internal commitment based on a deep sense of faith. His journey across the creek, away from his family, brings him closer to a fulfillment of his love for words, as it enables him to go to school and "learn how to read and write" (*JGV* 21). John is also a born storyteller in whose tales "Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox and Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones walked the earth like natural men" (*JGV* 25). His future wife Lucy, who is known to be the school's best speaker, admits freely to John: "You kin speak . . . better'n me, . . . you got uh voice for speakin" (*JGV* 32). Naturally, John develops into a public speaker who captivates his audience in any context, but especially in the religious one.

As John struggles through life, he lifts up a number of prayers that reflect his personal problems, asking for purity and self-control: "O Lawd! you know mah heart, and all de ranges uh mah deceitful mind – and if you find any sin lurkin' in and about mah heart please pluck it out and cast it intuh de sea uh fuhgitfuless whar it'll never rise tuh condemn me in de judgment" (*JGV* 25). His talent for speaking, powerful in recitation and storytelling, eventually finds its full expression in prayer: "He prayed aloud and the empty house threw back his resonant tones like a guitar box. 'Dat sho sound good,' John exulted. 'If mah voice sound *dat* good de first time Ah ever prayed in de church house, it sho won't be de las'" (*JGV* 52; emphasis in the original). At this moment, an element of performance enters his religious devotion. He is enamored by the sound of his own voice, and prayer loses its transcendent character, instead becoming increasingly artistic and eloquent.

> 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. One night at the altar-call he cried out his barbaric poetry to his "Wonder-workin" God so effectively that three converts came thru religion under the sound of his voice. (*JGV* 89)

Hurston emphasizes here that John's personal faith is a continuation from African beliefs. In other words, he simply puts a Christian name to some of his ancestors' religious practices.

As an anthropologist, Hurston examines African-American religious expression not only because "it was brilliant verbal art but also [because of] her belief that it contained echoes of African ancestry that were dim but still fundamental and that it offered a continual recomposition of the structuring mythology of black America" (Sundquist 57). In

Jonah's Gourd Vine, this is made clear by Hurston's many allusions to African mythology and musical instruments. The novel evokes an ancient language that the slaves brought from Africa "to America in their skins" (*JGV* 29). It is the language of "[t]he drum with the man skin that is dressed with human blood, that is beaten with a human shin-bone and speaks to gods as a man and to men as a God" (*JGV* 29). The power of John's sermons lies in their crudeness and the passion with which he preaches. Hurston uses devices such as transcribing capital letters to mark particularities in emphasis and intonation: "But God said 'NO!'" (*JGV* 176). There is a charm in John's simplicity of language and his energy as he speaks. His congregation becomes an audience that is captivated by his skills.

Fittingly, John begins his career as a preacher by imitating a pastor to amuse his coworkers, similar to how he had formerly entertained with folk stories: ". . . John preached the sermon himself for the entertainment of the men who had stayed in camp and he aped the gestures of the preacher so accurately that the crowd hung half-way between laughter and awe" (*JGV* 107). His friends are so impressed with his skills that they desire to take him to Eatonville, so that he can imitate another preacher there, who speaks "thru his nose and . . . preaches all his sermons de same way" (*JGV* 107). Having practiced for a while, John eventually, upon the arrival of Lucy and their children in Eatonville, tells the church he attends: "Brothers and Sisters, Ah rise befo' yuh tuhday tuh tell yuh, God done called me tuh preach" (*JGV* 111).

John becomes a famed and powerful orator who draws people to himself rather than leading them to God. As John begins pastoring Zion Hope of Stanford, "membership

mounted every month" (*JGV* 112) and he remains a great success as a speaker until he voluntarily steps off the pulpit, his reputation having suffered much due to his adultery. When Hurston mentions "Jonah's gourd vine," it is in connection with his enemies at the church he pastors who seek to bring him down. Deacon Harris tells John's second wife, Hattie: "Ah'd cut down dat Jonah's gourd vine in uh minute, if Ah had all de say-so" (*JGV* 146). Harris actively seeks opportunities to destroy John:

> Well, in looking over de books, I saw where mos' of the folks whut would stand up for Rev'und so hard, is gone. If we wuz tuh bring de thing tuh uh vote Ah b'lieve we kin dig up de hidden wedge. Ah been sorta feelin' 'round 'mong some de members and b'lieve de time done come when we kin chop down dis Jonah's gourd vine. (*JGV* 154)

Thus, in one sense, John's adulteries become the worm that cuts down this vine; in another sense, his very brothers and sisters in Christ undermine and slowly destroy him.

John's final sermon, as Hurston's biographer Robert E. Hemenway notes, is taken almost verbatim "from the Reverend C. C. Lovelace of Eau Gallie, Florida, on May 3, 1929, and Hurston had published it before, in her *Negro* essay" (197). Because this was not Lovelace's final sermon, argues Hemenway, the sermon as a literary text is emphasized in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, not the fact that John is stepping down from the pulpit after he has delivered it – "the power is in the text, not the context" (Hemenway 197). Thus, while the reader is exposed to prowess of the preacher-poet-prophet, he or she does not learn anything about John's convictions, but much about "a communal esthetic" (Hemenway 198). There is a difference, therefore, between John's public voice, which is in unison with his community, and his private voice, which is in disharmony with it (Hemenway 198).

John continues to delight in his own skills as a speaker even after his downfall. Once he has been welcomed by Sally and asked to give a sermon in her church, he replies to her praises of him: "[S]ho 'nuff Ah felt lak ole times tuhday. Felt lak Samson when his hair begin tuh grow out agin" (*JGV* 189). Samson, the Israelite judge who violates his Nazirite vow, betrays his calling and is subsequently left by the LORD (Judges 16:20), humbles himself and asks God for strength to kill Israel's enemies in his own death (Judges 16:28-30). John likens himself to Samson because he feels renewed strength, unaware that he is also predicting his own untimely death.

God gives John great talent and a ministry that bears much fruit, yet the fruit does not last because there is no inner transformation that takes place within John, who in himself "is a paradox – saint and sinner" (Holloway, *Character* 38) – he speaks to the people for God, and God uses him powerfully through his sermons and prayers, yet he cannot obey God in his own life. Hemenway argues that there is an overarching "cultural argument" by means of which Hurston justifies John, as she "suggests that [the] lack of control over one's destiny is the obvious product of African-American history" (198). He views Hurston's novel as a commentary on slavery as an institution, as a critique of the circumstances from which John has to operate (198-199). Just as the vine does not belong to Jonah (Holloway, *Character* 37), John is at the mercy of white people.

John is not completely powerless, however; he himself speaks prophetically in the sense that he expresses social criticism, as can be seen in the circumstances surrounding his trial. While Hurston's often-proclaimed unwillingness to discuss racial matters causes

many of her critics to assume that her "personal history of white patronage and elite education had led her to abandon her own racial community and to misidentify with the perspectives and interests of her white patrons and friends" (Kawash 176), there are numerous subtle points of critique she raises through her work. Hurston "troubles the received notions of race, identity, and community on which the politics of racial collectivism . . . are based. . . . [and] forces us to *rethink* race, identity, and community . . ." (Kawash 176; emphasis in the original).

Community is central to Hurston's understanding of the individual, and while she portrays the African-American community in Eatonville extremely positively, she also criticizes its blindness towards its own shortcomings. The hypocrisy and self-righteousness that surface in the townspeople after John's downfall are clear evidence of the critical side of Hurston's point of view. Concerns of race are central to Hurston's understanding of community as portrayed in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. The issue is a complicated one, due to the nuanced expressions in her fictional and autobiographical writings, which "have created not only various but opposing perceptions, ranging from accusations of Uncle Tomism, opportunism, and political reactionism, to assessment of the author as a radical black feminist, resistance writer, and literary genius" (Konzett 73). However, this need not be a problem, but rather, could be a multi-faceted understanding of the author herself, who, while idealizing her community, simultaneously is critical of many aspects of it: "*Jonah's Gourd Vine*, at the same time that it glorifies a black world, also focuses on conflicts within it" (Meisenhelder 37).

Jonah's Gourd Vine gives glimpses of Christ as it engages with the Jonah theme through two Christ characters: Lucy is linked to Christ in her suffering and in the abuse she bears even though she does not deserve it. John, though he is nowhere near innocent, resembles Christ in his patient endurance of persecution that is exaggerated and unjust. He chooses to stay silent in light of accusations in the same way that Christ refused to justify Himself before Pilate as prophesied: "[H]e was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). While neither John nor Lucy represent Christ fully, since He was sinless, each possesses certain characteristics of Him and therefore may be said to serve as a platform for Hurston to explore the Christ-theme.

Lucy is compared to the prophet Jonah at one point in the novel, by means of her own prayer, which she lifts up to God during a time of bitter distress about her husband's unfaithfulness:

> And oh, Ah know youse a prayer-hearin' God. Ah know you kin hit uh straight lick wid uh crooked stick. You heard me when Ah laid at hell's dark door and cried three long days and nights. You moved the stumblin' stone out my way, and now, Lawd, you know Ahm uh po' child, and uh long ways from home. You promised tuh be uh rock in uh weary land – uh shelter in de time uh storm. Amen. (*JGV* 84)

The phrase "three long days and nights," as well as the fact that Lucy feels far away from home and longs for God to shelter her, all evoke the Old Testament prophet who was swallowed by a great fish and remained in its belly for "three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17), who had to preach repentance to a city far away from his own (Jonah 3:1), and who was angry at God for taking away the vine that had given him shade (Jonah 4:6-9).

However, the phrases also call to mind the One who came to fulfill the promise of salvation for all nations that God the Father made as recorded in the book of Jonah.

At different times, the Bible uses different phrases to describe the time period between the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, namely "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:64; Luke 9:22, 18:33, 24:7, 24:21, 24:46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4); "in three days" (Matthew 26:61, 27: 40; Mark 14:58, 15:29; John 2:19-20); "after three days" (Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34); "three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40). Christ uses the latter phrase to establish a connection between Himself and the prophet Jonah. As the Pharisees demand a "miraculous sign" from Him, He tells them:

> A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:39-41)

Thus, Lucy's reference is to Christ as much as it is to Jonah. In fact, Lucy is a Christ-figure in two specific ways: on the one hand, she is the innocent victim of cruel injustice and immense suffering. On the other hand, John perceives of her as his savior and in his eyes she becomes like God.

Lucy's death can be read as an allusion to Christ's passion. She goes through immense pain as she continuously has to witness her husband's infidelity: "Lawd, lemme quit feedin' on mah heart lak Ah do"; she then continuously has to come up with the grace to forgive: "Lawd, if Ah meet dat woman in heben, you got tuh gimme time tuh fight uh

while. . . . 'Tain't mah fault, Lawd, Ahm jus' ez clean as yo' robes" (*JGV* 114). Lucy suffers unjustly and is physically beaten by John before her death; she is the only character in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* who prays sincerely, and she is often confronted with God's silence (e.g. *JGV* 84), as Christ was at the moment He bore the sin of mankind on the cross and cried out in anguish: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). The reader learns that "Lucy prayed often [as her suffering increased], but sometimes God was tired and slept a little and didn't hear her" (*JGV* 116). Finally, Lucy "cried out, 'O Evening Sun, when you git on de other side, tell mah Lawd Ahm here waitin'.' And God awoke at last and nodded His head" (*JGV* 132). These lines are filled with implicit frustrations at God's seeming distance and lack of involvement in Lucy's suffering, which, to her mind, is close to being unbearable: "Ah done been in sorrow's kitchen and Ah done licked out all de pots. Ah done died in grief and been buried in de bitter waters, and Ah done rose agin from de dead lak Lazarus. Nothin' kin touch mah soul no mo" (*JGV* 131).

As a person, Lucy is closely connected to John's experience of the supernatural. After almost drowning in the river as he returns from visiting one of his mistresses, John at first walks towards God as He creates worlds, but ends up approaching Lucy, who "brought the world with her" (*JGV* 87). Lucy, not God, creates and dominates John's world. She remains his reality and eventually becomes his "stumblin'-stone" (*JGV* 128), as was prophesied of Jesus:

> The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
> he is the one you are to fear,
> he is the one you are to dread,
> and he will be a sanctuary;

> but for both houses of Israel he will be
> a stone that causes men to stumble
> and a rock that makes them fall.
> And for the people of Jerusalem he will be
> a trap and a snare. (Isaiah 8:13-14)

Just as Jesus is a stumbling stone to those who do not want to follow Him, so Lucy considers herself a hindrance to John in his pursuit of other women (*JGV* 128). In an ironic and unexpected manner, John does experience a lifting of the burden of sin as Lucy dies: "[U]nderneath his sorrow was an exultation like a live coal under gray ashes. There was no longer guilt. But a few days before he had shuddered at the dread of discovery and of Lucy's accusing eye. There was no more sin. Just a free man having his will of women" (*JGV* 136). Yet, when John is in utter despair, he turns to the dead Lucy, not the risen Christ, in prayer, asking her to intercede before God for him:[7]

> Oh Lucy! Lucy! Come git me. You knowed all dis – whut yuh leave me back heah tuh drink dis cup? Please, Lucy, take dis curse offa me. Ah done paid and paid. Ah done wept and Ah done prayed. If you see God where you is over dere ast Him tuh have mercy! Oh Jesus, Oh Jesus, Oh-wonder-workin' God. Take dis burden offa mah sobbin' heart or else take me 'way from dis sin-sick world! (*JGV* 183)

Paradoxically, as John addresses Lucy as his savior, he likens himself to Christ. John's asking Lucy to take away the cup evokes Jesus praying in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). There was, however, no other way to redeem mankind. The allusion to Christ's passion here serves to ridicule John in his childishness and narcissism. Jesus was perfect in

---

[7] Romans 8:34 teaches that Christ, after He returned to heaven, "is at the right hand of God and is . . . interceding for [believers]." In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, John asks Lucy to intercede for him, thus giving her the place that is due to Christ.

obedience, sinless, and unselfishly bore the cross – John is complaining and whining to his wife whom he has brutally mistreated and betrayed because he feels unable to face his Maker.

Like Lucy, though in a completely different manner, John is a Christ-figure in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. John frequently likens himself to Christ when he undergoes suffering, which, in his own eyes, is undeserved and unbearable; however, in another sense, the narrator likens John to Christ, as he experiences scorn and the fickleness of the masses. Thus, even though John is portrayed as being rather pretentious at times, the reader feels a certain amount of sympathy for him, because his accusers are guilty of the same sins that he commits; however, John's self-righteous persecutors manage to hide their own shortcomings more successfully than he does, because they are not in a similar place of public interest. Thus, there are two levels to John's being likened to Christ, which my subsequent discussion illuminates.

From the beginning of the novel, John is portrayed as a somewhat reluctant and ambivalent Christ-figure. There is a constant tension within John, as he does not live up to his potential. Significantly, the first major argument in the novel concerns foot washing. Ned orders John to bring him water, and Amy tells him to get it for himself (*JGV* 4). The incident falls short of what it echoes; Christ's washing of His disciples' feet. This is the moment when "he showed them the full extent of his love" (John 13:1) by performing the task of a servant, though He is not only their "Lord and Teacher" but also the Creator of the universe, asking his followers to do the same thing for each other, to love with the same

kind of humility (John 13:13-15). In the Crittenden family, sacrificial love is completely absent. Instead, there is constant rivalry between John and his stepfather, and there are physically violent fights between Amy and Ned.

Similarly, the preacher, rather than the person of Christ, takes center stage in the church John pastors, where he, advised by Lucy, preaches a sermon about himself to save his career. It is at this moment that he claims to be divinely inspired:

> Mah chillun, Papa Pearson don't feel lak preachin' y'all tuhday . . . , y'all been looking at me fuh eight years now, but look lak some uh y'all been lookin' on me wid unsein' eye. When Ah speak tuh yuh from dis pulpit, dat ain't me talkin', dat's de voice uh God speakin' thru me. When de voice is thew, Ah jus' unother one uh God's crumblin' clods. (*JGV* 122)

When John, after having preached his sermon on himself, "moved down to the Communion table and in a feeling whisper went thru the sacrifice of a God" (*JGV* 123), the reader senses that, even as he administers the bread and the wine in remembrance of Christ, John has likened himself to God through his sermon. The indefinite article used by the narrator suggests that monotheism is not practiced in John's church; his greatest shortcoming as a pastor is that he idolizes himself, and that he allows others to idolize him.

John continuously compares himself to Christ and encourages others to do the same. After Lucy's death, John perceives of his own suffering in physical terms, subtly linking himself to Jesus, once again alluding to Lucy as his savior from pain:

> The world had suddenly turned cold. . . . Mouldy, maggoty, full of suck-holes – one had to watch out for one's feet. Lucy must have had good eyes. She had seen so much and told him so much it had wearied him, but she hadn't seen all this. Maybe she had, and spared him. She would. Always spreading carpets for his feet and breaking off the points of thorns. But and oh, her likes were no more on this earth!

> People whom he had never injured snatched at his shoddy bits of carpet and sharpened the thorns for his flesh. (173)

In the subsequent sermon, John mourns his own scars and the way he feels betrayed by examining the physical suffering of Christ: "Our theme this morning is the wounds of Jesus. When the father shall ast, 'What are these wounds in thine hand?' He shall answer, 'Those are they with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.' Zach. 13:6" (*JGV* 174). This passage in the book of Zechariah, which is not Messianic[8] in nature, is often misinterpreted in the way that John does here. However, when read in the context of Zechariah 13 as a whole, the passage speaks of false prophets rather than anticipating Christ:

> ". . . I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.
>
> "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.' (Zechariah 13:2-6)

The person who is wounded by his friends is someone who prophesied lies in God's name and promoted idolatry. Commentators state that the wounds most likely resulted from "an ecstatic orgy" (Smith, Ralph L.). John, however, misapplies the text and equates this to the betrayal that Jesus experienced as Judas Iscariot let His enemies know who the One they

---

[8] In the same sermon, John mentions a few truly Messianic texts, such as Isaiah 53 that speaks of Christ suffering for the sake of mankind, as well as the affirmation in 1 Peter 1:19-20 that the Lamb was chosen "from before the foundation of the world" (*JGV* 174) to pay a bloody price for sin.

were searching for was by a kiss (Matthew 26:49; Mark 14:45; Luke 22:47-48). Being unable to practice what he preaches in his own life, John fittingly identifies with a false prophet rather than with Christ. Whether Hurston was aware of this or not, consideration of the actual meaning of the text adds irony to her work, as John himself is continuously wounded by his own promiscuity.

There is, however, another side to John's suffering, apart from his own motives, regarding the way he is treated by others. As Christ was both loved and hated by his contemporaries, John suffers much at the hands of his community. Many of the members of his congregation long for his downfall, jealous of his success in the pulpit and also with women. The narrator describes the scene at the divorce trial as follows:

> The toadies were there. Armed with hammers. Ever eager to break the feet of fallen idols. Contemptuous that even the feet of idols should fall among them. No fury so hot as that of a sycophant as he stands above a god that has toppled from a shrine. Faces of gods must not be seen of him. He has worshipped beneath the feet so long that if a god but lowers his face among them, they obscene it with spit. . . . (*JGV* 166)

Much like those who crucified Christ, the spectators can deal with a god who crushes them under his feet, but not with one who shows them compassion. In other words, they cannot deal with the humanity they see in John, and they long to completely destroy him by testifying against him.

Overall, Hurston's character John is likened to Jonah as he is selfishly distracted from his mission and puts his own motives before those of God. His hollow faith proves to be his downfall, because he does not deliver authentic messages and does not practice what he preaches. As with the vine in the account of Jonah, God takes away the fame that He has

given John. As a preacher, John fails to love his congregation, much in the same way that Jonah fails to love the Ninevites, simply being too focused on women and the sound of his own voice. Jesus Christ has no place in John's church. Nonetheless, He is present in Hurston's novel, though only in glimpses, as certain characters mirror some of his characteristics or the circumstances of his life. This indirect involvement with Christ reflects Hurston's personal standpoint towards Christianity. Perhaps most clearly expressed in the silence Lucy faces in answer to her prayers, Hurston portrays God as impotent and uncaring.

5. Learning to Love the Lost

O'Connor writes in a letter to Betty Hester[9] that "it is the business of the artist to uncover the strangeness of truth" (*HB* 343). In her essay "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction," she elaborates that "[i]n the novelist's case, prophecy is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up. The prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque" (*MM* 44). O'Connor desires to make her contemporaries aware of the reality around them, especially of spiritual realities that are decreasing in popularity during the time in which she writes, and that are either domesticated by nominal Christians or dismissed by opponents of the faith. Like Hurston, O'Connor expresses "her disapproval

[9] For the sake of anonymity, she is referred to as "A" in *The Habit of Being*.

of various social structures in American culture" (Martin 137) through her fiction, which is, "[i]n a real sense[,] . . . a form of prophecy, both revelatory and admonitory, telling a modern secularized world of the presence of grace and the imminence of judgment" (Byars 34). Grace is a powerful agent in O'Connor's fiction; it acts unexpectedly, overwhelming individuals that seem to be highly unlikely recipients of divine favor. This can be seen in her short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," perhaps O'Connor's most widely-read work, in which the character of the grandmother is transformed by grace, being enabled to see the criminal, "The Misfit," as her son (*Complete Stories* 132). Similarly, in "The Artificial Nigger," grace touches the individual after a troubled trip to the city that includes being lost, denial/betrayal, and forgiveness:

> Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action of mercy touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words in the world that could name it. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly burned with shame that he had so little of it to take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous to claim his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise. (*Complete Stories* 270)

Having finally understood his own depravity, Mr. Head, without naming Him, sees his need for Christ. O'Connor desires to point out that God loves all people, and that no one can earn His favor by being good or doing works. Making no excuses to an increasingly relativistic

world, she warns of judgment and preaches the gospel unashamedly, like the biblical prophets.

O'Connor not only sees her own profession as prophetic, she also often writes about characters that are prophets, both true and false. In her two novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, O'Connor's particular focus is "the [protagonists'] struggle against their vocation as prophets" (Byars 34). In *Wise Blood*, O'Connor introduces Hazel Motes, an absurd prophet who founds "the Church Without Christ." When the self-proclaimed preacher, Onnie Jay Holy, appears on the scene, Haze is indignant. Holy explains why, in his opinion, what he calls "Holy Church of Christ Without Christ, the new church with the new jesus" is trustworthy:

> In the first place, friends, you can rely on it that it's nothing foreign connected with it. You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, and that's all there is to it. . . .
>
> I want to tell you a second reason why you can absolutely trust this church – it's based on the Bible. Yes sir! It's based on your own personal interpitation of the Bible, friends. You can sit at home and interpit your own Bible however you feel in your heart it ought to be interpited. . . .
>
> I'm going to tell you one more [reason], just to show I can. This church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you, nobody knows nothing you don't know, all the cards are on the table, friends, and that's a fack! (*WB* 78)

Through this, the reader can decipher O'Connor's criticism of the relativistic times as well as the Protestant church which, for her taste, places too much emphasis on experience and personal interpretation of the Bible. Hazel Motes wants nothing to do with Jesus, running away from his calling as a prophet, which ultimately leads to his destruction.

In *The Violent Bear It Away*, O'Connor envisions two prophets who preach condemnation to a great city, and whom God teaches a lesson about love. This work clearly reflects the account of Jonah, as the Tarwaters are similar to the Old Testament prophet in their approach to the city. Mason, in his initial state, mirrors Jonah's lack of perspective, as he fails to love those he is called to minister to. Like Jonah, Mason preaches repentance but really desires destruction, not mercy; however, unlike in the account of Jonah, the reader witnesses a conversion experience in Mason. Francis, the younger prophet, mirrors Jonah's reluctance to obey God, as well as his contempt for the lost. Jill Baumgaertner notes that, "like Jonah, Tarwater runs from his calling, fleeing God and any responsibility he might have to assume on His behalf" (146). Ultimately, however, Francis has a vision of Christ at the feeding of the five thousand, and he comes to desire the Bread of Life in the same way that his great-uncle does.

The fact that O'Connor uses the figure of the Old Testament prophet to preach the gospel of Christ, using His words in a context that gives them "an Old Testament Flavor" (*HB* 382), causes her writing to have a unique quality (Madden 81). Being called by God to be His spokesmen is of the utmost importance to the characters in *The Violent Bear It Away*. O'Connor sees the prophet as a critic of society; thus, Francis's "vocation to be a prophet will define his place within and relationship to history; like the prophetic artist, his mission is to create and interpret history in light of its transcendent purpose" (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 112). O'Connor's prophet is meant to question established notions that are contrary to God's will, but first, he has to be in line with it himself.

Mason desires to be significant in God's sight and useful to Him above all else. He believes that it is a part of his calling to bring up Francis as another prophet to succeed him, likening "their situation to that of Elijah and Elisha" (*VBIA* 41). Just as Elisha takes over Elijah's ministry after the latter has been taken up to heaven (2 Kings 2:9-14), Mason hopes that Francis will eventually replace him and complete the task that is always on the forefront of his mind: baptizing Bishop, Rayber's son who suffers from Down syndrome. Mason tries to impose his point of view on Francis; however, Francis's calling to be a prophet cannot simply be inherited from Mason, it must be personal, born of individual conviction (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 112). O'Connor engages with religious ritualism in her story "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," through the character of "the child":

> [S]he remembered that she hadn't said her prayers and got up and knelt down and began them. She took a running start and went through to the other side of the Apostle's Creed and then hung by her chin on the side of the bed, empty-minded. Her prayers, when she remembered to say them, were usually perfunctory but sometimes when she had done something wrong or heard music or lost something, or sometimes for no reason at all she would be moved to fervor and would think of Christ on the long journey to Calvary, crushed three times on the rough cross. Her mind would stay on this a while and then get empty and when something roused her, she would find that she was thinking of a different thing entirely, of some dog or some girl or something she was going to do some day. (*Complete Stories* 244)

Clearly disapproving of this kind of mindless prayer, O'Connor denies the charge that Catholicism is merely a ceremonious religion. In a letter to her Protestant friend Dr. T.R. Spivey, she admits that religious experience may "become mechanical and mere habit" but also cautions to assume that inward religious experience must be perceivable on the outside and must be accompanied by emotions (*HB* 346). In short, she disagrees with the assumption "that grace is something you have to feel" (*HB* 346). Thus, while religious

routine that does not include the participation of the mind does not appeal to O'Connor, she is careful not to judge those around her on the basis of appearance. Consequently, an internal change needs to take place within Francis for him to become a prophet, as external factors are insufficient indicators, and by themselves, they are worthless.

The Tarwaters' expectations of their ministry are shaped by the experience of the Old Testament prophets. They focus especially on "being called," alluding to the call narratives in the Bible, when the prophet is commissioned. Francis emulates men like the prophet Isaiah without truly understanding the process of purification that the moment of being called entails. He dreams of being like the Hebrew prophets, men whom God uses powerfully to warn of approaching judgment and call to repentance, but fails to see that He also uses them to proclaim His love for His people and the whole world, anticipating the Messiah and the new covenant, explicitly mentioned in the thirty-first chapter of the book of Jeremiah, with Christ as its Mediator. Francis cannot comprehend the true nature of this new covenant, even though he has been taught about it all his life. Like Jonah, he fails to understand God's mercy.

The Violent Bear It Away describes this very process of Francis, the young prophet, coming to understand his fallen state and need for cleansing, which helps him grasp God's love for mankind. Initially wanting to bring glory to himself, he learns, in a painful process, to desire to bring glory to God. Mason has undergone a similar experience as he was called by God:

> [O]ne morning he saw to his joy a finger of fire coming out of [the sun] and before he could turn, before he could shout, the finger had touched him and the destruction

> he had been waiting for had fallen in his own brain and his own body. His own blood had been burned dry and not the blood of the world. (*VBIA* 5-6)

Prior to this, Mason had focused on the idea of doom for the world, which he considered to be extremely evil and devoid of hope. As he is called, however, Mason discovers that being a prophet is not about getting God to do his will, but about doing God's will. The narrator notes, with obvious irony, that "the Lord Himself had failed to hear the prophet's message" and that the punishment that Mason had wished upon others ultimately came upon himself, perhaps as a challenge to his character, ultimately leading him to learn from "his own mistakes" (*VBIA* 5). Thus, Mason's own call narrative, which he freely and frequently shares with Francis, includes an element of repentance, as *The Violent Bear It Away* explores "the possibility of both violence and grace within the same individual" (Spivey 129). Critics have questioned whether Mason ever comes to truly love the city, since, as Sarah Gordon argues, the fact that he does not hate the city or seek its destruction does not mean that he loves it (217). However, it seems clear that there is a significant change of attitude within Mason.

Deeply passionate about being a prophet, Mason takes himself extremely seriously. Having been mocked by Rayber, who published an essay about Mason's "fixation," Mason defends his calling enthusiastically. He quotes "sentences from the schoolteacher's piece [about him]. Wrath had burned them on his memory, word for word. 'His fixation of being called by the Lord has its origin in insecurity. He needed the assurance of a call, and so he called himself'" (*VBIA* 19). Mason's prophetic voice is eventually silenced by violence that, as he remembers the incident, continues to render him speechless:

> Whenever he came to this part of the story, his breath would at once come short as if he were struggling to run up a hill. His face would get redder and his voice thinner and sometimes it would give out completely and he would sit there on the step, beating the porch floor with his fist while he moved his lips and no sound came out. Finally he would pipe, "They grabbed me. Two. From behind. The door behind. Two." (*VBIA* 61)

The Violent Bear It Away, beginning with its very title, addresses questions of dominance, of brutal acts of subjugation, and, like the prophets in the Bible, Mason is physically attacked. John the Baptist stands for the voice of righteousness that is silenced in O'Connor's novel. In the Bible, John rebukes Herod for being with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and is brutally beheaded at the request of Herodias's daughter, who gains Herod's favor by dancing for him and demands John's head "on a platter" as a reward (Matthew 14:1-6; Mark 6:14-29). In line with the grotesque nature of the work, *The Violent Bear It Away* refers to him as "John whose severed head struck terror from a dish" (17) and his presence is felt throughout the novel as he becomes the prototype of the violated spokesman of God. Mason sees himself as undergoing the same kind of suffering and silencing that the prophets of old had to endure. Fully knowing what fate might await young Francis, Mason raises him to be his disciple, a new prophet who will follow in his footsteps after his death.

Francis anticipates being called by God and envisions a dramatic act: "When the Lord's call came, [Francis] wished it to be a voice from out of a clear and empty sky, the trumpet of the Lord God Almighty, untouched by any fleshly hand or breath" (*VBIA* 22). Francis's main obstacle in life is his longing "to be 'called' as Moses, Joshua or Daniel were called – with many signs and miracles" (Baumgaertner 143). Because that does not

occur the way he imagines it, Francis is unable to move on with his life. Considering himself to be set apart due to the unusual circumstances of his birth, Francis impatiently waits for a supernatural sign:

> The boy was very proud that he had been born in a [car] wreck. He had always felt that it set his existence apart from the ordinary one and he had understood from it that the plans of God for him were special . . . . Often when he walked in the woods and came upon some bush a little removed from the rest, his breath would catch in his throat and he would stop and wait for the bush to burst into flame. (*VBIA* 41)

His "friend," the voice with whom he communicates in his loneliness and who, according to O'Connor, is Satan (*HB* 367), advises him to expect an audible or physical sign if he were actually called to be a prophet: "You go ahead and put your feet in [Mason's] shoes. Elisha after Elijah like he said. But just lemme ast you this: where is the voice of the Lord? I haven't heard it. Who's called you this morning? Or any morning? Have you been told what to do?" (*VBIA* 42); "What you want is a sign, a real sign, suitable to a prophet. If you are a prophet, it's only right you should be treated like one. When Jonah dallied, he was cast three days in a belly of darkness and vomited up in the place of his mission" (*VBIA* 161). The splendor with which the biblical prophets were called is Francis's ultimate dream that would give his life a purpose beyond himself. He struggles to submit to God's will even more than Mason, desiring his own glory above that of Jesus, and wanting to remain in control of his own life. When Francis finally does receive a sign to "set him in the right direction," it comes in unexpected form: "a homosexual rape" (Baumgaertner 146). This is not in any way what Francis expected; it does however, bring him to an awareness of his own need for salvation.

O'Connor writes about her second novel that "[t]here are two main symbols in the book – water and the bread that Christ is" (*HB* 387). At the center of *The Violent Bear It Away*, ever drawing Francis's prophetic energy towards himself, is "a complex and living incarnation of the beautiful: the retarded child Bishop" (Lake 142). Francis is obsessed with baptizing Bishop and he revolts against this tendency within himself. As the novel discusses baptism, it raises questions about the disparity between an outward act and inner conviction, the physical and the spiritual, as well as the value of human life. Rayber proclaims baptism to be meaningless, "an empty act" (*VBIA* 194); it is Bishop's baptism that Rayber opposes the strongest, however. He tells Mason: "You could slosh water on him for the rest of his life and he'd still be an idiot. Five years old for all eternity, useless forever. . . . [H]e'll never be baptized – just as a matter of principle, nothing else. As a gesture of human dignity, he'll never be baptized" (*VBIA* 34).

The reader learns quickly that the main reason Rayber is so opposed to Bishop's baptism is his anger towards God for having made Bishop the way he is, as Rayber considers Bishop's life to be worthless: "In a hundred years people may have learned enough to put [children like Bishop] to sleep when they're born" (*VBIA* 168). "I may not have the guts to drown him, . . . but I have the guts to maintain my self-respect and not to perform futile rites over him. I have the guts not to become the prey of superstitions. He is what he is, and there's nothing for him to be born into" (*VBIA* 172). Rayber sees his little son as hopeless and without a future; indeed, Bishop, who suffers from Down syndrome, is different from the other characters in the novel – he is completely otherworldly as well as

entirely worldly. According to Mason, God's purpose in Bishop being born to Rayber's wife was that Rayber "couldn't corrupt" the child (*VBIA* 77). In one sense, Bishop's point of view seems to transcend what other people see; in another, it is bound to the physical realm, as he, for example, picks up trash in the street and examines it with great enthusiasm (*VBIA* 140). Bishop provokes by his otherness and is doomed to destruction at the hands of those who, strangely enough, love him the most. Though he is innocent and portrayed with great care as being incapable of evil, he pays the price for Francis's struggle with a violent death suffered at the hands of the prophet. In this sense, he is a Christ-figure, similar to Lucy in *Jonah's Gourd Vine.*

Bishop, however, is not the only target of Francis's prophetic energy; there is something beyond his baptism. As in the account of Jonah, within the narrative of *The Violent Bear It Away* the prophet is sent to deliver God's message to the city.[10] Mason has taken baby Francis to raise him in the backwoods, because he considers the city to be evil and doomed. Francis inherits from Mason this dislike for the city that is unbiblical. An

---

[10] O'Connor's first and last stories, "The Geranium" and "Judgment Day," both deal with the city and the country in relation to the issue of race as they describe old men who have been moved from the Southern countryside to the urban North. Both Old Dudley and Tanner come to New York City, being unable to sustain their existences down South, and dream of the life they have left behind, especially their interaction with African-American characters. This eventually leads to a rude awakening as they encounter what Old Dudley calls "Yankee Niggers" (*Complete Stories* 10), who are quite different from the people they have known in the South. Old Dudley agrees to live with his daughter out of a sense of curiosity, acknowledging that "[b]ig towns were important places" (*Complete Stories* 4). Like Francis Tarwater, Old Dudley feels small and inadequate in the big city, being hopelessly overwhelmed by its speed and crowdedness (*Complete Stories* 7). He could have eased his discomfort in the big city by introducing his rural African-American friends to it: "Old Dudley would have liked to have explained New York to Rabie. If he could have showed it to Rabie it wouldn't have been so big – he wouldn't have felt pressed down every time he went out in it" (*Complete Stories* 6). However, in the end it is the urban African American who, rather than requiring Old Dudley's explanations, understands the city and helps Old Dudley, leaving him feeling utterly humiliated (*Complete Stories* 12). Tanner shares many of Dudley's sentiments and experiences; however, he does not merely end in tears but rather, dead, buried in New York City, and finally re-buried in the South (*Complete Stories* 550).

examination of historical facts reveals that Christianity has been most successful when it applied its mandate of "love thy neighbor as thyself" to the city, seeking to make meaning of suffering in the world in light of what Jesus endured on the cross. A major argument sociologists use to explain why Christianity grew from a "tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire [to] dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization" (Stark 3), is the fact that Christianity could not only explain urban catastrophes, like the plague, better than Greco-Roman beliefs (Stark 74), but also that "Christian values of love and charity had, from the beginning, been translated into norms of social service," as believers nursed sick Christians and non-Christians alike – at the risk of their own lives (Stark 74-75). Similarly, Emperor Julian wrote in a letter in 362 A.D., that "[t]he impious Galileans [that is, Christians,] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us" (Stark 84). The early Christians succeeded in living out the Scriptural command of loving one another in an exemplary way (Stark 87).

Francis's approach to the city is completely different from that of the early church. As he first visits the city, together with his great-uncle, Francis is full of expectations that are quickly disappointed:

> His head jerked backwards after each passing figure until they began to pass too thickly and he observed that their eyes didn't grab at you like the eyes of country people. Several people bumped into him and this contact that should have made an acquaintance for life, made nothing because the hulks shoved on with ducked heads and muttered apologies that he would have accepted if they had waited. Then he realized, almost without warning, that this place was evil – the ducked heads, the muttered words, the hastening away. He saw in a burst of light that these people

> were hastening away from the Lord God Almighty. It was to the city that the prophets came and he was here in the midst of it. (*VBIA* 26-27)

As his visit to the city makes him feel extremely small and insignificant, even invisible, Francis condemns it and plans to return as a prophet, like his great-uncle: "When he was called, on that day when he returned, he would set the city astir, he would return with fire in his eyes" (*VBIA* 28). Francis equates the unfamiliar sense of anonymity with evil and passes judgment on the city. He clearly misunderstands the implications of being a prophet, not yet knowing that prophecy points to God rather than the prophet himself. He has not yet learned what John the Baptist knew so well.

The next time Francis approaches the city, escaping from a fire he set to Mason's property and, as he thinks, his dead body, Francis's view of the city evokes the popularly-held image of hell. Shaped by the misanthropic teachings of his great-uncle, he sees the city as being both on fire (*VBIA* 51) and underground (*VBIA* 54). Coming to live with Rayber, he is reinforced in his judgmental attitude and increasingly detests city life. However, after having committed the most violent crime in the novel, Francis is raped on the way back to Powderhead and, awakening naked and helpless in the backwoods, he is transformed. It is the rape at the end of the novel that convinces Francis to truly embrace his calling: "Paradoxically, this shocking violation of his being leads Tarwater to accept his vocation" (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 115). His entire perspective changes as he suffers violence as opposed to violating others. Francis no longer judges and condemns those living in the city but feels compelled to love them and to share with them the truth now revealed to him. He comes to lean on grace, which, according to O'Connor, "can and does use as its medium

the imperfect, purely human, and even hypocritical. Cutting yourself off from Grace is a very decided matter, requiring a real choice, act of will, and affecting the very ground of the soul" (*HB* 389).

Christ's presence in *The Violent Bear It Away* is metaphorical;[11] expressed as a thirst for Living Water, as a hunger for the Bread of Life, which remain unsatisfied as long as Francis is in rebellion. O'Connor often uses hunger to describe the emptiness of humanity apart from God, as in the case of young Bevel/Harry in the short story "The River":

> "Will he heal me?" Bevel asked.
> "What you got?"
> "I'm hungry." (*Complete Stories* 159)

The little boy is introduced to the Christian faith, baptized, and finally drowns himself in the river, longing to escape his family situation and to follow Jesus fully, driven by a hunger for Him: "He intended not to fool with preachers any more but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the kingdom of Christ in the river. He didn't mean to waste any more time" (*Complete Stories* 173). Similarly, in "The Enduring Chill," Asbury, one of O'Connor's intellectuals, experiences emptiness and hunger, being "tormented now thinking of his useless life. He felt as if he were a shell that had to be filled with something but he did not know what" (*Complete Stories* 377-378). Hunger is a

[11] O'Connor writes in a letter to her friend Cecil Dawkins, an aspiring author, that it is almost impossible to capture the actual, historical person of Christ successfully in fiction. Commenting on a story about the "necessity of Judas to Christ," a direction of writing Dawkins had since abandoned, O'Connor writes: "The thought behind this may be profound for all I know but I just couldn't get to the thought for being repulsed by the pretentiousness of the dialogue, etc. I have never found a writer who could make Christ-talk" (*HB* 369).

symptom of being lost for O'Connor's characters; tragically, many of them never accept the One who is able to fill them.

In the beginning of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the satanic character asks Francis: "Ain't you in all your fourteen years of supporting this foolishness fed up and sick to the roof of your mouth with Jesus?" (39). Francis is afraid that the hunger his great-uncle suffers from could affect him one day, that "he would be torn by hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill it but the bread of life" (*VBIA* 21). Mason himself passes away while eating, and though he is not taken up "in a chariot of fire" like his role model Elijah, as Rayber sarcastically suggests, he dies full (*VBIA* 88).

Francis, on the other hand, is hungry but cannot eat, until he is ultimately transformed. He rejects the very concept of Christ being the Bread of Life:

> He knew he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable. His black pupils, glassy and still, reflected depth on depth his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf. The Lord out of dust had created him, had made him blood and nerve and mind, had made him to bleed and weep and think, and set him in a world of loss and fire all to baptize one idiot child that He need not have created in the first place and to cry out a gospel just as foolish. He tried to shout, "NO!" but it was like trying to shout in his sleep. The sound was saturated in silence, lost. (*VBIA* 91-92)

Francis resents the idea of following a God who was homeless and died on a cross like a common criminal, and he even more resents the idea of having to give up his own pride and earthly rewards. He cannot get himself to see Jesus as his reward, to delight in the

miraculous feeding of the five thousand and to consider that the Bread of Life can fill the emptiness inside of him.

Living with Rayber, who seeks to convert Francis to his personal form of secularism, Francis eats but remains unsatisfied, "[i]t was apparent from his expression that he found the quality of [the food] poor" (*VBIA* 102). Seeking to uphold his independence, Francis writes down an estimation of what each meal Rayber feeds him costs. He does not enjoy anything Rayber puts before him (*VBIA* 115-116):

> The first day in the city [Francis] had become conscious of the strangeness in his stomach, a peculiar hunger. The city food only weakened him. He and his great-uncle had eaten well. If the old man had done nothing else for him, he had heaped his plate. Never a morning he had not awakened to the smell of fatback frying. The schoolteacher paid scarce attention to what he put inside him. For breakfast, he poured a bowl of shavings out of a cardboard box; in the middle of the day he made sandwiches out of lightbread; and at night he took them to a restaurant, a different one every night run by a different color of foreigner so that he would learn, he said, how other nationalities ate. The boy did not care how other nationalities ate. He had always left the restaurants hungry, conscious of an intrusion in his works. (*VBIA* 162)

Francis notes how much he is driven by his hunger, and how the last time he had actually felt "satisfied by food" was when he was eating breakfast beside the dead body of his great-uncle (*VBIA* 162). There is a connection between the spiritual and the physical here, which Francis cannot help notice, even though his "friend" seeks to discourage him from "entertain[ing] hunger as a sign" (*VBIA* 162). The satanic voice tells him that the true prophets were not driven by hunger, but rather "had been fed" (*VBIA* 162). Thus, Satan tries to convince Francis that his hunger is physical, not spiritual, and that God should provide actual food to fill him, distracting Francis from Jesus. Reminding Francis of Elijah

being sustained by the LORD, he goes on to suggest to Francis that "he demand an unmistakable sign, not a pang of hunger . . ., clear and suitable – water bursting forth from a rock for instance, fire sweeping down at his command and destroying some site he would point to . . ." (*VBIA* 162).

Francis's emotions become increasingly more intense. As he approaches the moment of baptizing and drowning Bishop, he seeks to fill himself with food, eating "voraciously":

> With an expression of intense concentration, he ate six buns filled with barbecue and drank three cans of beer. He might have been preparing himself for a long journey or for some action that would take all his strength. Rayber observed this sudden appetite for the poor food and decided that he was eating compulsively. (*VBIA* 167)

After a tense conversation with Rayber, he throws up the food, upon which the hunger returns: "A ravenous emptiness raged in his stomach as if it had reestablished its rightful tenure" (*VBIA* 174). Even after he has killed Bishop, Francis continues to remain insatiably hungry. He explains to the driver who gives him a ride and offers him his sandwich: "When I come to eat, I ain't hungry . . . . It's like being empty is a thing in my stomach and it don't allow nothing else to come down in there" (*VBIA* 211). The emptiness continues as Francis straightforwardly proclaims his preference for marijuana and liquor as he catches a ride with a stranger, declaring "It's better than the Bread of Life!" (*VBIA* 230). It is only after losing consciousness and being subsequently raped by the driver that Francis is changed. He has a vision of Christ multiplying the loaves and fishes and realizes that no one but Christ can fill the vacuum that is within him (*VBIA* 241). Francis, in the end, finds hope in

the love of Christ, as his great-uncle did before him. But unlike Mason, who had secluded himself at Powderhead, this love compels Francis to move towards the city, not away from it. As he turns around to approach the city for a second time within the narrative of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the reader has reason to assume that Francis will indeed become a prophet. In this act, O'Connor notes, he "escapes the Devil by accepting his vocation . . ." (*HB* 507). Like Jonah, he has been struck down in his rebellion and is caused to cry out to God for help. Like Jonah, he obeys at the second chance; however, the reader has reason to believe that Francis, unlike Jonah, has developed a true love for "the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping" (*VBIA* 243).

6. Conclusion

Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis once said that, given His historical influence and the magnitude of His claim to be God, it is impossible to simply ignore Christ, or to dismiss Him as "a great moral teacher." Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity* (1952) that it does not make sense to say

> "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (52)

This is the same Jesus of Nazareth that O'Connor and Hurston, through their engagement with Old Testament prophecy, put to the test. Their conclusions are different and shaped by the ways in which they have questioned and wrestled with the claims of the Bible, yet their works equally, standing for themselves, proclaim that Christ needs to be considered, in one way or another, by every individual. O'Connor's point of view is similar to that of Lewis; writing to Betty Hester that "if [Jesus] was not God, He was no realist, only a liar, and the crucifixion an act of justice" (*HB* 92), she sets out to prove the human need for salvation through her fiction. Hurston does not write as an advocate for Christ's divinity, although she does not contradict this notion directly. She simply treats Him as an interesting person, whether literary or historical is not quite clear, to whom she can allude in her fiction, in direct and indirect ways.

Hurston and O'Connor describe the process of the prophet coming to accept his calling. They allow their readers to witness a narrative that is similar to the traditional Bildungsroman. John, Hurston's character, discovers his gift for speaking and increasingly puts it to use in a religious context. He does not, however, develop a relationship with God and therefore never achieves any transcendence or true meaningfulness in his preaching. In O'Connor's novel, Francis is aware of his calling and runs away from it, refusing to surrender his life until he experiences sin and, subsequently, grace, which he then seeks to communicate to those around him. The value of religious experience is weighed very differently in these two novels, which explains their vastly different engagements with the person of Christ.

Community and belonging are of great concern in the book of Jonah, and they are also extremely important for both Hurston and O'Connor, who, in different ways, most often portray very specific locations in their fiction. Hurston frequently writes about her hometown of Eatonville, Florida, "a pure Negro town – charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America" (*DTR* 1). O'Connor, as an invalid, was quite literally tied to the American South, and she delights in her outsider perspective of being a "Catholic novelist in the Protestant South":

> The larger social context is simply left out of much current fiction, but it cannot be left out by the Southern writer. The image of the South, in all its complexity, is so powerful in us that it is a force which has to be encountered and engaged. The writer must wrestle with it, like Jacob with the angel, until he has extracted a blessing.[12] (*MM* 198)

Both Hurston and O'Connor are able to be critical of their own context while also showing a deep love for the South.

Jonah's Gourd Vine is interested in Christ only indirectly; however, the novel points to Him as it likens some of its characters to Him. John, the novel's protagonist, is both selfish and self-centered, and finds himself in ruins as quickly as he has risen to fame, as a worm destroys the vine that he had taken for granted. Abusing his position as pastor, John suffers the consequences of preaching empty words without applying them to his own

[12] The reference here is to Genesis 32:22-32, where Jacob, Isaac's younger son who had previously stolen the blessing that belonged to his older brother Esau, wrestles with God and refuses to let go until God has blessed him. Jacob is forever changed by the encounter, as his name is changed from Jacob (deceiver) to Israel (struggles with God), and as he continues to limp because God had touched the socket of his hip.

life. *The Violent Bear It Away* discusses Jesus of Nazareth very directly and also shows how the novel's characters are transformed by Him. Christ is a constant metaphorical presence as the characters come to grips with their hunger for the Bread of Life. Mason is driven by a singular passion for Christ while Francis is motivated by a resistance to Him that ultimately turns into surrender. There is a transformation in attitude as Francis, like Jonah, faces a great city. Jonah demands for the city to experience violence, as do the Tarwaters. The message of O'Connor's novel, however, is one of a different kind of violence. As Jesus took God's wrath upon Himself, His followers experience suffering.

In their concern with prophecy, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* allude to John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, a model in asceticism whose voice is silenced by physical violence. The first chapter of the Apostle John's Gospel, which discusses Jesus's baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, begins with a description of the incarnation (Baumgaertner 142). The Word becoming flesh, the link between language and the body, is a central concern to both Hurston and O'Connor in their fictional works. I explore this issue in depth in my next chapter.

The Word into the World: Incarnation

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

1. Introduction

The incarnation of Christ, the claim that God Himself took on human form and human nature, continues to fascinate and to divide cultures of belief. Because the incarnation is perhaps the central mystery of Christianity, any metaphor derived from it, or any attempt to explain it in language figurative or denotative, must by necessity fall short. In the Bible, the Word is not just language, nor, paradoxically, is it essentially linguistic; rather, it is understood as the preincarnate Christ, and the Word made flesh is not simply human, but also perfectly divine. Nonetheless, the incarnation illuminates and alludes to the intimate relationship between language and the body in our human existence, and a serious consideration of the incarnation leads to a renewed appreciation of the body. Connections between the physical and the oral are manifold, and are often represented in fictional works, as "writers transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language . . ." (Morrison 4). The present chapter of my dissertation argues that Hurston and O'Connor use the link between language and the body to address questions of origin, destiny, and belonging in different ways in their novels, experimenting with language to underline the worth of the body.

After introducing the biblical notions of language, the body, and the incarnation, I trace the history of the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)[13] in American literature to provide a context for the ways in which Hurston and O'Connor apply non-

[13] In what follows, I use the abbreviation AAVE to refer to African American Vernacular English.

mainstream language in general, and the black vernacular in particular, in their fictional works. In Appendix A (page I), I also give a basic overview of the specific grammatical features of AAVE, which blurs the distinctions between language and the body, to create a platform upon which I analyze fictional dialogue. The main body of this chapter addresses the issue of how language and the body act and interact in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, discussing how Hurston and O'Connor play with this intimate connection to achieve various purposes in their fiction. Specifically, I attempt sociolinguistic analyses of the two novels and examine the significance of names in both works, attempting to show how Hurston's and O'Connor's works express the hope of freedom from physical limitations they see in the body.

2. The Word Became Flesh

The Bible presents a complex understanding of human language and also of the human body, which I attempt to show by discussing each of those two concepts in a progression through the different stages of the narrative of the Bible/salvation: creation, fall, and redemption/restoration. In their capacity to speak, humans mirror God, who created the universe in speech acts (Genesis 1). At the time of creation, God gives the first man the privilege of naming the animals around him:

> Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man

> gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. (Genesis 2:19-20)

Adam also "named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20). In the Garden of Eden, language is used in truthful communication between the Creator and His creation. Satan, whom the Apostle John calls "the father of lies" whose "native tongue" is lying (John 8:44), interrupts this harmony by twisting the words God had spoken, thus breaking the first man and woman's ability to speak with their Creator as they used to.

At the Tower of Babel, language ceases to be a tool for communication, but rather becomes an instrument of confusion. God causes a monolingual community to disperse as He introduces a multiplicity of languages in an attempt to stop the prideful progression of humanity. As human beings seek to "make a name for [them]selves," attempting to build "a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens" (Genesis 11:4), the LORD stops them and "scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel – because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world" (Genesis 11:8-9). In light of the rebellion caused by a common human language, God introduces an obstacle to verbal understanding among the different peoples that leads to their separation.

After human beings are redeemed and restored to a relationship with God, languages, in their very diversity that is maintained, become agents of unification. At Pentecost, the believers "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit causes

them to speak in foreign languages, enabling others to hear the good news of salvation by faith in Christ:

> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from *every nation* under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?" (Acts 2:5-8; emphasis mine)

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, there is a celebration of linguistic unity despite language diversity, as Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became flesh and was sacrificed, has redeemed individuals "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). These individuals are united in their worship of God, giving glory to Him for their redemption in song (Revelation 7:9-10).

Like language, the body was shaped in creation, affected by the fall, and subsequently redeemed. God made the body of the first man, Adam, "from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). All human bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made," purposefully created as God "knit[s] [them] together in [their] mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13-14). They are sustained by God who knows the very number of hairs on each person's head (Matthew 10:30). Just as God's breath gives life to the individual, the departure of the divine breath at death causes the body to become dust once again (Psalm 104:29).

From a biblical perspective, human beings use and abuse their bodies in contexts that were not intended by God. Closely following the physical expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the first murder takes place, as Cain slays his brother, Abel, out

of jealousy (Genesis 4:8). The human body thus becomes devalued, and it is repeatedly given over to various kinds of dehumanizing ends, such as prostitution; the Bible goes so far as to equate Israel's breaking of her covenant relationship with God to prostitution (e.g., Ezekiel 16). The broken relationship between God and His people is mended only on the cross.

As humanity is restored to its Maker through the Messiah, the value of the body is underlined when, after the ascension of Christ into heaven following His resurrection, the Holy Spirit enters believers, causing them to become temples:[14] "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Furthermore, while the body of each believer is a temple, the sum of believers makes up the body of Christ. That is, the body also becomes metaphorical of the community of believers in all its diversity and the variety of giftedness: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16). It is by the broken body of Christ that Christians are saved and form one body, the church, of which He is the Head, and in celebrating the "Lord's Supper" they partake of His flesh and blood (Potts, "Body" 194).

Language and the body merge in the concept of the incarnation, as God Himself takes on a human body and speaks human language. In *Götzen-Dämmerung* [*Twilight of*

[14] O'Connor treats the sacredness of the human body as God's temple in her short story "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." The nuns tell Susan and Joanne to protect themselves from male advances by saying: "Stop sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!" (*Complete Stories* 238).

the Idols] (1889), Friedrich Nietzsche, herald of "God is dead," suggests that, to do away with the notion of God, one has to eliminate grammar first, because it embodies the very concept of order and creation (73). According to the Bible, the Word of God played an important role in creating the universe, as God spoke the world into existence, an act that brought order out of chaos: "God said, 'let there be . . .' and there was . . ." (Genesis 1:3). This divine Logos, "through whom [God] made the universe" (Hebrews 1:2) and in whom "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay" (Romans 8: 21), is described as having "become flesh" in the Gospel of John (1:14). John identifies the incarnate Christ as Jesus of Nazareth and anticipates His sacrificial death on the cross by ascribing to Him the title "Lamb of God" (John 1:29).[15] The belief that the second Person of the Trinity, at a specific point in time, took on human, bodily form, is central to the Christian faith and the life of Jesus "is normative in its claim about the nature of God and the possibilities for human existence" (Miles 1). Based on the very doctrine of the Trinity, love is at the heart of human reality (Miles 1), and this love is manifested in the incarnation of Christ, which was necessary for various reasons, namely "to reconcile [mankind] to God by making atonement for our sins" (Swinburne 37), for God "to identify with [human] suffering," becoming a suffering servant out of love (Swinburne 44), and, finally, to encourage humanity and demonstrate "by example what a perfect human life amounts to" (Swinburne 46).

[15] This is an allusion to the Passover lamb, whose blood protected the Israelites from the plague on the firstborn, the tenth plague which ultimately made it possible for God's people to be released from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 12).

In his book *Miracles* (1947), C.S. Lewis discusses the incarnation as the foundational miracle of the Christian faith: "Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this" (112). The term incarnation, derived from the Latin "incarnatio," implies that Christ became a human being rather than just using the form of a human body (O'Collins 1). Jesus is the physical embodiment of God, "[i]n him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily" (Colossians 2:9). In the incarnation, God does not cease to be divine, but rather, He "tak[es] on additionally a human body and a human nature understood as a human way of thinking and acting" (Swinburne 51). A.W. Tozer writes that "[i]n His incarnation the Son veiled His deity, but He did not void it. The unity of the God head made it impossible that He should surrender anything of His deity" (21-22). God can never shed His divinity; however, in the incarnation, He has come near to His creation, granting human beings immediate access to Himself (Burns 29). In Christ, God subjects Himself to the experience of being human and being confined to the material universe, accepting the limitations of this state with unsurpassed humility, as the Apostle Paul writes to Christians at Philippi, whom he encourages to match the attitude of the One who, although He is the Creator of the universe, became not only a Man, but a Servant to all humanity, and allowed for Himself to be abused and crucified (2:5-8).

The incarnation as such is difficult to comprehend; yet it has fascinated thinkers and challenged scholars from different fields for the past two thousand years. Studies in sociolinguistics have shown that language and the body are not separate entities, as is often assumed. In actuality, they are very closely related, in the sense that language bears heavily

on an individual's sense of self; that is, how a person speaks expresses to a large extent who he or she is (Lippi-Green 5). In this vein, Foucault has elucidated how power is executed through language and how "principles of exclusion" deprive all individuals of speaking freely about specific, "taboo," topics, and/or deny certain individuals, such as "the madman," the right to be heard (110).[16] According to Foucault, then,

> the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (109)

It is socially determined, in other words, whose output garners validity; this process is by no means objective, nor is it exclusively a matter of linguistics. Rather, it is directly corresponding to the body, as can be shown in the case of AAVE, the language which most of Hurston's characters speak, and in the case of the varieties of Southern English that O'Connor uses for Francis and Mason Tarwater, as well as her African-American characters.

3. Language and the Body in American Literature

AAVE – also known as Ebonics, Black Vernacular, or, in the field of literature, Black Dialect – is the variety of English that, according to linguists' estimates, is spoken by approximately 80 to 90 percent of the black population in the United States (Lippi-Green

[16] The third "principle of exclusion" Foucault discusses, i.e., "the will to truth" (113), is irrelevant to my discussion and, therefore, is omitted in this dissertation.

176). It is, first and foremost, a language of the community that signifies closeness and serves to express a sense of belonging of the individual to a group (Egar 87). Despite the fact that European Americans often try to limit AAVE by labeling it as faulty English, it is precisely not "merely colloquial, slang, or vulgar," but rather a rule-governed language system that is highly flexible, given that it makes use of "a variety of class and regional variants" (Brown 8). AAVE is marked by certain phonological, lexical and grammatical features that distinguish it from Mainstream US English (MUSE);[17] some features of AAVE are also characteristic of varieties of English, such as Southern white dialects of American English, while others are unique to regional and social AAVE variations (Lippi-Green 176). The origins of AAVE date back to the times of slavery in the United States, probably as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and they are subject to constant debate among linguists. There are two principal points of view: the creolist and the dialectologist positions. Whereas the creolists argue that AAVE evolved as a pidgin and creole, a contact language used by African slaves as they had to interact with speakers of English, dialectologists believe that AAVE is English acquired directly, as African slaves arrived in America (Rickford 4). The question about the origins of AAVE is a loaded one, perhaps more so than it seems at first sight. If AAVE is simply English learned by African slaves in a process of second language acquisition, its unique features are mere language errors.

[17] In what follows, I use the abbreviation MUSE to refer to Mainstream US English. In the works of contemporary sociolinguists like Rosina Lippi-Green, MUSE has taken the place of what was formerly known as Standard English; there is, they have argued, no such thing as Standard English – it is a mere myth, an ideal, upheld by those empowered by it (Lippi-Green 59).

However, if AAVE is a creole and, therefore, an independent language,[18] its speakers have a number of rights, which could have expensive material implications for US society. An example of the significance of this debate is the widely discussed resolution by the Oakland Unified School District Board in December 1996, which gives AAVE the status of a language and thus grants its speakers assistance in the second language acquisition of MUSE, which requires significant funding (Mufwene 1). Seen in this light, the controversy surrounding AAVE is partially a pecuniary issue, although the problem admittedly goes much deeper.

AAVE is constantly questioned and undermined in its validity, which points to a serious problem and underlines how language and the body intersect in AAVE. While individuals and organizations claim to be objective when finding fault with the way some African Americans speak, there is a deeply subjective element to what has become linguistic discrimination. The "problem" with AAVE, as Lippi-Green notes,

> is not the verbal aspect system which distinguishes it from other varieties of US English, or the rhetorical strategies which draw such a vivid contrast, it is simply this: AAVE is tangible and irrefutable evidence that there is a distinct, healthy, functioning African American culture which is not white, and which does not want to be white. (178)

This observation is as true today as it was during the time of American slavery: criticism and mockery of AAVE are directed at the speakers of AAVE, and more specifically at their

[18] In this dissertation, I refer to AAVE as a language.

black bodies, rather than the language itself (Lippi-Green 178). Many of the differences between AAVE and other varieties of English are simply perceived, due to racial barriers.[19]

At its root, the dramatic/literary representation of AAVE is a mocking white intonation of blackness. Imitations of AAVE in European-American writing can be found as early as late seventeenth-century court documents, such as those of the "Salem witch trials," in which the speech of African-American witnesses is transcribed (Wideman xvi). The minstrel shows of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century romanticized the times of slavery and featured white actors imitating the speech of slaves, depicting African Americans as intellectually inferior and unable to speak English properly. Consequently, AAVE was distorted into a stereotype and presented to a white audience who then felt superior and was comforted by the reinforcement of its sense that African Americans are ignorant and need to be enslaved for their own good. Building on the minstrel shows, AAVE was eventually institutionalized by the nineteenth-century "Plantation school," which consisted of European-American writers like Sidney Lanier, Joel Chandler Harris and George Washington Cable (Wideman xvi). It is in this context that "eye dialect" evolved, a minstrel phenomenon that exclusively deals with AAVE in writing: in order to ridicule African Americans and their speech, white writers changed the spelling of words to make them visibly more "black," although those words are pronounced in exactly the same way in MUSE and AAVE. An example would be the spelling of *took* as *tuk*, which does not

[19] I briefly introduce the grammatical features of AAVE in Appendix A (page I).

serve any purpose other than "to *show* the sound of Black vernacular" (Wideman xvi; emphasis in the original).

In order to substantiate this point, it is necessary to introduce works by black and white writers to show how the use of AAVE in the literature of the nineteenth century evolved, leading up to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Hence I discuss two European-American writers, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain, on the one hand, and three African-American writers, Frances Harper, Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, on the other. It is noteworthy that white writers began to use AAVE before black writers, since, as I mentioned above, representations of AAVE in literary works originated from the white minstrel tradition. The achievements of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), according to Abraham Lincoln "the book that made this great war [i.e., the American Civil War]" (Weaver xi), in the battle against slavery stand above criticism. However, despite her clear opposition towards the institution of slavery, Stowe groups her characters according to types in a rather racist manner; AAVE is presented as the uneducated utterances of ignorant, dark-skinned slaves who cannot speak proper English. For example, while both Eliza and George, who are almost white and well-educated, speak MUSE, Topsy's wildness, like Aunt Chloe's simplicity, or Uncle Tom's lack of education, is accompanied by AAVE: "Law, Missis, you must whip me; my old Missis allers whipped me. I ain't used to workin' unless I gets whipped" (Stowe 355). While Stowe represents AAVE phonologically ("allers," "workin'"), she also uses grammatical features ("I gets"). Although it makes sense to assume that house slaves spoke in a way that is less marked

than those working in the fields, this is only true to a certain degree, and it is quite obvious that Stowe uses features of AAVE as an indicator of degradation, and to mark an inability to succeed in life.

Like Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is highly controversial, as it criticizes the institution of slavery while simultaneously relying on racist vocabulary. Twain is widely recognized as being among the first writers to realistically represent what was then called black dialect in high literature. The character of Jim, a runaway slave, speaks the following words:

> 'Who? Me? Go 'long. Doan talk to *me* 'bout yo' pints. I reck'n I knows sense when I sees it; en dey ain' no sense in sich doin's as dat. De 'spute warn't bout a half a chile, de 'spute was 'bout a whole chile; en de man dat think he kin settle a 'spute 'bout a whole chile wid a half a chile, doan know enough to come in out'n de rain. (95; emphasis in the original)

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain uses AAVE so as to place the emphasis on phonology rather than grammar. So, while he captures a few grammatical features, like the presence of the third person singular *s* in the first person ("I knows," "I sees") or multiple negation ("ain' no"), he focuses on the way speakers of AAVE omit the postvocalic *r* and replace the initial voiced *th* sound for *d* ("de"). The use of apostrophes to make dialect more visible is one of the most noticeable features of AAVE as represented by Twain. While the two European-American writers discussed here clearly have honorable motives – in Stowe's case, the abolition of slavery; in Twain's case, criticism of the racism that still existed in the

American South after the Civil War[20] – they nonetheless end up "othering" African Americans. This is especially true of Stowe; her good intentions notwithstanding, she introduces a rigid system that categorizes skin color, intelligence and linguistic abilities in a way that, from a contemporary point of view, is deeply disturbing.

Frances Harper is one of the first African-American writers to employ AAVE in her work. However, like Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harper, in *Iola Leroy* (1892), has only her uneducated, dark-skinned characters speak AAVE, while her "mulatto" protagonist, as all other "almost white" characters in the novel, speaks MUSE. In the novel, AAVE is closely linked to the times of slavery, as the first chapters, prior to the emancipation, are dominated by black speech, beginning with the opening sentence of the novel: "Good mornin', Bob; how's butter dis mornin'?" (7). Iola's father specifically, as his future wife attempts to address him as master, denounces "the dialect of slavery" because he has freed her (74). It follows, then, that AAVE is a phenomenon of the past at best, and an obstacle that needs to be overcome at worst. There is nothing culturally unique about AAVE, as represented by Harper, and there is no place for it in post-civil war society; it is a language that does not have a future. Harper's agenda, in *Iola Leroy*, is to prove the intellectual equality of African Americans when properly educated, not to emphasize their linguistic difference.

---

[20] *Huckleberry Finn* is set prior to the Civil War; however, Twain uses the novel to express criticism of his own times.

Although Harper's contemporary, Charles Chesnutt, did not publish a novel until 1900, he was widely known for his short stories, a number of which employ AAVE, most notably those collected in *The Conjure Woman* (1899). This collection introduces a tension between MUSE and AAVE in its very makeup, as its frame narrative is narrated by John, a white man, while the ex-slave Uncle Julius, a trickster figure, narrates the individual stories. These two linguistically and formally opposed layers result in a contradictory portrayal of Southern race relations. While John has an extremely naïve outlook on things, Uncle Julius presents various strategies of active resistance through, for example, conjure spells as performed by Aunt Peggy, the conjure woman. In Chesnutt's portrayal of AAVE, a strong emphasis is placed on phonology: "Ef any er de niggers ebber complained, dey got fo'ty; so co'se dey did n' many un 'em complain" (33). Comparable to the manner in which Twain uses AAVE in *Huckleberry Finn*, Chesnutt faithfully transcribes the sound of rural black speech. Chesnutt himself, in a letter to Walter Hines Page, contends that he dislikes writing "dialect," and that in fact, "Negro dialect" does not exist at all, but "that what we call by that name is the attempt to express, with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest *the sound*, English pronounced as an ignorant old Southern Negro would be supposed to speak it" (qtd. in Baker 42; emphasis in the original). In view of this, AAVE is rural for Chesnutt – it is, in point of fact, related to demographics rather than race – and it is phonological rather than grammatical. His attitude towards black speech is negative, insofar as it stands for the rural rather than the urban, ignorance rather than knowledge.

In the 1890s, the African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar made dialect poetry extremely popular, most importantly with his *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1895). In the introduction to this work, William Dean Howells expresses harsh criticism of dialect poetry, which hurt Dunbar both on a personal level and in the eye of the public (Wagner 109). Dunbar's representation of AAVE in "When Malindy Sings," for example, is often praised as being authentic. However, the prevailing racism of the time prevented the poet from expressing harsh criticism of racism in American society and many other African-Americans accused him of reinforcing stereotypes (Jones 184). In his "Preface to the Revised Edition" of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), James Weldon Johnson, a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, claims that dialect poetry, as written by Dunbar, "has only two main stops, humor and pathos" (3). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., recounts the debate surrounding the use of "dialect" in both poetry and fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). Gates notes that, despite his failure to gain critical approval, "Dunbar, nevertheless, Signified upon the received white racist textual tradition and posited in its stead a black poetic diction which his more gifted literary heirs [for Gates: e.g., Sterling A. Brown and Hurston] would, in their turn, Signify upon" (176). Dunbar's achievement lies mostly in his influence on other writers, for whom he paved the way as he reclaimed "dialect" for African-American literature.

Dunbar thus anticipated the writers of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. In the early twentieth century, and more specifically during the modernist period, the nature of the use of AAVE in literature changed and went beyond the "humor and pathos" that Johnson

criticizes in Dunbar (Johnson 3). Both black and white writers continued using the language in their works, as Michael North notes in *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994), which analyses the impact of AAVE on both European-American and African-American literary modernism. White modernists like Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, who were themselves linguistic outsiders in Europe, or William Carlos Williams, who remained in America, employed AAVE in their works and correspondence in order to rebel against mainstream society and make their work more distinctive and fashionable (North 78). Simultaneously, black writers like Claude McKay and Jean Toomer struggled to modernize and urbanize AAVE as used in literature which, to their minds, was tainted by the minstrel tradition and its association with slavery and, what is more, had been romanticized by nineteenth-century African-American writers like Dunbar (North 11). North makes an important connection by pointing out how the "white avant-garde," by abusing the black voice in its "theoretical renovation of language," kept alive a cliché and thus handicapped the black writers who tried to overcome that very cliché (195).

During and after the Harlem Renaissance, the poets of the younger generation, notably Langston Hughes and Sterling A. Brown, represent "the common, racy, living authentic speech of the Negro in certain phases of real life" (Johnson 3). Hughes, for example, does so in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), a poem in celebration of Harlem that attempts to represent AAVE as it is spoken in an urban center like New York. As an introductory note to the long poem consisting of many short poems, Hughes writes:

> this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages

> sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition. (89)

Like the African-American musical tradition, Hughes sees AAVE as an urban phenomenon worthy of celebration. In the poems that make up *Montage*, Hughes repeatedly uses features of AAVE, both grammatical and phonological, but he uses them in an urban sense, representing the vernacular philosophy, as can be seen in the following excerpt from his poem "Ballad of the Landlord":

> Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
> Talk on-till you get through.
> You ain't gonna be able to say a word
> If I land my fist on you. (102)

Hughes modernized the use of AAVE in literature in a way which, as I noted above, goes beyond aspects of grammar and phonology. While Hughes uses "gonna," the copula absence ("you talking") and negation with "ain't," he does not unrealistically overuse these features and thus manages to avoid sounding old-fashioned and sentimental. In *Montage*, as in some of his earlier poems, Hughes captures the urban spirit of Harlem, and he describes the beauty of the black body. His contemporary, Hurston, has an entirely different but equally modern approach to the use of AAVE in literary works, as my subsequent discussion of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* shows.

4. Democratic Language

My previous chapter examines Hurston as a prophetic writer. Some of the social criticism she expresses, I suggest, can be found in her engagement with AAVE. From the date of the novel's publication, critics have noted the centrality of language in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In her 1934 review for the *New York Times*, Margaret Wallace writes:

> Not the least charm of the book . . . is its language: rich, expressive, and lacking in self-conscious artifice. From the rolling and dignified rhythms of John's last sermon to the humorous aptness of such a word as 'shickalacked,' to express the noise and motion of a locomotive, there will be much in it to delight the reader. (9)

The novel's focus is not limited to linguistic matters in themselves, however; it is that specific kind of incarnational language of her people that Hurston is most interested in. Part of a tradition of writing produced by African Americans who experiment with AAVE, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* examines the language of the black community by foregrounding the beauty of religious discourse.

AAVE is not merely a language; it is, as a phenomenon, very closely tied to the black body, as I have shown above. Criticism of the language has proven to be directed at the individual who speaks it as someone who is not white. AAVE was used in literary representation by European-Americans to mock those they had formerly enslaved, painting their own bodies black as they ridiculed the vernacular. Reclaiming their own language, Hurston and other African-American writers also reclaim their dignity, and reclaim their bodies. Physically freed at the abolition of slavery, they are now artistically freed as well.

Hurston seeks to redeem AAVE for literary works, being neither self-deprecating nor defensive in her use of it. Rather, she emphasizes the unity of the African-American community despite all the problems she describes, and the uniqueness of African-American cultural expression. She does not shy away from using AAVE in her fiction because of its roots in the minstrel shows, as many of her African-American contemporaries do. In fact, rather than being apologetic, Hurston generally stands up to accusations, for example embracing the issue of mimicry which African-American artists are accused of, calling it "an art in itself" in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (*Folklore* 838).[21] *Jonah's Gourd Vine* makes language and the body its focus, consciously creating a platform "for Hurston to examine black 'talk'" (Sundquist 41), thereby showing the dignity and worth of the body through the beauty of the language. In what follows, I examine the connection between language and the body on various levels, ranging from concerns of sociolinguistics to those of speech act theory.

Critics have suggested that "there is a tension in Hurston's writings between language and vision wherein images of vision have served to configure as well as challenge the cultural space she inherited at birth" (Helbing 166). Through her use of language, Hurston manages to confront her community on specific issues, and she also looks beyond it to humanity in general as she shapes her characters and places them in relation to each other. Her reading of her own people is by no means without critical distance, despite the

[21] Walter Benn Michaels picks up on this in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (1995), explaining how Hurston attempts to "undo the opposition between imitation and originality" (87).

fact that she writes in AAVE. In fact, it may be through her very use of language that, at points, she expresses cultural criticism.

The narrative voice of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is in MUSE most of the time, while the dialogues in the novel are almost exclusively in AAVE. This phenomenon, called code switching (i.e., the use of characters who speak AAVE while the narrative is written in MUSE), has certain "political implications" which denote "dominance and submissiveness" as well as "a kind of apartheid" and is therefore rejected by contemporary African-American writers (Berben-Masi 570). In Hurston's novel, however, this code switching is toned down by numerous exceptions as well as allusions to African-American mythology in the narrative text, as can be seen in the very opening line of the work: "God was grumbling his thunder and playing the zig-zag lightning thru his fingers" (1). The speech of Hurston's characters is consistently in the vernacular, marked by the common features of AAVE. However, while these grammatical features are highly noticeable in the text, it is Hurston's ear for language, her ability to capture the very intonation of AAVE, that is most unique about her written portrayal of the language. The following passage from *Jonah's Gourd Vine* makes this clear:

> "Yo brazen ways wid dese white folks is gwinter git you lynched one uh dese days."
> "Aw 'tain't," Amy differed impatiently, "who can't look at ole Beasley? He ain't no quality no-how."
> "Shet dat door, John!" screamed Ned.
> "Ah wuzn't de last one inside," John said sullenly.
> "Don't you gimme no word for word," Ned screamed at him. (*JGV* 2)

Hurston has her African-American characters express themselves in audibly idiosyncratic ways that serve as a marker not for the individual but, rather, the entire community. She mimics the sound of AAVE ("wid dese," "gwinter get," "uh dese," etc.) and uses grammatical features such as multiple negation with "ain't" and is-regularization ("Yo brazen ways wid dese white folks is . . ."). There are times when Hurston exaggerates and uses "eye dialect," as when she transcribes "to" as "tuh," "you" as "yuh," or "a" as "uh" (e.g., *JGV* 126). This perhaps underlines the fact that, as many critics have noted, Hurston's "views on race, true to her personality, were unpredictable, ambivalent, sometimes contradictory, but certainly never conventional" (Washington 17).

Hurston's use of AAVE in her literary works was met with contempt by some of her contemporaries, for example Richard Wright, who himself was inspired to work with AAVE by a white writer, Gertrude Stein.[22] In his 1937 review of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a work which, like *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, while retaining an interest in the rural, still captures AAVE as the language of the "self-aware, vital, independent, creative [African-American] community" (Wideman xv), Wright claims that "Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh" (76; emphasis in the original). In particular, he finds fault with her dialogue, written in AAVE, which, he writes, "manages to catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind in their

[22] Wright became interested in AAVE after reading Stein's racist representation of the language in "Melanctha," one of her *Three Lives* (1906) (Karem 697).

pure simplicity" (76). Wright, like many of Hurston's contemporaries, takes such offense to her novels because he is deeply concerned with the way "the race" presents itself as it attempts to break free from racist stereotypes and, in his zeal, reads sentimental clichés into Hurston's work.

However, it may be argued that, in her treatment of the body, Hurston uses *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to question established racial categories rather than reinforcing them, most obviously in the portrayal of her protagonist, John, whom strangers occasionally think to be a white man and whom those who know him constantly mock for his light skin color.[23] The power attributed to discourse, as illuminated by thinkers like Foucault, has led critical race theorists to realize that racial categories go beyond mere concerns of nationality. They are constructed through discourses which are by no means exclusively racial: "[a]t different times, economic, political and cultural factors all play a determining role in shaping the character of races" (Gilroy, *Small Acts* 20). *Jonah's Gourd Vine* undermines and mocks the idea that one can tell a person's identity by his or her skin color. Following Frantz Fanon, Paul Gilroy asks: "How many skin colors are there? How exactly, scientifically, is skin shade supposed to correspond to the variety of 'races'?" (*Against Race* 47). Hurston's novel raises similar questions as it discusses skin color in often drastic terms: "you always washin' his face wid his color and tellin' 'im he's uh bastard" (*JGV* 3). "John is de house-nigger. Ole Marsa always kep' de yaller niggers in de house and give 'em uh job totin'

[23] Hurston has been criticized for making Janie, the protagonist of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a "light-skinned and silken-haired" woman; however, as Alice Walker points out, it is impossible to decide whether the author herself "was a colorist," or whether she was expressing a critique (Walker 2).

silver dishes and goblets tuh de table. Us black niggers is de ones s'posed tuh ketch de wind and de weather" (*JGV* 4). "He ain't de onliest yaller chile in de world. Wese uh mingled people" (*JGV* 9). "Dey make lak he love you better'n he do de rest on 'count youse got color in your face" (*JGV* 11). John repeatedly gets in trouble for his light skin, as when he approaches a group of gambling African-American men who assume that he is white (*JGV* 59). On the other hand, his looks are also a major reason why his congregation is willing to overlook his adulteries for such a long time.

Unlike many other writers, both African-American and European-American, Hurston does not adapt the individual character's speech to his or her skin color or level of education. John, who is repeatedly called "yaller," speaks in the same manner as his family does, as the following dialogue between Amy and John shows:

> "You can't know intuh dat yit, John. In times and seasons, us gwine talk dat, but Ah come tuh take you back wid me, John."
> "Me, mama?" John asked in agonized surprise, "you know Ah don't want not parts of over dat Creek." (*JGV* 40)

Similarly, members of the Potts family, deemed superior to others by the black community because of their property and the children's education, speak in ways that are remarkably similar to those of the other African-American characters in the novel who are employed as field hands by Pearson. Lucy's mother Emmeline, for example, says "Ain't Ah done tole yuh and tole yuh not tuh let boys be puttin' dey hand all over yuh?" (*JGV* 71). Whether she does it purposefully or not, Hurston's use of language has something democratic about it, as she chooses to emphasize the community as a whole rather than the individual. AAVE, then, unifies the voice of the African-American community, and as Hurston proclaims its

validity, she underlines the dignity of the black body that was often denied by her white contemporaries.

Jonah's Gourd Vine exemplifies how, at the hands of the European Americans in power, the African-American body is separated from the voice. By means of her discussion of the war and resulting migration, Hurston describes African Americans as people who are never heard; yet they are used and abused to fight in the war: "De black man ain't got no voice but soon ez war come who de first man dey shove in front? De nigger" (*JGV* 148). Black manpower is needed not only in the war, but also in the production industry: "The factories roared and cried, 'Hands!' and in the haste and press white hands became scarce. Scarce and dear. Hands? Who cares about the color of hands? We need hands and muscle. The South – land of muscled hands" (*JGV* 149). Hurston criticizes the degrading way in which black soldiers and workers are treated and demands an entirely different approach to the black body – she demands that they need to be given a voice in society first, which would lead to a greater appreciation of the body which can no longer be abused. The metaphor of the incarnation becomes a tool of empowerment, signifying a future hope without racism.

In its post-slavery context, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* presents the struggles of many formerly enslaved individuals to find their voices and a desire to dominate others. Obedience by those deemed inferior becomes highly significant and leads to an abundance of a special kind of discourse represented in Hurston's novel. To illuminate this, it is helpful to examine what twentieth-century philosopher J. L. Austin called "a *performative*

sentence or a performative utterance or, for short, 'a performative'" (*How to Do Things with Words* 6; emphasis in the original). Austin came to understand that certain utterances create something as opposed to merely describing things that are in existence, for example promises or sentences made by a judge (Leitch 2486). Performatives effect ontological change – a shift in being. In making a performative utterance, the speaker "is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something" (Austin, "Utterances" 1432; emphasis in the original). Whether an utterance is actually performative depends on its context and circumstances that need to be appropriate (Austin, "Utterances" 1432).

The Bible introduces God's creative speech act in the book of Genesis, as the opening lines of the Bible introduce all three members of the Trinity: God the Creator (Genesis 1:1), "the Spirit of God" (Genesis 1:2), and the creative Word of God as He speaks the world into being (Genesis1:3). In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, speech act theory is relevant to the issue of naming. The fact that the days of slavery are past leads to a change in how people address each other, although this change is less radical than some of the characters in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* perceive, or would like to assume:

> Marse Alf! Don't y'all folkses over de creek know slavery time is over? 'Tain't no mo' Marse Alf, no Marse Charlie, nor Marse Tom neither. Folks whut wuz borned in slavery time go 'round callin' dese white folks Marse but we been born since freedom. We calls 'em Mister. Dey don't own nobody no mo. (*JGV* 14)

Despite the fact that the post-slavery generation no longer addresses the owners of their parents' generation as "master," the way in which those former masters refer to them by their first names and treat them like property is reminiscent of slavery. The fact that a girl proudly proclaims "Ah calls [the former masters] anything Ah please" (*JGV* 14) is, without

any commentary, unveiled as mere provocation; throughout the novel, the African-American characters speak to the white characters with the utmost deference.

The question of a name is significant to John on a very personal level, since he does not know his father. It is not even John himself who adopts the last name Pearson, but rather the schoolteacher, who names him. The teacher is a monarch in his classroom: "He had little ambition to impart knowledge. He reigned" (*JGV* 25). He commands his students and expects perfect obedience at his words: "'Come heah, you,' he pointed his ruler at John" (*JGV* 25). He threatens "forty lashes" (*JGV* 25) and behaves like a slave master. The scene in which John is re-christened is a reenactment of slavery times:

> "What's yo' name?"
> "John."
> "John whut? You got some other name besides John."
> "Mama, she name me Two-Eye John –". . .
> "But mama and all of 'em at home calls me John Buddy"
> "Buddy is a nickname. What's yo' papa' name?"
> John scratched his head and thought a minute.
> " 'Deed a don't know, suh."
> There was another short silence.
> "Where do you live?"
> "On Mista Alf Pearson's place."
> "Was you born there?"
> "Yes suh."
> "Well, Ah'll jus' put you down as John Pearson and you answer by that, you hear?"
> "Yes suh." (*JGV* 26)

Ironically, the reader has every reason to suspect that Pearson is indeed John's father; however, John receives the last name of Pearson not as the Judge's son, but rather, as a piece of his property. Like during the days of slavery, when a slave took on the last name of his or her owner, John is branded, which also shows in the fact that he wears Pearson's

son's old clothing (*JGV* 18) until he outgrows it and then wears the Judge's (*JGV* 49). This practice of naming is a daunting reminder of slavery; however, John is able to leave the Pearson plantation and start over in an all-black town where his name is associated with no one but himself. Lucy sees this as a chance for her children to become "bell cows" rather than followers (*JGV* 109). As John moves his family, he begins to speak for himself and achieves great success that is only limited by his personal failings that are highly visible to the masses who watch him, enamored by his verbal abilities and his good looks.

Tom McGlamery argues that "spectatorship and performance are important activities throughout Hurston's fiction and non-fiction" (93). The sermon is not the only aspect of performance in the novel, however; dramatic enactments of wars and revolutions take place not exclusively on the pulpit and in the classroom, but also within families. The birth of a new voice is accompanied by power struggles between the old generation that has witnessed slavery and the new generation that desires to look forward. This is exemplified clearly by the following dialogue between Ned and John:

> "Shet dat door, John!" screamed Ned.
> "Ah wuzn't de last one inside," John said sullenly.
> "Don't you gimme no word for word," Ned screamed at him. "You jes' do lak Ah say do and keep yo' mouf shet or Ah'll take uh trace chain tuh yuh. Yo' mammy mought think youse uh lump uh gold 'cause you got uh li'l' white folks color in yo' face, but Ah'll stomp yo' guts out and dat quick! Shet dat door!" (*JGV* 2)

The violence that marks this relationship is expressed by threats and, most importantly, the desire to dominate vocally and to be obeyed at all costs. This is, as Hurston makes amply clear, an aftereffect from slavery: "Ole Marse didn't ast *me* of hit wuz rainin' uh snowin' uh hot uh col'. When he spoke Ah had tuh move and move quick too, uh git a hick'ry tuh

ma back. Dese younguns ain't uh bit better'n me. Let 'em come lak Ah did" (*JGV* 4; emphasis in the original).

The older generation in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, those who had to obey when called, being considered property, discover the power of language now that they have a voice for the first time. They also discover what it means to be able to discipline their children, formerly at the mercy of their masters and often raised apart from the family. Sometimes, this new-found power leads to the abuse of those who are weak and defenseless. In the post-slavery reality of the novel, words are constantly expected to be followed by violent reactions with physical consequences, as Ned warns his wife: "Amy, you better quit talkin' 'bout de buckra [i.e., white people]. Some of 'em be outside and hear you and turn over you tuh de patter roller, and dey'll take you outa heah and put uh hun'ed lashes uh raw hide on yo' back. Ah done tole yuh but you won't hear" (*JGV* 7). Suspicion of physical punishment at the hands of white people leads to a feeling of utter powerlessness that causes Ned to complain about Amy's lack of obedience to his words. Ned tells John, who replies to a request by him with "Yes suh," "Don't set dere and answer me. When Ah speak, you move!" (*JGV* 45). Lucy's mother, Emmeline, similarly reigns in her house and commands her children to obey her words: "Don't you back talk *me*. When Ah speak you *move*. You hear me Lucy?" (*JGV* 73; emphasis in the original). The older generation in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is unsure how to use linguistic power because they have suffered years of abuse under slavery; however, Hurston makes it amply clear that there is great potential in the free black

voice, in words spoken by free people who are not bitter about the past, a voice that cannot be silenced any longer.

Thus, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is the story of the birth of a brand-new voice and a brand-new body. Overall, Hurston's novel contains a message of hope, embodied in her younger characters who are eager to be allowed to leave slavery behind, an institution they have never personally witnessed and that nonetheless, through their parents' generation, has a negative effect on them. As a theological concept, the incarnation proclaims hope in the body, because the fact that God Himself took on flesh leads to salvation, and ultimately to the bodily resurrection. The incarnation as a metaphor stands for freedom from limitations imposed on the body, a freedom which Hurston proclaims in her novel. Through her use of language and the body in the novel, she frees AAVE from its association with slavery, as it is spoken by all African-American characters, regardless of age or skin color. In her treatment of AAVE, Hurston reclaims black language and, through it, the black body, from an association with slavery.

5. Visible Grace

O'Connor's understanding of writing fiction is intertwined with her concept of the incarnation, as she suggests in her essay on "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" (based on a lecture, published posthumously as part of *Mystery and Manners* in 1969), declaring that an understanding of "material things" as "evil" and "spirit" as good, as proposed by some

religious groups and her own secular contemporaries, is simply false. This understanding, writes O'Connor, makes "fiction . . . hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art" (*MM* 68). The Word becomes flesh in writing, O'Connor suggests, and writers must not consider themselves above getting their hands dirty, precisely because "[f]iction is about everything human and we are made out of dust" (*MM* 68). O'Connor's point is that fiction cannot be only about abstract ideas, it has to be about real people, real struggles. Equally important, however, "[b]ecause a Word initiated sensible creation, things can be known and spoken and revealed in their essential reality" (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 9). O'Connor believes that grace can be made visible through the language she uses in her writing.

Thus, the incarnation is present in all O'Connor's carefully worded fiction. As a theological concept, it takes center stage in one of her last short stories, "Parker's Back." O'Connor introduces a character who denies, as so many throughout history have done, that God truly became Man. Parker's wife, Sarah Ruth, abhors anything physical: she hates the tattoos on Parker's body and considers "churches [to be] idolatrous" (*Complete Stories* 518), thus undermining the body of Christ. Sarah Ruth does speak of Jesus and His judgment (*Complete Stories* 519), yet she seems completely unfamiliar with the fact that, according to the Bible, the Word became flesh. When Parker hopes to impress her with a tattoo of Christ, arguing that "[s]he can't say she don't like the looks of God" (*Complete Stories* 525), her reaction is the complete opposite of what he had hoped:

> "Don't you know who it is?" he cried in anguish.
> "No, who is it?" Sarah Ruth said. "It ain't anybody I know."

> "It's him," Parker said.
> "Him who?"
> "God!" Parker cried.
> "God? God don't look like that!"
> "What do you know how he looks?" Parker moaned. "You ain't seen him."
> "He don't *look*," Sarah Ruth said. "He's a spirit. No man shall see his face."
> "Aw listen," Parker groaned, "this is just a picture of him."
> "Idolatry!" Sarah Ruth screamed. "Idolatry! Enflaming yourself with idols under every green tree! I can put up with lies and vanity but I don't want no idolator in this house!" and she grabbed up the broom and began to thrash him across the shoulders with it. (*Complete Stories* 529; emphasis in the original)

Sarah Ruth denies the physical body and thus the human nature of the second Person of the Trinity. She cannot bear the thought of God having humbled Himself to become Man, which explains her inability to understand the grace through which He saved humanity, as she acts ungraciously towards those around her. What O'Connor criticizes in her contemporaries is true for Sarah Ruth as well: she has "no sense of the power of God that could produce the Incarnation and the Resurrection" (*HB* 300).

In one of her letters, O'Connor underlines that "God became not only a man, but Man" (*HB* 102), opposing those who claim that Jesus was merely a human being. The Bible teaches that the incarnation is not a compromise of the divinity of Christ in any way. Jesus Christ is forever both Man and God; the wounds that resulted from the crucifixion remain on His body, as becomes obvious in Thomas's encounter with the risen Christ: "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe'" (John 20:27). Christianity is by no means a religion

that devalues the physical, material creation, although many heretics[24] have tried to claim just that, beginning immediately after the birth of the Christian faith, as can be seen in the fact that these heresies are disputed in the Bible. John assures his readers in 1 John 1:1 that he has touched the Word of God with his own hands. He also asks: "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). Most poignantly, he argues:

> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:2-3)

The Bible applies serious language to the person denying the reality of the incarnation, and O'Connor echoes the same sentiment in "Parker's Back." Through this story, she shows the value and the redeemable quality of the body.

For O'Connor, considerations about the body are affected by personal suffering. She lived much of her life in words because the flesh was failing her – after losing her father to lupus in 1941, she herself had to face the long and painful battle with the disease that wrote its name all over her body and often rendered her completely immobile (Gooch 356). O'Connor suggests in one of her letters that she has learned much from her suffering, calling it "more instructive than a long trip to Europe. . . . Sickness before death is a very appropriate thing and I think those who don't have it miss one of God's mercies" (*HB* 163). As her body was falling apart, O'Connor experienced her dependence on God. She was

[24] The most notable heresy of this kind is Gnosticism, which stems from the first two centuries and claims that God is entirely spiritual and good, while matter is evil (Smith, Carl 15).

able to joke about her physical condition, as is evident throughout her correspondence. Ultimately, because of her faith, she could see physical suffering as something positive.

O'Connor writes in one of her letters that "spiritual reality . . . affects us in the flesh" (*HB* 365). *The Violent Bear It Away* is shaped by her fascination with the human body, which she describes in a grotesque manner as a means to illuminate spiritual aspects. This point of view causes her to describe her characters as physically ugly and even repulsive. Mason, for example, is "a bull-like old man with a short head set directly into his shoulders and silver protruding eyes that looked like two fish straining to get out of a net of red threads" (*VBIA* 10). The old prophet, whose corpse the reader encounters on the first page of the novel, was obsessed with envisioning his burial during his last years, attempting to make sure that it would be executed in the proper manner, anticipating the bodily resurrection (*VBIA* 3). The resurrection of Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, as the Psalmist proclaims that God would not "let [his] Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10). However, as prophesied in Isaiah and elsewhere, the Messiah would be resurrected from the dead (Isaiah 55:3) and ultimately defeat death itself (Isaiah 25:8). The Gospels also record how Jesus Himself proclaimed throughout His ministry that He would die and rise again from the grave (John 2:19). And indeed, on the third day after He was killed on the cross, Christ's tomb was found empty, He was risen (Mark 16:6). Christ's resurrection has two consequences for believers. The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans that Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (4:25).

Because He died and rose, believers will also rise in the future (1 Corinthians 15:22) and they are "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" in their lifetime (Romans 6:11).

The bodily resurrection of Christians is spoken of in various passages in the Bible, perhaps most notably Romans 5:17: "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ"; and 1 Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

The body as the Apostle Paul describes it, is given a glorified form, "imperishable" and "immortal" – no longer is its destiny dust or ashes. To O'Connor's mind, the resurrection "proclaims the value of what is least about us, our flesh" (*HB* 366). O'Connor's fiction underlines the transient nature of the human body, as O'Connor held "that the 'glorified body' of the resurrection was the real body, not the sorry flesh one carted through history" (Kreyling 9). *The Violent Bear It Away* contains frequent allusions to the resurrection, and they are mixed with images of Mason's corpse.

The way in which the novel deals with the dead body is macabre at points, as when Mason tries out the coffin while still alive, causing Francis to remark: "It's too much of you for the box, . . . I'll have to sit on the lid to press you down or wait until you rot a little" (*VBIA* 14). There is unending discussion about how to get the corpse into the grave. Mason assures Francis:

> Listen. If it ain't feasible to use the box when the time comes, if you can't lift it or whatever, just get me in the hole but I want it deep. I want it ten foot, not just eight, ten. You can roll me to it if nothing else. I'll roll. Get two boards and set them down the steps and start me rolling and dig where I stop and don't roll me over until it's deep enough. Prop me with some bricks so I won't roll into it and don't let the dogs nudge me over the edge before it's finished. (*VBIA* 14)

The task ahead of Francis is frightening, especially considering he is only fourteen years old; he reacts to it with a confusion that is to be expected. The narrative voice allows the boy to pretend that he is in control; however, the reader nonetheless sees glimpses of his utter lostness: "He decided to dig the grave under the fig tree because the old man would be good for the figs. . . . Two hundred pounds of dead mountain to bury. . . . It would take all day to get a hole big enough out of this rock and the schoolteacher would burn him in a minute" (*VBIA* 22). The mere mention of Rayber, the schoolteacher, who, unlike Mason, does not believe in the resurrection (*VBIA* 110), indicates Francis's desire for human company. Francis, inebriated, is told by the novel's Satan-figure that Mason, now a 200-pound corpse, "was the stone before your door and the Lord has rolled it away" (*VBIA* 47), meaning that Francis is now free from the old man's ideals as well as his physical presence. The truth is, however, that Francis still thinks about Mason's teachings on the resurrection of the dead.

Francis discusses the resurrection with the Lucifer character of the novel, who constantly attempts to distract and manipulate Francis:

> Well now, the stranger said, don't you think any cross you set up in the year 1952 would be rotted out by the year the Day of Judgment comes in? Rotted to as much dust as his ashes if you reduced him to ashes? And lemme ast you this: what's God going to do with sailors drowned at sea that the fish have et and the fish that et them et by other fish and they et by yet others? And what about people that get burned up naturally in house fires? Burnt up one way or another or lost in machines until they're pulp? And all those sojers blasted to nothing? What about all those that there's nothing left of to burn or bury?[25] (*VBIA* 36)

Amazed by the physical human body, Francis ponders the consequences of burning his great-uncle, which leads him to entertain theological questions. The tension about what should happen with the body had begun years before Mason's actual death. He threatened the boy: "'if when I'm dead you want to turn me over to my betrayer and see my body burned, go ahead! . . . Go ahead and let him burn me but watch out for the Lord's lion after that" (*VBIA* 24). As Francis actually begins digging his great-uncle's grave, he reminds himself once again that Rayber "would burn him in a minute" (*VBIA* 25) and "wouldn't consider for a minute that on the last day all the bodies marked by the crosses will be gathered" (*VBIA* 25). Francis resolves to burn his dead uncle; however, returning to Powderhead at the end of the novel, he discovers that he did not succeed, that the African-

---

[25] This passage refers to the discussion of the judgment of the dead in the book of Revelation. The author who identifies himself as John and is usually taken to be the Apostle, writes: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-14).

American character Buford has buried Mason and placed "the sign of his Saviour . . . over his head" (*VBIA* 240). This discovery is shocking to Francis: "Nothing seemed alive about the boy but his eyes and they stared downward at the cross as if they followed below the surface of the earth to where its roots encircled all the dead" (*VBIA* 240). Mason, in the end, is buried in the manner he had wished for, his body awaiting the second coming and the resurrection. Thus, the corpse that haunts *The Violent Bear It Away* embodies a great promise of everlasting life: eternity will be spent not apart from, but within a body. Through the hope that lies even in a dead body, O'Connor shows that there will indeed be restoration.

As with Hurston, O'Connor's interest in language and the body has a sociolinguistic dimension that shows, once again, the redemptive quality of the incarnation. Pondering the grand mysteries of the faith, O'Connor also uses language to make statements about her characters. This can be observed in a number of her short stories; my dissertation focuses on two, "Greenleaf" and "The Displaced Person." The former story deals with social varieties of American English, while the latter introduces issues of second language acquisition in its treatment of Polish immigrants/refugees during World War II. Both stories add different elements to the discussion of sociolinguistics in *The Violent Bear It Away*.

The protagonist of "Greenleaf," Mrs. May, is constantly mentally distinguishing herself and her family from the "trash" (*Complete Stories* 315) she has employed, terrified by the thought that the Greenleafs will one day be considered "[*s*]*ociety*" (*Complete Stories* 318; emphasis in the original). The language spoken by the Greenleafs is appalling to Mrs.

May, and she refers to it as "Greenleaf English" (*Complete Stories* 318), which her sons imitate when they mock her (*Complete Stories* 327). In this story, O'Connor shows how linguistic barriers break down as the Greenleaf boys are far more successful than Mrs. May's sons, and as Mrs. May is ultimately gored by the bull they own.

In "The Displaced Person," linguistic discrimination is illuminated as a family of World War II refugees from Poland is marginalized from the moment of their arrival, especially by Mrs. Shortley, the milkman's wife and Mrs. McIntyre's companion. The initial conflict concerns language, as there is a lack of communication, which immediately becomes an excuse for xenophobia: "All of them's last name was something that only they themselves and the priest could pronounce. All [Mrs. Shortley] could make of it was Gobblehook" (*Complete Stories* 195-196). The Guizacs's inability to speak English is deemed ignorance: "'They can't talk,' Mrs. Shortley said. 'You reckon they'll know what colors even is?'" (*Complete Stories* 196); "You reckon he can drive a tractor when he don't know English?" (*Complete Stories* 201). These comments show the outrageousness of linguistic discrimination.

The Guizacs are seen as a threat and O'Connor skillfully alludes to the realities of the war to underline the severity of xenophobia – while the Shortleys know the situation of the Guizacs, who are "from Poland where all them bodies were stacked up" (*Complete Stories* 201), they still cannot welcome them because of their foreignness: "Every time Mr. Guizac smiled, Europe stretched out in Mrs. Shortley's imagination, mysterious and evil, the devil's experiment station" (*Complete Stories* 205). Mr. Shortley considers it to be

dangerous to allow foreigners to learn English (*Complete Stories* 233), a statement that shows how language politics are used as a means of exclusion. The Shortleys may be exaggerated in their position, but linguistic discrimination is a reality that O'Connor merely mirrors, not having invented it.

Mrs. Shortley envisions a verbal battle between her family and the Guizacs that alludes to the connection between language and the body:

> She began to imagine a war of words, to see the Polish words and the English words coming at each other, stalking forward, not sentences, just words, gabble gabble gabble, flung out high and shrill and stalking forward and then grappling with each other. She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room, all the dead dirty words, theirs and hers too, piled up like the naked bodies in the newsreel. (*Complete Stories* 209)

In a strange reversal within the Shortleys' minds, the Polish holocaust victims become synonymous with their German persecutors, just like, in the eyes of Mrs. McIntyre, Christ, God incarnate, becomes "just another D.P." (*Complete Stories* 229). "The Displaced Person" highlights some of the deeper concerns of linguistic discrimination in a deeply troubling manner, using effectively the sentiments evoked by the image of the bodies of holocaust victims to show the connection between language and the body. To O'Connor, issues such as this one are indicators of the lack of balance in this world, which, as she underlines in *The Violent Bear It Away*, chooses to ignore its only Hope (*VBIA* 5).

In *The Violent Bear It Away*, O'Connor uses language to group her characters not according to racial categories, but according to social class and education level; more specifically, according to the distinction between the urban and the rural. Both Mason and

Francis speak a rural variety of English that is similar to the speech of O'Connor's African-American characters, as shows clearly in a moment of dialogue between Francis, Buford, who "had a crinkled face, darker than his hat" (*VBIA* 43), and the anonymous, "tall and Indianlike" woman (*VBIA* 42):

> "Tell her to shut up that," Tarwater said. "I'm in charge here now and I don't want no nigger-mourning."
> "I seen his spirit for two nights," she said. "Seen him two nights and he was unrested."
> "He ain't been dead but since this morning," Tarwater said. "If you all want your jugs filled, give them to me and dig while I'm gone."
> "He'd been predicting his passing for many years," Buford said. "She seen him in her dream several nights and he wasn't rested. I known him well. I known him very well indeed." (*VBIA* 43)

There are no noticeable differences between the Southern white variety of English that Francis speaks and the language of the African-American people he communicates with, as their speech shares the use words like "ain't" and features such as the absence of the copula. There are a few features in the speech of O'Connor's black characters that are specific to AAVE, but these distinctions are minimal. Rather than singling out African Americans, O'Connor makes fun of all of her characters alike, for example mocking the pronunciation of her rural white Southern characters, as when Francis and Mason both pronounce the word business as "bidnis" (*VBIA* 27). Rayber, on the other hand, speaks MUSE and uses this as a means of differentiating himself from Mason. O'Connor uses language to indicate belonging, to group her characters according to their educational status. She is not primarily interested in indicating belonging to racial categories, but rather

desires to point out levels of learning and regional affiliation, to make a clear distinction between the rural and the urban.

Elsewhere in her writing, O'Connor seems to underline the differences between African-American speech and Southern white varieties of English. In "The Geranium," O'Connor's first story, there is quite a distinction between black and white speech, as the following example shows. The European-American character Old Dudley fondly remembers Rabie, an African-American character who speaks AAVE: "We ain't gonna go huntin' no 'possum tonight, is we boss? I got a lil' business I wants tuh tend tuh" (*Complete Stories* 5). Old Dudley himself says things like: "Don't let it get you down, Rabie. It's just like any other city, and cities ain't all that complicated" (*Complete Stories* 6). There is a drastic difference between the varieties of English spoken by Rabie and Old Dudley. O'Connor exaggerates the features of AAVE to the extreme, using eye dialect at times (as in the case of "tuh"). In *The Violent Bear It Away*, however, the differences between the speech of her black and white characters have become almost nonexistent. As in Hurston's novel, O'Connor shows how language is related to identity[26] and the body, as her characters' speech is shaped by their surroundings, indicating belonging to groups in

[26] That language is closely tied to identity in *The Violent Bear It Away* becomes clear when O'Connor debates the language of temptation. While Francis's personal devil is a central character in the novel, O'Connor admits that she would not have been able to envision the language Satan uses when speaking to Rayber: "[T]he Devil who prompts Rayber speaks a language I can't get down, an idiom I just can't reproduce – maybe because it's so dull I can't sustain any interest in it" (*HB* 367). Thus, O'Connor does not report the words that tempt Rayber in direct speech; nonetheless, the reader is aware of them, as they are mirrored in his obsessive behavior as well as the possessive manner with which he counsels Francis.

ways that transcend the merely linguistic. Importantly, though they do concern the body, they transcend questions of race and skin color as well.

Through the dialogue in her novel, O'Connor minimizes racial concerns and normalizes her black characters. It is on a linguistic level, then, that O'Connor creates equality for the body. Francis and Mason are the two characters O'Connor arguably identifies with and respects the most, and she has them speak in almost the same way as her black characters. Through her use of language, O'Connor elevates her African-American characters in a way that is remarkable, especially when considering the progression from her earlier to her later works, which shows that O'Connor had formerly attempted to underline the difference between AAVE and Southern white varieties of English. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, however, she connects Buford and Mason, two men of faith, through a shared language. Despite the fact that Buford is extremely marginalized, as are all of O'Connor's black characters, his body is, to an extent, redeemed, as Buford buries Mason's body according to Mason's wishes. Looking beyond racial differences, O'Connor's focus is on a common humanity in need of salvation and in hope of the bodily resurrection, both made possible by the incarnation.

As with *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, names, which are central to identity, quite literally words to the flesh, have great significance in *The Violent Bear It Away*. In O'Connor's novel, this is pertinent because her understanding is shaped by the biblical concept of names and naming. "In the ancient world generally . . . a name expressed something of the very essence of that which was being named" (Bohmbach 944). Biblical names are

descriptive and usually point out a specific feature of the person named (e.g., Esau: "hairy"), refer to the event of that person's birth (e.g., Jacob: "heel-grabber"), or his or her destiny (e.g., Peter: "rock") (Bohmbach 944-945). Name changes, then, occur to mark a significant change in a person (e.g., Naomi: "pleasant one" renames herself Mara: "bitter," to signify her changed life) (Bohmbach 945). O'Connor applies this concept to many of her characters, most obviously the character of Hulga in "Good Country People," whose "name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had it legally changed. [Her mother] was certain that she had thought and thought until she hit upon the ugliest name in any language" (*Complete Stories* 274). Hulga rejects her mother and her mother's values through the change of name.

For O'Connor, names signify belonging, and, as Francis defends his name, he claims independence. When Francis comes to live with Rayber, the latter offers to be a father to him and tries to change the boy into his own image. Francis reacts harshly: "'I ain't ast for no father,' he repeated. 'I'm out of the womb of a whore. I was born in a wreck.' He flung this forth as if he were declaring royal birth. 'And my name ain't Frankie. I go by Tarwater . . .'" (*VBIA* 106). Rayber perceives Francis as being the image of Mason: "It might have been the old man who had replied that he could walk on his two feet for nothing without being beholden" (*VBIA* 108). At the Cherokee Lodge, Rayber registers their group as "George F. Rayber, Frank and Bishop Rayber" (*VBIA* 153). Although Rayber must be Francis's legal last name, given that his mother was George Rayber's unmarried sister, Francis immediately corrects this: "He crossed out the name *Frank* and underneath in

an old man's meticulous hand he began to write something else" (*VBIA* 153; emphasis in the original). He writes: "Francis Marion Tarwater. . . . Powderhead, Tennessee. NOT HIS SON" (*VBIA* 157; emphasis in the original). Francis will not in any way be defined by the language of those around him, yet he cannot completely escape all language and therefore remains a captive. In refusing Rayber's name he must embrace the name given to him by Mason, whom he equally detests and from whom he ultimately seeks to escape. This linguistic act foreshadows how Francis will eventually embrace his calling to be a prophet. In his rebellion against Rayber and everything he stands for, Francis makes what O'Connor would consider the better choice. He chooses to be branded as a Tarwater, a prophet of Christ, a believer in the incarnation, redemption, and ultimately the bodily resurrection.

Seen as a whole, *The Violent Bear It Away* has much to say about the intimate connection between language and the body, words and flesh. Considering all of her writing "incarnational," O'Connor expresses spiritual realities in a tangible way; her fiction is also, in the reversal, a linguistic engagement with the material world. O'Connor deals with the bodily resurrection and questions of the physical body through Mason's corpse and the treatment thereof. On the sociolinguistic level, there is an engagement with the difference of the varieties of English spoken in the city and the country, which she uses to normalize her African-American characters. Names in O'Connor's fiction are used to indicate belonging. Overall, her novel suggests that language and the body cannot be seen separately; they must be considered in conjunction, and they are both redeemed. She draws attention to the great worth the Christian faith puts into the flesh, as it embodies the

promise of the resurrection. It is often assumed that Christianity considers the flesh to be sinful. This is far from the truth, however. While the flesh also "refers to the weaker aspects of the nature of humankind that are subject to temptation," Christ Himself was sinless and, through His coming in the flesh, was able to save mankind (Potts "Flesh" 464).

6. Conclusion

The Word became flesh: the connection of language and the body is central to *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, as my analysis in this chapter has shown. This relationship between words and the flesh points back to a larger concept, the incarnation of Christ. In Hurston's novel, the word is incarnational as rumors manifest themselves more and more clearly until they become tangible reality: "Ah don't zakly hear nothin' neither, but uh far away whisper look laak it's puttin' on flesh" (*JGV* 100). Language is a powerful agent that shapes the novel in many ways, taking on almost physical form. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is about AAVE, and while Hurston is as ambiguous as ever in how she uses it, she effectively communicates the beauty of the language of her people, transcribing it onto the pages of her novel.

The incarnation is central to O'Connor's understanding of Christianity, as well as her mission as a writer, because it is at the heart of God's plan to redeem humanity: "God is pure Spirit but our salvation was accomplished when the Spirit was made flesh" (*HB* 360). Only because the second Person of the Trinity became Man was He able to bear the sin of

the world on the cross to redeem mankind. What it means that the Word became incarnate to save mankind is a great concern in *The Violent Bear It Away*, a novel that is haunted by a great-uncle's corpse that cannot be burnt but must rest underneath a cross, and by that great-uncle's words, which influence those he leaves behind as they pursue a desperate quest for Truth. Describing the connection between language and the body on various levels, O'Connor points to the resurrection.

The flesh, in both of these novels, as works that at their core engage with Christianity and Christian ministry, is not condemned, but redeemed. As I show in this chapter, Christianity is not a religion that devalues the body: The risen Christ has a body for eternity, marked by the crucifixion, the nails driven through His hands and feet and the lance that pierced His side left scars that will remain forever. Humanity will never be "disembodied" either, as believers will rise with Christ and have glorified heavenly bodies.

Both Hurston and O'Connor, in a very different sense, were limited by their own bodies: Hurston because she was marginalized as a black female, O'Connor because her body was failing her altogether because of her illness. Yet they both refused to see these factors as something tragic,[27] insisting that self-pity is utterly unnecessary for them. In fact, they took what could be limitations and turned them into strengths, out of which they wrote their incarnational fiction as they put words to their flesh. The body, then, signifies strength rather than weakness. Hurston celebrates the free black body; O'Connor celebrates the body's future glory in the resurrection. The present body may fail, but that is not the end.

---

[27] Hurston writes in "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" that she is "not tragically colored" (*Folklore* 827).

To both writers, the body signifies a future hope. They deliver prophetic messages about a time to come. For Hurston, it is a time in which black bodies will not be abused, when her people will be allowed to live peacefully, without constantly having to prove their worth. For O'Connor, it is a time when the dead in Christ will arise and there will be no more suffering and pain.

Hurston and O'Connor approach the subject of language and the body in vastly different contexts and with opposing motivation. Hurston, as an African-American, writes to validate her community and to represent cultural richness. She describes the black voice and body in transition, in a struggle for authority that is at times anxious but never deprives it of its spirit. O'Connor, as a Catholic with very personal religious convictions, desires to show the meaning behind the incarnation and the power of the salvation that was achieved by Christ's death on the cross. She uses non-mainstream English to indicate her characters' educational status, and a character's speech serves to indicate belonging to certain groups. O'Connor's interest is not in racial otherness, nor is it in the beauty of language itself, though she certainly uses it to create irony. Her focus is on doctrine. Both writers proclaim that language and the body are intimately linked and that one of the most fundamental human desires is to be heard and taken seriously. The ultimate quest, then, is one for the Truth that is worth being expressed.

The Bible puts forth a miraculous story: "Created by the Word, the world then receives the divine Word in human form . . ." (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 8). The Author Himself, the quintessential Word, enters His own narrative as the central Character.

Pondering the mystery of the incarnation necessarily leads one to think about duality. O'Connor writes in a letter that "[t]he Church has always been mindful of the relation between spirit and flesh; this has shown up in her definitions of the double nature of Christ . . ." (*HB* 365-366). Christ is both Man and God, and, in a different sense, humanity is also divided. Hurston and O'Connor are interested in this division of mankind, as they introduce characters that are inwardly divided and constantly struggle on various levels of their existence, as I discuss in my next chapter.

The Word and the World: Double Consciousness

"I and the Father are one" (John 10:16).

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

1. Introduction

It can be said of many of the characters in the fictional works of Hurston and O'Connor that they are internally divided, seeking knowledge while simultaneously standing as the principle obstacle of this endeavor. This dynamic, which has been theorized as that of the double consciousness, is highly destructive and leaves the characters frustrated and dissatisfied. There is a constant tension within the protagonists of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, as they wrestle with themselves to the point of self-defeat and push themselves to the wall. John and Francis may be described as characters who are internally divided, who cannot follow through with what they intend to do because of a violent internal struggle. Thus, I proffer that the concept of a double consciousness is helpful in exploring and analyzing the dilemmas they face.

This chapter begins with, and is galvanized by, Hegel's contention that self-consciousness can only come into existence when mediated through another. Abiding by this principle, I then trace the origins of the idea of double consciousness in American Transcendentalism and medical history, briefly introducing the two thinkers who are said to have introduced the term, namely, Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James. Following this, I describe how the idea of double consciousness, as appropriated by W.E.B. DuBois, a contemporary of Hurston, has come to refer to the highly unique consciousness that members of minorities possess, inasmuch as they both belong to, and are rejected by, mainstream society. Then, I show how the notion of a divided self is expressed in the Bible.

In view of this, the explicit purpose of my examination is to have the theoretical notion of double consciousness enter into dialogue with Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*, in order to show that the conflicts the characters of both texts experience can be illuminated by this concept. I analyze the duality of consciousness through various dynamics. In my reading of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, I foreground the racialized aspect of double consciousness in an attempt to show how Hurston refutes and transcends DuBois's theoretical framework. I also discuss the internal division of the protagonist John as caused by relationships, emotions, and his engagement with the supernatural. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, internal division is caused by the battle between two men who seek to influence Francis, as well as two spiritual forces that seek to guide him.

2. The Divided Mind

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, consciousness denotes "[i]nternal knowledge or conviction; knowledge as to which one has the testimony within oneself; esp. of one's own innocence, guilt, deficiencies, etc." While this definition pertains, by and large, to the interior of a person, it should be noted that there is also a social component, for "innocence, guilt, [and] deficiencies" require both judgment by and comparison with others, and thus come into play only within a human society. This, then, brings to mind the Hegelian notion of self-consciousness, which is inextricably linked to human interaction. In

Phenomenology of the Spirit (1807), Hegel outlines a situation where two free and independent selves fight until death upon having encountered one another. He argues that "*[s]elf-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*," so that, following the potentially fatal battle for recognition, the encounter is institutionalized and the previously autonomous "I"s become a "we" (110; emphasis in the original). According to Hegel, "[s]elf-consciousness exists in and for itself . . . only in being acknowledged" (111). It is important to note in this connection, however, that, to Hegel's mind, what is actually established under the collective label "we" is a relationship of superordination and subordination, i.e., one of master and slave. For one of the contestants, he contends, surrenders his or her independence to that of the opponent who is willing to risk more. Consequently, it follows that they come to "exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman" (Hegel 115). The end result of this dynamic, at this phase, is a blurred sense of reality; the master thinks of him- or herself as being independent, while he or she is really wholly dependant on the slave who acknowledges him or her as master (Hegel 116-117). And this, in turn, occasions a situation wherein "the master as well as the slave experiences an 'existential impasse' [this is the term Alexandre Kojève introduces in his reading of Hegel] and . . . self-division is a characteristic of both." This notion of a divided self leads to the idea of double consciousness as theorized by DuBois in the early twentieth century (McMahon 292). DuBois, however, while clearly

influenced by Hegel, as is manifested in the vocabulary he uses (Adell 13), more immediately takes his cue from the two fields of thought which independently introduced the actual term double consciousness, namely European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism on the one hand, and late nineteenth-century psychology on the other hand (Bruce 299-300).

In European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, double consciousness was used to refer to the coexistence of a worldly and a spiritual state of being, whereas, in the discipline of psychology, in the form that flourished in the late nineteenth century, "the term double consciousness was applied to cases of split personality" (Bruce 299-300). William James,[28] the famous psychologist, is said to have "coined the term *double consciousness*" in his groundbreaking work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) (Harris 221; emphasis in the original). In a chapter on "The Consciousness of Self," James writes that the self is divided into an objective and a subjective part; whereas it is the *I* "which knows," it is the *me* which "is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known" (39). Thus, according to James, "[t]he same brain may subserve many conscious selves," which could be present at the same time or alternate (379). James analyzes doubling or alternating personalities as one of the "mutations of the self" (352) and discusses situations in which a person's body is temporarily possessed by what he considers to be a spirit: "[t]he subject during the secondary consciousness speaks, writes, or acts as if animated by a foreign

[28] DuBois, then, who later applied the idea of double consciousness to African Americans in the early twentieth century, was one of James's students at Harvard at the very time period James published the *Principles* (Harris 221).

person" (371). French psychologist Alfred Binet writes in *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies* (1890): "[W]e know that in hysterical individuals there exist phenomena of double consciousness" (22). That is, according to late nineteenth-century psychology, hysteria as a condition manifests itself through loss of part of the individual consciousness. Double consciousness occurs when the individual's consciousness is divided into two equal halves, both of which function properly and alternate. The two consciousnesses, while being clearly separated yet in dialogue, stand in opposition (Binet 33). It follows that this idea of a rivalry between whatever the two consciousnesses constitute seems to be common to every thinker who grapples with the notion of double consciousness.

This, indeed, is true for the American Transcendentalists and European Romantics as well, whom Bruce cites as one of the sources of the notion of a double consciousness (299). As noted by Bruce and others, in *Faust* (1808), the German Romantic Johann Wolfgang Goethe describes the internal struggle of his main character, who speaks about uniting two opposing souls in his chest: "Zwei Sehlen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust" (Goethe 53). For the Transcendentalists, following Goethe, double consciousness denotes "the inner conflict between [the individual's] sensual and spiritual selves" (Porte 3). Emerson appropriates Faust's struggle to his Transcendentalist philosophy, stating in a much-cited passage that

> the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other, never meet and measure each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with

> the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves. (Emerson 102)

Clearly, for Emerson as well, there cannot be a peaceful coexistence of the two consciousnesses.[29]

This idea of conflict also lies at the heart of DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which he applies the idea of a double consciousness to African Americans in North America as they struggle for equality and a place in society after the American Civil War:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (215)

According to DuBois, the African-American individual lives behind a veil that confines and excludes him or her from the mainstream. For DuBois, self-consciousness begins when a child realizes that because of the color of his or her skin, he or she is different from the other – predominantly white – children: discriminated against by society, individuals face hatred by the majority, with which they nonetheless identify in many ways. Thus, they judge themselves through the eyes of the mainstream, ultimately condemning their very existence.

---

[29] While O'Connor's characters often exemplify the struggle described by Emerson, she strongly disagreed with many of his theological ideas, as the Transcendentalists in general were far too liberal for her taste (*HB* 145). In one of her letters to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, she declares: "when Emerson decided in 1832 that he could no longer celebrate the Lord's supper unless the bread and wine were removed . . . an important step in the vaporization of religion in America had taken place" (*HB* 511).

3. The Quest for God

The notion of the divided self, which has fascinated so many thinkers throughout history, also applies to the way in which the Bible describes the human quest for God: the tension between the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the spiritual, which I map in this dissertation. The concept of a double consciousness perfectly describes the ambivalence of human beings towards God, as they seek Him but simultaneously want to avoid Him. There is something deeply terrifying about the God of the Bible because He is completely holy, and because He demands wholehearted commitment. Following Christ means a complete change, which terrifies many. It means practicing self-denial, as He proclaims:

> If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. . . . (Luke 9:23-26)

The Bible states that Jesus is the judge of the world, and He demands a complete allegiance that does not hold anything back. This is not to be done grudgingly, it is a privilege, as the Apostle Paul experiences (Philippians 3:10).

On the battlefield of the human mind and heart, there are two agents, protagonists of the eternal struggle between good and evil, which began in the Garden of Eden, as the serpent's voice contradicted God and deceived the woman and the man (Genesis 3). This battle continues, in different ways and on different levels, all the way through the Bible. In

the book of Proverbs, the two voices are personified as those of wisdom[30] and folly, both female, both ever-ready to guide the individual. Satan tries to distract people from God and accuses them before Him, as can be seen in the book of Job (1:6-12; 2:1-6), while the Holy Spirit points people to Christ, as the Spirit convicts them of sin and also shows the cross as the way to righteousness. Jesus states about the Spirit that

> [w]hen he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:8-10)

The initiative for salvation is from God; the Apostle John notes that "[w]e love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The struggle between empty ritualism and true inner change of a person can be found throughout the Bible and not only, as many people casually assume, in the New Testament. God has always asked those who claim to belong to Him to be truly devoted in their relationships with Him rather than just going through religious motions. The Old Testament makes a clear distinction between physical circumcision, marking individuals as members of God's household, and the circumcision of the heart. Circumcision on the eighth day of life was a command for every male Israelite, as God communicated to Abraham:

> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be

[30] Proverbs 8 describes the role wisdom played in the creation of the world, thus alluding to Christ, the divine Logos, as Paul explains in Colossians 1:15-16, which states that Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."

> circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:10-14)

The Abrahamic covenant of circumcision is central to God's relationship with the Israelites; however, He makes it clear repeatedly that mere outward circumcision is not enough. God desires for His people to be devoted to Him wholeheartedly, telling them: "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deuteronomy 10:16). God mourns the fact that Israel, like the physically uncircumcised nations surrounding her, is "uncircumcised in heart" (Jeremiah 9:26). The prophet Ezekiel foresaw a time in which God promised to give His people a new heart, taking away the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (36:26). This was the time of a new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, who proclaimed that, at its coming, God would write His law on each person's heart (31:33). This new covenant was mediated by Jesus (Hebrews 8:6), brought about by His sinless death and sealed with His blood (1 Corinthians 11:25). It is by the Holy Spirit, the Counselor whom Christ sent, that God circumcises his followers' hearts (Romans 2:29).

In Galatians, one of the epistles in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes that "the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature" (5:17). The sinful nature is shaped by the fall; it is guided by Satan, not God; indeed, it embodies rebellion against God. This dynamic of opposition between the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit is exactly what John, the protagonist of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and Francis, the protagonist of *The Violent Bear It Away*, experience as they battle with their

own desires, which they do not seem to be able to transcend. Nonetheless, they are drawn by a Higher Power.

4. Walking the Color Line

While I have demonstrated above that the concept of a double consciousness transcends the subject of race and that the philosophical notion preexisted a racialized understanding, an examination of double consciousness in Hurston's writing must address how her contemporary DuBois coined the term. The relationship between Hurston and DuBois is well-documented and frequently commented upon. The way in which DuBois understood art as propaganda, stated most clearly in "Criteria of Negro Art," was certainly alien to Hurston, who was much more subtle in her approach; social criticism in her work is an "implicit, indirectly pursued function of redeeming the folk – within black and white communities" (West 22). Hurston referred to DuBois as "The Dean of American Negro Artists" and makes a direct reference to him in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, mocking him as "'[n]other smart nigger" (*JGV* 148). Hurston did not agree with many of DuBois's theories, considering them too extreme and harsh,[31] and while her fiction raises similar questions regarding the processes of identity formation in a post-slavery society, and a possible

[31] In her essay "The 'Pet Negro' System," Hurston discusses the beauty of interracial friendship and challenges DuBois directly: "Dr. William E. Burckhardt DuBois, the bitterest opponent the white race has ever known, loved Joel Spingarn [a Jewish-American scholar] and was certainly loved in turn by him. The thing doesn't make sense. It just makes beauty" (*Folklore* 921).

tension of identifying with both Africa and America, she arrives at vastly different conclusions.[32]

This is evident in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, where she tells the story of a man who tries to find himself and desperately fails, not because he is caught between two races, but because he is inwardly divided in various other ways. That is, while he certainly can be said to suffer from a double consciousness, this is true not in the sense in which DuBois would fathom. The portrayal of the fictional person of Reverend Cozy, against whom John is up in an unofficial preaching competition of sorts, may very well be criticism directed at DuBois and other African-American scholars who, to Hurston's mind, overanalyzed and debated the so-called race question in a way that was not in any way beneficial to the average person they were arguing about. As Reverend Cozy lectures on "the race problem" (*JGV* 158), he seeks to convince the people in John's congregation of their inherent worth, never stopping to ask whether they feel worthless in any way. Explaining that both Jesus and Adam must have been colored, the Former because He lived in a hot place and the latter because he was created out of dust, Cozy argues that African Americans are "de smartest people God ever made and de prettiest" (*JGV* 159). His lecture simply goes over the congregation members' heads; are not intellectually stimulated by his words. The audience

---

[32] One may, however, argue that Hurston, notoriously ambiguous and ambivalent, exemplified some of DuBois's double consciousness herself, especially in her relationship with her "Darling Godmother," Charlotte Osgood Mason (*Life* 111). On occasions, Hurston's correspondence with Mason comes close to worship, and the power Mason executed over Hurston's work often seems utterly humiliating (Washington 12).

much prefers John's passionate and traditional preaching to Cozy's academic discourse. In many ways, Hurston's point seems to be that propaganda that is too heavy-handed is completely unfruitful and, in very real terms, excludes those it seeks to represent.

A superficial reading of Hurston's novel might suggest that she agrees with DuBois's notion of double consciousness and attempted to capture it in her fictional assessment of the post Civil War period. Certain characters in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* experience suffering because, in the eyes of some, they are neither fully African nor American. John is light-skinned and therefore considered too white by a few other African Americans, while he is not treated as an intellectual equal by European Americans because he is not white enough. Thus, John finds himself in a position that objectively seems difficult to negotiate. However, these circumstances do not negatively affect him, because Hurston carefully portrays those African Americans who challenge John as either being vastly inferior to him, as is the case with his stepfather Ned and Coon Tyler (*JGV* 59), or as having motives for disliking him that are perhaps projected onto skin color, as in the case of Mrs. Potts, who refers to John as a "yaller bastard" (*JGV* 65) when he, a poor and uneducated man, attempts to court her daughter. In fact, most African-American characters of the novel like John because he is not "color-struck" (*JGV* 52); that is, he does not treat those whose skin is darker than his with contempt. Similarly, Hurston subtly undermines the white characters who patronize John in their relationships with him. Judge Pearson, for example, is clearly hypocritical in the way he engages with John, whom the reader has every reason to suspect is his own son. Therefore, the way Pearson treats John may almost

be seen as a mechanism of self-protection, in the sense that Pearson cannot admit that John is his equal without admitting that John is his son.

Apart from the few people who misjudge and mistreat John because of his skin color, he manages to win over entire towns and appease enraged congregations by his good looks and verbal abilities, and he never lets scorn directed at his race get to him, boldly speaking back to those who attack him. Hurston thus undermines DuBois's claims about the double consciousness of African Americans and the negative effects this has. She creates a character who is not dominated by a desire to fit into mainstream society, or who believes that he is only half a man because he is not white. Rather, John is confident and at peace with who he is as regards aspects of race.

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, hybridity becomes a central concern, as many of the slave women were forced to bear their master's children. Amy, John's mother, is one of these women, and while she never reveals John's father's identity, the reader may conclude that it is her former master, Pearson. The character of Ned, John's stepfather, is most outspoken in his dislike of individuals of mixed origins. Utterly insecure about his own stance in relation to former slave owners, Ned continues to revere white people. He considers every claim to equality as being dangerous, yelling at John to stop "gazin' dem white folks right in de face!" and proclaiming that John's "brazen ways wid dese white folks is gwinter get [John] lynched one uh dese days" (*JGV* 2). Surrounding himself with European Americans of little repute (*JGV* 3), among them "Cap'n Mimms," whom Amy considers "po' white trash" (*JGV* 7), Hurston makes it very clear that the reader is to consider Ned's attitude and

behavior as unsustainably outdated and alien. Ned longs for the privilege of whiteness and clings to the white people he now has access to, not willing to realize that the reason he has access to them is that a new time has begun.

While he admires whiteness, Ned is extremely self-conscious about raising a child of mixed origins, a white man's son (*JGV* 4), and he continuously makes John suffer for his own feelings of inferiority. Ned believes that John "ought to be humble" because he does not know his father (*JGV* 44), and he despises John on account of his light skin color: "Yo' mammy mought think youse uh lump uh gold 'cause you got uh li'l white folks color in yo' face, but Ah'll stomp yo' guts out and dat quick!" (*JGV* 2). He refers to John as a "li'l yaller god" (*JGV* 3) as well as a "house-nigger" (*JGV* 4) and a "punkin-colored bastard" (*JGV* 9). When John was a baby, Ned treated him as special on account of his skin color (*JGV* 11); however, as Ned began associating with poor white people, his attitude towards John changed completely. Ned is a man of the past, who cannot adapt to the changing environment of the Reconstruction era. He longs for the security of the system that was in place during slavery, and finds himself utterly helpless when facing freedom of choice, clinging to his former superiors and suddenly despising light-skinned African-Americans, because the poor white people he is now able to associate with feel threatened by them.

The creek divides in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Ned firmly belongs on the other side of it and one "can't git 'im 'way from dere" (*JGV* 40). John, on the other hand, wants "no parts of over dat Creek" (*JGV* 40). Being part of a generation that has passed, Ned can no longer successfully live in the present, while John is a man of the future. He has his own struggles

that ultimately cost him his life, but he manages to overcome racial prejudices that would otherwise hold him down. John says about Ned: "Youse mah race but you sho ain't mah taste" (*JGV* 47). Other young characters of the novel are equally determined to live out freedom. Lucy's brother, Bud, insists: "Ah ain't skeered u no white man. Ah been free ever since Grant took Richmond" (*JGV* 91).

Amy, John's mother and Ned's wife, sees much more clearly than her husband does, and she challenges Ned regarding his prejudices. She analyzes the comments of Ned's new white friends regarding the inferiority of people of mixed origins, asking:

> Is mo' yaller folks on de chain-gang den black? Naw! Is dey harder tuh learn? Naw! Do dey work and have things like other folks? Yas. Naw dese po' white folks says dat 'cause dey's jealous uh de yaller ones. How come? Ole Marse got de yaller nigger totin' his silver cup and eatin' Berksher hawg ham outa his kitchin when po' white trash scrabblin' 'round in de piney woods huntin' up uh razor back. (*JGV* 9)

She continues to give more examples, emphasizing that certain European Americans denounce light-skinned African Americans out of jealousy. Unlike her husband, she can see right through them, and she passionately defends her son John, of whom she is extremely proud, from these unjust claims.

Amy, perhaps more explicitly than any other character in the novel, realizes and expresses that there is a change in the understanding of the worth of a human being that accompanied the abolition of slavery. African Americans, for the first time, are included under the category "human," which places them in a position that enables them to raise their own children and to actually develop a relationship with them. During the days of

slavery, children were seen as mere property, and their mothers could not allow themselves to get too attached emotionally:

> 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. . . . 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. (*JGV* 5)

Contending that there cannot be love without a sense of ownership and safety, Amy proclaims that loving one's children is an appropriate response to freedom. She is very protective of her offspring and cares for them passionately. This includes John, her firstborn son, fathered by a white man, whom Amy does not consider a reminder of the painful past, but rather a bearer of hope for the future.

In the minds of white people, the consciousness of slavery continuously haunts the novel, as they cannot seem to let go fully of the old system that gave them the right to objectify others. When Pearson first encounters John, he exclaims: "What a fine stud! Why boy, you would have brought five thousand dollars on the block in slavery time!" (*JGV* 17). While Pearson treats John with a sentiment that is at least at times similar to respect, he never acknowledges that he is John's father. Even though Pearson shows concern for John's well-being, and even dresses him in his son's clothes, he never treats him as an equal. It is unimaginable for Pearson to admit that John is his son, and, fascinatingly, the reader senses no trace of guilt in Pearson. He appears to consider the things that were done in the past as rightful and believes himself to be an honorable man. As far as the reader can

tell, Pearson himself is in no way internally divided, as he manages to shut off his conscience.

The American experience, the past of slavery and the present reality, are indeed central in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*; however, simultaneously, Africa is an equally important presence in the novel, not as a physical entity, but within the consciousness of the African-American characters of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. The ex-slave characters of the novel have retained a unique sense of their ancestry, continuing to embrace their cultural heritage, which Hurston shows by means of their engagement with music, which has become completely embodied by the individual characters:

> So they danced. They called for the instrument that they had brought to America in their skins – the drum – and they played upon it. With their hands they played upon the little dance drums of Africa. The drums of kid-skin. With their feet they stomped it, and the voice of the Kata-Kumba, the great drum, lifted itself within them and they heard it. . . . The drum with the man skin that is dressed with human blood, that is beaten with a human shin-bone and speaks to gods as a man and to men as a God. (*JGV* 29)

As the African-American community residing on Pearson's farm ends its celebration, "[t]he shores of Africa receded. They went to sleep and woke up the next day and looked out on dead and dying cotton stalks and ripening possum persimmons" (*JGV* 32). The physical reality of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* continues to be an American plantation; however, this does not limit the novel's characters. Within their minds and in their very bodies, they carry an alternate reality that they have access to at any time. There is, in that sense, no contradiction or tension between being African and American.

Another piece of Africa is regained by means of the all-black town of Eatonville, of course largely autobiographical for Hurston. John initially cannot imagine a town that is run "'thout de white folks," asking: "Who bosses it, den?" (*JGV* 107). He is awed by the town's "Negro mayor" and decides quickly to make Eatonville his home. Lucy is delighted to live in this environment with their young children, since they "won't be seein' no other kind uh folks actin' top-superior over 'em and dat'll give'em spunk tuh be the bell cows theyselves . . ." (*JGV* 109). Their family prospers in this environment, and Hurston portrays the advantages as well as the disadvantages of living in a place that is racially segregated. Clearly, she is in favor of such an establishment, but she also shows the downsides of any community that is not accountable to the outside.

This becomes evident in Hurston's description of John's divorce trial, which is one of the few glimpses Hurston gives of a tension between the African and the American heritage of her black characters, and perhaps the only moment at which it might be said that she portrays a conflict that evokes DuBois's notion of double consciousness. John refuses to call up witnesses because he believes that exposing Hattie's infidelity would bring discredit to his people:

> Ah didn't want de white folks tuh hear 'bout nothin' lak dat. Dey knows too much 'bout us as it is, but dey some things dey ain't tuh know. Dey's some strings on our harp fuh us tuh play on and sing all tuh ourselves. Dey thinks wese all ignorant as it is, and dey thinks wese all alike, and dat dey knows us inside and out, but you know better. (*JGV* 169)

John does not want to give more evidence for what white people believe anyway, and he does not want a woman like Hattie to destroy the image of someone like his first wife, Lucy

(*JGV* 169). He concludes that "[d]e only difference [white people] makes is 'tween uh nigger dat works hard and don't sass 'em, and one dat don't. De hard worker is uh good nigger. De loafer is bad. Otherwise wese all de same" (*JGV* 169). Rather than progressively challenging these notions, however, John tries to cover up what ultimately cannot be hidden, namely, as his mother Amy would put it, that there are good and bad people within all races. Hurston once again portrays this failure as a reaction to white people's prejudices, however, and not to some kind of insecurity or inferiority complex within John. He feels the need to protect because he has seen injustice, not because he feels inwardly torn.

The concept of double consciousness in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is by no means limited to the racialized aspects of the term, however. Examining the protagonist John, I show that, while he does not experience an internal division due to the fact that he is both African and American, there are several factors that indeed divide him. John is divided due to the impact of people who are close to him and whom he seeks to impress, thereby becoming a completely different person. He is also divided because of intense personal and internal struggles, and, finally and importantly, by outright manipulation through voodoo.

Even though their relationship changes drastically as time proceeds, John's true love and first wife, Lucy, retains a strong influence on him. Prior to their wedding, John is transformed whenever interacting with Lucy, as "something about [her] struck another and stiffer bone down his back" (*JGV* 63). Desiring to impress and be a good man for Lucy turns John into a better person, if only momentarily. Lucy's presence gives John courage, and her wise counsel provides him with an advantage over other men. Pearson comments

on John's marriage to Lucy: "you damn rascal! that girl you married is as smart as a whip and as pretty as a speckled pup. She's making a man of you. Don't let her git away" (*JGV* 85). Lucy is completely committed to John and their family, and she patiently bears his shortcomings. However, as the marriage continues, Lucy has less impact on John and in the ever-present struggle between pleasing her and fulfilling his desires, the desires more and more effortlessly gain the upper hand.

Lucy then becomes John's conscience where his own fails; it is for this reason that he cannot face her in light of his adultery. As Lucy lies dying, John is increasingly uncomfortable around her and feels accused. He begins to despise the woman he once loved so dearly, and he rebels like a small child, eventually beating her on her deathbed.[33] John is terrified of who he has become when seeing himself through Lucy's eyes:

> He was afraid lest she should die while he was asleep and he should awake to find her spirit standing over him. He was equally afraid of her reproaches should she live, and he was troubled. More troubled than he had ever been in all his life. In all his struggles of sleep, the large bright eyes looked through and beyond him and saw too much. He wished those eyes would close and was afraid again because of his wish. (*JGV* 132)

Lucy's presence haunts John, who cannot deal with his own inadequacy and seeks freedom from his own actions. He feels relieved when his true love passes away because he is utterly controlled by his adulteries. John breathes more easily when the voice of truth is finally silenced. He has spent the time span of his marriage to Lucy fighting against it,

---

[33] Violence against women is a common subject for Hurston, for example in her story "Sweat" and in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where Jody "struck Janie with all his might" for humiliating him (*EWWG* 239).

refusing to listen fully, being tossed back and forth between who he could be and who he is compelled to be.

Although Lucy has a significant influence on John that sometimes causes him to act completely out of character, his deepest and most fundamental division is of an emotional nature and springs entirely from within himself. John is known for his lack of perspective, as he appears to be completely unaware of his surroundings and often makes decisions on the basis of his feelings rather than common sense. Pearson tells him: "John, I'm not going to ask you why you've done these things, partly because I already know, and partly because I don't believe you do" (*JGV* 99). John replies: "If Ah had uh knowed 'twuz gointer raise all dis rukus.' Alf laughed sardonically, 'Of course you did not know. Because God has given to all men the gift of blindness'" (*JGV* 99). John is angry with himself for being unable to break his old habits, yet he cannot get himself to change, no matter how desperately he tries to be different to save his marriage. He continuously acts against his own will (*JGV* 199). This dynamic is a clear example of the internal division he suffers from, as he cannot control his own behavior.

Much of this struggle is spiritual, as John outwardly lives the life of a Christian and inwardly simply follows his own instincts. John's quest for God remains superficial, as he is controlled by his desires and being insincere in his religious devotion comes naturally to him. After a certain point in the novel, he does not seek God anymore, nor the things of God, but he remains on a horizontal level and only wrestles with himself and those around

him. This leads to a kind of religious hypocrisy, precisely because of his occupation as a pastor, which leads him to be very "spiritual" on a surface level.

John is not only affected by Lucy and his own emotions, however. Some of his emotional instability and contrariness are caused by outward forces, as Hattie seeks An' Dangie's help to bind John to herself by means of voodoo (*JGV* 125-126). The topic of voodoo, which she calls "the worship of the sun, the water and other natural forces" in *Tell My Horse* (1938) (*Folklore* 376), is one that Hurston explores quite frequently in her writings, both in her anthropological work and in her fiction. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she writes: "I learned the routines for making and breaking marriages; driving off and punishing enemies; influencing the minds of judges and juries in favor of clients; killing by remote control and other things" (156). In her novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Hurston reinvents the account of the Exodus. She seeks to challenge the Christian understanding of Moses, claiming that "there are other concepts of Moses abroad in the world" and that, in Africa and elsewhere, Moses "is worshipped as a god" (*Moses* 337), emphasizing the practices of voodoo that she had observed in her anthropological studies. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she equally explores the topic of voodoo and seeks to shed light on how it in fact functions in a Christian context, as she, like DuBois, observes a continuity between African religious practices and "the earliest forms of Christianity of the plantation" (Holloway, *Character* 16).

As a result of Hattie's spells, John feels drawn to her against his better judgment. Awakening from his stupor, he finds himself to be completely confused, unsure of the

motives behind his own actions (*JGV* 142). He has a strong sense of being violated, realizing that something has been done to him against his will, as he cannot remember any of the details of getting married to Hattie (*JGV* 143). Devastated by both the memory of slapping Lucy during the time when she was dying and his affair with Hattie, he breaks down: "'You, you!' he sobbed into the crook of his arm when he was alone, 'you made me do it. And Ah ain't never goin' tuh git over it long ez Ah live'" (*JGV* 145). Uncovering what Hattie has done to him gives John the strength to rebel against the forces that control him. After discovering the charms Hattie has buried and hidden, John brutally beats her "until the neighbors pulled him from her weakening body" (*JGV* 162). Then, he completely breaks down and upon recovery makes small yet significant attempts to reclaim his old life (*JGV* 162). The division John experiences as a result of voodoo is the only one he is able to mend, as he destroys the outward forces that affect him. He remains unable, however, to deal with his emotions, as he is not only unstable but also hopelessly naïve. In various ways he is torn and completely unaware of what is happening. He goes through cycles of repentance, only to immediately return to his old behavior.

Hurston's novel shows a division that is completely and utterly human: not African or American, nor black or white, she nevertheless refuses to compromise the African-American context in which she is writing. In fact, her novel manages to be both specifically African American, for example in its discussion of inherited African practices, and universal, as it grapples with problems like adultery or human pride. At a time when her contemporaries worried about writing works that put their people into the right light and

saw themselves as agents of improvement, she told things exactly as they were, beginning with her very own father, a Baptist preacher and a man who could not stay faithful to her mother. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* shows a divided mind that struggles with very basic human instincts, not with grand philosophical notions. Hurston's apology for her people is a realistic portrait that acknowledges their shortcomings, which, at their core, transcend questions of race.

5. A Double Baptism

O'Connor describes herself as "a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness," suggesting that religious conservatism and a desire to interact with the times are by no means mutually exclusive (*HB* 90). Rather, O'Connor seeks to bring her religious background to bear on her surroundings; she is ever aware of Christ's challenge to interact with the world without being worldly. As a writer, O'Connor is always conscious of the spiritual as well as the natural realm, and her fiction touches on both of these realities. Clearly, O'Connor is fascinated by questions of human consciousness and seeks to explore them. *The Violent Bear It Away* treats the issue on a spiritual level.[34] O'Connor's letters contain several statements indicating what the novel "is about." The idea of a division within the self is central to each one of them: Francis's struggle against being who

[34]Elsewhere, O'Connor also explores double consciousness as pertaining to the concept of race. In "The Displaced Person," her story about the Holocaust, for example, Mr. Shortley asks one of the African-American farm workers why they do not return to Africa, to which he replies: "They might eat me up" (*Complete Stories* 232), and Mrs. Shortley transfers her fear of being "displaced" (i.e., laid off and removed from the farm) onto the black farm workers (*Complete Stories* 207).

he is meant to be, doing what he is meant to do (*HB* 344). What has been termed double consciousness is, therefore, at the very heart of the novel. There are different elements and stages to Francis's struggle, however, all revolving around Bishop, Rayber's son who suffers from Down syndrome, and the possibility of his baptism, as well as the threat of his death, both physical and spiritual.

Francis is an inwardly torn and utterly confused person, in whom Desmond notices "various modes of consciousness – mythical/conventional, historical, Christian – which exist simultaneously in his mind as possible modes of being" (*Risen Sons* 112). I suggest that it is helpful to look at the various levels of consciousness as standing directly in opposition, arguing that Francis is plagued by a kind of double consciousness. This is true in two senses. On the one hand, Francis is caught between the two older men who try to pull him to their side. On the other hand, he is subject to two spiritual forces which do not directly correspond to these two men, but to supernatural powers.

Within the narrative of *The Violent Bear It Away*, two individuals seek to influence Francis, his great-uncle Mason, the backwoods prophet, and his uncle Rayber, the schoolteacher. Baumgaertner quotes O'Connor as follows:

> I wanted to get across the fact that the great Uncle (Old Tarwater) is the Christian – a sort of crypto-Catholic – and that the school teacher (Rayber) is the typical modern man. The boy (young Tarwater) has to choose which one, which way, he wants to follow. (142-142)

The claim the two older men lay on Francis's life, more specifically his spiritual life, is evident almost from his birth: Mason takes advantage of a moment when Rayber is absent to baptize baby Francis; Rayber subsequently seeks to trivialize the act of baptism

performed by Mason as he pours water on the baby's "bottom and said the words of baptism again. . . . 'Now Jesus has a claim on both ends,' [he] said" (*VBIA* 73). This scene anticipates and beautifully illustrates the conflict between the two dominant influences on the adolescent Francis, who is hopelessly torn between the worldviews these two men represent.

Prior to re-baptizing Francis, Rayber accuses Mason of having ruined Rayber's own life and being close to ruining Francis's life as well:

> "You're too blind to see what you did to me. A child can't defend himself. Children are cursed with believing. You pushed me out of the real world and I stayed out of it until I didn't know which was which. You infected me with your idiot hopes, your foolish violence. I'm not always myself, I'm not al . . ." but he stopped. He wouldn't admit what the old man knew. "There's nothing wrong with me," he said. "I've straightened the tangle you made. Straightened it by pure will power. I've made myself straight." (*VBIA* 73)

What begins as a defense of Francis quickly turns into a statement about the internal division of Rayber himself, which hints at the complicated interpersonal structure of *The Violent Bear It Away*. Though Rayber has built a life that represents the secular modern lifestyle, he has never been able to completely overcome the awareness of the supernatural and the hope of salvation inflicted in him by Mason, even though he claims that he has become his own savior and achieved independence. *The Violent Bear It Away* may be read as a Bildungsroman, as it traces Francis's coming of age and to maturity (Prown 137). Both Mason and Rayber desire to educate Francis; however, they dominate rather than guide him and mock each other for failing to make a lasting impact on his life (*VBIA* 34). In what follows, I analyze Francis's ties with each of his uncles in light of their own personalities

and behavioral patterns. My discussion foregrounds the concept of violence because it is central to the characters' interactions.

Being the source of the internal division of Francis and Rayber alike, Mason introduces them to ideas and concepts that transcend the natural and speak of a higher meaning which they cannot bring into accordance with the world that surrounds them. Claiming to have "saved" Francis from "running to doom" in being educated by Rayber (*VBIA* 79), Mason home schools Francis, teaching him

> Figures, Reading, Writing, and History beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on through the presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. Besides giving him a good education, he had rescued him from his only other connection, Old Tarwater's nephew, a schoolteacher who had no child of his own at the time and wanted this one of his dead sister's to raise according to his own ideas. (*VBIA* 4)

Francis is completely engrossed by Mason's teachings, and although he enjoys provoking Mason throughout his life, he never really questions his great-uncle's authority as the latter educates him "to justify his Redemption" (*VBIA* 5) until after his death, when he decides to verify whether everything Mason has taught him was true. Francis struggles to find his own voice after Mason is gone, noticing that, as he speaks to Mason's corpse, his "voice sounded like a stranger's voice, as if the death had changed him instead of his great-uncle" (*VBIA* 11).

After Francis attempts to burn Mason's dead body, he leaves Powderhead to find his only surviving relative, Rayber, who at one point in the novel admits to possessing a kind of double consciousness: "he saw himself divided in two – a violent and a rational self" (*VBIA* 139). Violence, here, is the violence of the cross, radical grace which demands

a radical response. Rayber, while he would like to be a mentor to Francis, suffers from the same internal division as Francis, due to being exposed to Mason's teachings in his youth and having subsequently violently rejected them. Francis therefore does not respect Rayber and dismisses him as a man of the intellect who cannot act (*VBIA* 212).

Over the course of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the reader learns Rayber's story in flashbacks. Mason kidnaps and baptizes Rayber as a teenager; he instructs him in the Christian way and Rayber initially finds much hope in what Mason tells him is his new life in Christ. Upon his father's arrival, rather than desiring to go back to the city, young Rayber wishes to stay at Powderhead (*VBIA* 126). Mason assures him that, even though he can be forced to return to the city physically, he cannot go back to his previous spiritual state:

> "[Your father] ain't got any place to take you back to."
> "He can't take me back with him?"
> "Not where you were before."
> "He can't take me back to town?"
> "I never said nothing about town. . . ." (*VBIA* 126)

Mason proves to be right, of course. Rayber will never be able to leave the experience of his baptism and the time of being instructed by Mason behind: "he had been born again, . . . his head had been thrust by his uncle into the water and brought up again into a new life" (*VBIA* 126). As an adult, however, he rejects Christianity of any kind and seeks to hold in check the thoughts that Mason has instilled in him.

Mason tells Francis that Rayber turned away from his teaching because of the urban environment Rayber was brought back to, but that he continues to have a hold on Rayber's

mind: "They told him I was a crazy man. But I'll tell you one thing: he never believed them neither. They kept him from believing me but I kept him from believing them and he took on none of their ways though he took on worse ones" (*VBIA* 66). Young Rayber, like Francis, is the helpless victim of clashing worldviews, unable to choose either one. Insisting on his power over Rayber, Mason proudly proclaims: "I had never left his mind. I had taken my seat in it" (*VBIA* 66); "He loved me like a daddy and he was ashamed of it!" (*VBIA* 71). There is a painful conflict of emotion within Rayber, who continuously wrestles with Mason's teaching and considers himself to be under the "curse" of his great-uncle's witness that, flawed as it may be, calls him to Christian love directed at his little son, Bishop (*VBIA* 112-113): Rayber shares with Francis that he has made an attempt to drown Bishop, but has not succeeded because, after the little boy's lifeless "body, caught by an undertow, almost got away from him . . . he had a moment of complete terror in which he envisioned his life without the child" (*VBIA* 142). Thus, Rayber is torn between hating and loving his son.

The ongoing struggle within Rayber is mirrored in his interactions with Francis, whom Rayber constantly tells that it is possible to control the influence of the old man, even though his life exemplifies quite the opposite. Subjecting himself to a life of asceticism, Rayber

> kept himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall in the side of his choice. . . . The boy would go either his way or old Tarwater's and he was determined to save him for the better course. (*VBIA* 115)

The narrator treats Rayber with explicit irony. Rayber considers himself to be too sophisticated to entertain religious thoughts; nonetheless, he constantly lectures Francis like "a fanatical country preacher" and speaks rash words that lead to equally rash reactions (*VBIA* 174-175).

Many of O'Connor's antagonists are formally educated but lack wisdom, for example the character of Rayber in "The Barber" and later *The Violent Bear It Away*; Hulga in "Good Country People"; Asbury in "The Enduring Chill"; Julian in "Everything that Rises Must Converge"; and Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth in "The Partridge Festival" (Grimshaw 10). These characters possess schooling and learning but the absence of actual knowledge, which to O'Connor must include a supernatural dimension. This, in turn, becomes part of a deeper critique of the American education system, most explicitly expressed in "Total Effect and the Eight Grade" (Grimshaw 10), where O'Connor writes that a good teacher will prepare his or her students for the reading of modernist literature by teaching them the great works of the past first, and that "[h]e will teach literature, not social studies or little lessons in democracy or the customs of many lands" (*MM* 10). She sees high school education as an important place to learn the basics; however, the teachers and scholars she encounters, and portrays in her fiction, have completely lost touch with reality.

O'Connor writes about intellectuals that lack either compassion or respect for others. Rayber, her villain in *The Violent Bear It Away*, is a later version of the central character of one of O'Connor's very first stories, "The Barber," which was not published during her lifetime. It was part of the story collection *The Geranium*, which O'Connor had

handed in as part of her M.F.A. at the University of Iowa in 1947 (*Complete Stories* vii). "The Barber" prefigures *The Violent Bear It Away* in many ways, despite the fact that it has a much more developed racial element than the novel. Rayber is completely out of touch with reality and cannot connect with the very cause for which he is fighting. He is judgmental, unable to be spontaneous and sincere in his arguments, and constantly makes excuses. In the end, he is portrayed as a complete fool who, having failed to convince the Barber and his friends of his political views through a premeditated speech, punches the barber and emerges from the shop as a madman: "Outside, the sun was suspending everything in a pool of heat, and before he had turned the first corner, almost running, lather began to drip inside his collar and down the barber's bib, dangling to his knee" (*Complete Stories* 25).

O'Connor's intellectuals are usually writers, like herself, yet they remain far from her ideal. They lack a vision, producing empty words as they consider themselves to be superior. [35] The character of Rayber, both in "The Barber" and in *The Violent Bear It Away*,

---

[35] Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth in "The Partridge Festival" idealize and seek to write about a killer, whom they proclaim to be a "scapegoat" who is "laden with the sins of the community. Sacrificed for the guilt of others" (*Complete Stories* 431), a "Christ-figure" (*Complete Stories* 435), without understanding or acknowledging Christ. Calhoun wants to prove himself through writing, hoping to make up for the fact that he is not fully committed to being an intellectual but works as a salesman during the summer, being very good at it (*Complete Stories* 424). In "The Enduring Chill," Asbury is another intellectual/writer at whose expense O'Connor has a lot of fun. Being aware of having failed as a writer and blaming his mother for it (*Complete Stories* 364), Asbury takes delight in a supposedly terminal illness and is shocked to find that he simply suffers from undulant fever, "the same as Bang's in a cow," from "hav[ing] drunk some unpasteurized milk" (*Complete Stories* 381). He has brought this upon himself trying to bond with his mother's African-American workers about whom he was writing a play (*Complete Stories* 368) by breaking her rules (*Complete Stories* 369/370). Like O'Connor's other intellectuals, Asbury is drawn to the city rather than the country (*Complete Stories* 366). As Calhoun in "The Partridge Festival," Asbury is encouraged to write about the regional South in a sentimental nature, through a reference to Margaret Mitchell: "I think it would be nice if you wrote a book about down here. We need another good book like *Gone with the Wind*" (*Complete Stories* 370). [footnote continued on next page]

produces a document that analyzes human life in a way that is utterly cold and removed. In "The Barber," he writes a political treatise that fails to reach his audience in the barbershop; in fact, he cannot even convince an African-American character to vote for the candidate who supports civil rights (*Complete Stories* 25). In *The Violent Bear It Away*, Rayber writes an article that dissects his uncle, Mason, offending him greatly by mercilessly diminishing the very thing that shapes Mason's identity and gives him a sense of purpose (*VBIA* 19). O'Connor's scholar-characters are plagued by blindness; they seek to make a difference through their writing, yet cannot connect with the people around them, nor with anything beyond the visible cosmos. These characters assume that believing in Christianity requires intellectual suicide. However, O'Connor herself states: "I certainly don't think that the death required that 'ye be born again,' is the death of reason" (*HB* 479). For her, faith in Christ is not a mark of intellectual bankruptcy, but rather, intellectual honesty.

Rayber is a well-educated person who cannot help but be insincere in the very things he advocates. He envisions a bearable life for Francis by means of "avoid[ing] extremes," which "are for violent people" (*VBIA* 145). Despite accusing Mason of violence and extremism, Rayber is equally violent and extreme. He recommends shock therapy to cure Francis of Mason's influence: "some sudden concrete confrontation with the futility,

---

In "Everything that Rises Must Converge," arrogant Julian dreams of being a writer but is reduced to "selling typewriters" (*Complete Stories* 410). Hulga/Joy, the protagonist of "Good Country People," is another disheartened intellectual, whom O'Connor mocks thoroughly. Educated with a Ph.D., she lacks common sense and is driven by bitterness (*Complete Stories* 276). A passionate atheist who does not allow her mother to "keep [a] Bible in the parlor" (*Complete Stories* 278), Hulga claims that she can "see through to nothing" (*Complete Stories* 287), yet she is the one who is utterly deceived by the Bible salesman who calls himself "Manley Pointer."

the ridiculous absurdity of performing the empty rite" (*VBIA* 146). Francis, however, is unable to distance himself from the past, time spent with Mason, and look ahead; his struggle is with "the seed" (*VBIA* 73) that has been sown within him. Seed is a biblical metaphor for the Word of God[36] (Luke 8:11); in *The Violent Bear It Away*, it refers to the teachings of Mason, which he sows in the hopes of reaping results. Jesus's parable of the Word of God as seed, which Jesus considers central to an understanding of all other parables, describes different ways in which people react when hearing the gospel, literally the "good news," the account of Jesus's death and resurrection:

> The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. . . . Still others, like seed sown among thorns hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop. . . . (Mark 4:14-20)

This must be the text Francis and Rayber have in mind when they discuss the seed and their individual reactions to it, whether or not they were affected by Mason's teaching. Francis tells Rayber with an "omniscient look. 'It's you the seed fell in. . . . It ain't a thing you can do about it. It fell on bad ground but it fell in deep. With me,' he said proudly, 'it fell on rock and the wind carried it away'" (*VBIA* 192). Rayber insists, however: "It fell in us both alike. The difference is that I keep it under control. I weed it out but you're too blind to know it's in you. You don't even know what makes you do the things you do" (*VBIA* 192).

---

[36] "Seed" is also used to refer to Christ as Abraham's descendant (Galatians 3:16).

Both men are haunted by Mason's instructions and they both refuse to yield, Rayber to the uncontrollable love he feels and Francis to the urge to baptize Bishop and subsequently others (*VBIA* 166). Rayber and Francis attempt to eliminate the seed planted within them, while Mason hopes that it will take root and "bear fruit" (*VBIA* 19).[37]

Mason gives Francis the specific order to baptize Bishop if Mason himself is unable to fulfill this mission (*VBIA* 144). Rayber is upset when he realizes that Mason "*had* transferred his fixation to the boy, *had* left him with the notion that he must baptize Bishop or suffer some terrible consequence" (*VBIA* 146; emphasis in the original). Thus, he makes it his objective to communicate to Francis that he can choose himself what to make of his life: "I want you to see the choice. I want you to make the choice and not simply be driven by a compulsion you don't understand. What we understand, we can control" (*VBIA* 194). Emphasizing rationality, Rayber argues that

> [b]aptism is only an empty act . . . If there's any way to be born again, it's a way that you accomplish yourself, an understanding about yourself that you reach after a long time, perhaps a long effort. It's nothing you get from above by spilling a little water and a few words. (*VBIA* 194)

The Violent Bear It Away showcases a kind of behavior that in many ways contradicts the teachings of Christ, who, in the Sermon on the Mount, tells His disciples to turn the other cheek, to always act in the best interest of those who harm them and society as a whole (Matthew 5:39). While Christ Himself is known for His righteous anger, as when He deals

---

[37] The metaphor of taking root and bearing fruit is prominent in the book of Isaiah, which records prophecies about the Babylonian exile of Judah as a punishment for her unfaithfulness and God's unfailing mercy ("Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above" [Isaiah 37:31]), and which also anticipates the Messianic age ("A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit" [Isaiah 11:1]).

with religious hypocrisy (e.g., John 2:13-17), He teaches that all correction and rebuke directed at others must come out of a deep love for them and out of a zeal for God. In direct opposition to the values of the Bible, O'Connor's novel exemplifies violence of a horrible kind – directed at a helpless child suffering from Down syndrome. Bishop ultimately pays the price for Francis's internal division.

Francis, victim of the violent encounter between two grown men, ultimately turns to victimize someone else. Double consciousness comes to a culmination in Bishop's violent death, as the little boy is both baptized and drowned. Francis's battle with his two uncles costs an innocent life; it is, however, not resolved at this point. Francis is completely trapped, as he acts rashly. It is obvious that he does not consciously choose his actions; rather, he is driven by compulsion. His struggle is not only between Mason's and Rayber's teachings; it rests on an entirely different level. Francis needs to determine "who he is in relation to God and how that knowledge will affect his life and action" (Srigley 105-106).

There are two voices speaking within Francis that do not directly correspond to the two men, but are somehow related to them and their influence.[38] As Mason and Rayber represent supernaturalism and naturalism, Francis is guided by two immaterial voices, one that draws him towards the things of God and one that seeks to divert his attention from those very things. Two of the levels of consciousness Desmond notes, an "inner" voice and a "biblical" one (*Risen Sons* 112), I suggest, stand in direct and open conflict with each

[38] Francis encounters the satanic voice before coming to live with Rayber; however, he has heard many stories of him, including that of Francis's baptism, which make Rayber's rejection of the Christian faith quite clear.

other. Francis's mind wages a war which can be illuminated by the biblical understanding of humanity. There is always a struggle between a desire to follow Christ and to reject Him, a dichotomy which O'Connor seeks to capture in *The Violent Bear It Away*.

As Francis's life changes dramatically with his great-uncle Mason's death, a voice begins counseling him. O'Connor explains in one of her letters that she has created this voice, the voice of an invisible person who quickly changes status from stranger to friend, to represent the devil (*HB* 367). The satanic voice attempts to distract Francis from exploring what might be his calling and seeks to encourage him to be self-reliant and accountable to no one. Most importantly, it desires to divert Francis's thoughts from his redemption, and from the Holy Spirit, who seeks to lead him to salvation. The instance in which the satanic voice appears in the novel is one of division. After Mason's death, Francis is concerned about a fence that divides a field into two parts, which is unacceptable to him and upsets him beyond what seems normal:

> A few weeks before, the old man had started an acre of corn to the left and had run it beyond the fenceline almost up to the house on one side. The two strands of barbed-wire ran through the middle of the patch. . . .
>
> "I'm going to move that fence," Tarwater said. "I ain't going to have any fence I own in the middle of a patch." The voice was loud and strange and disagreeable. Inside his head it continued: you ain't the owner. The schoolteacher owns it. (*VBIA* 12)

Talking to himself about the divided field, Francis enters for the first time into a dialogue with the satanic voice that continues to counsel him. From that moment on, Francis's existence is one of internal division until the voice of the devil is silenced in the dramatic conclusion of *The Violent Bear It Away*. It is deeply ironic that the devil "counsels"

Francis, as the Bible uses this word to refer to the Holy Spirit.[39] However, Satan "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and he deceives Francis successfully, causing him to listen to his counsel rather than the stirring of the Holy Spirit.

O'Connor believes that the "Devil has a name, a history and a definite plan. His name is Lucifer, he's a fallen angel, his sin is pride and his aim is the destruction of the Divine plan" (*HB* 456). Much of O'Connor's creative energy and time was spent trying to convince her readers of the reality of the spiritual realm. Her contemporaries are either completely oblivious to the existence of the devil, or they simply ignore him, as does, for example, the character of Mrs. Shortley in "The Displaced Person," who "had never given much thought to the devil for she felt that religion was essentially for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it" (*Complete Stories* 203). O'Connor warns all those who do not take the devil seriously or question his existence, thereby believing his lies and disobeying God.

The Violent Bear It Away suggests that Francis has a choice, although he is perhaps not fully aware of it himself, since Satan, cunningly, tells the boy that he does not exist. By means of this strategy, he seeks to deceive Francis by giving him a different, unrealistic view of the decision he has to make:

> The way I see it, [the voice] said, you can do one of two things. One of them, not both. Nobody can do both of two things without straining themselves. You can do one thing or you can do the opposite.
>
> Jesus or the devil, the boy said.

---

[39] "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26); "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me" (John 15:26).

> No no no, the stranger said, there ain't no such thing as a devil. I can tell you that from my own self-experience. I know that for a fact. It ain't Jesus or the devil. It's Jesus or *you*. (*VBIA* 39; emphasis in the original)

Assuring Francis that there is no devil, the satanic voice diverts Francis's attention from thoughts of the supernatural. His objective is, clearly, to distract Francis from thinking of God, or about a higher purpose life might have. As Francis mutters "Redeemed," for example, the voice replies "do you smoke?" (*VBIA* 37). He encourages Francis to look away from the cross: "I wouldn't pay too much attention to my Redemption if I was you. Some people take everything too hard" (*VBIA* 45). Later, he tells Francis: "Listen . . . you have to quit confusing madness with a mission. You can't spend your life fooling yourself this way" (*VBIA* 165-66).

The central conflict of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the mission Francis tries to avoid at all costs, is Bishop's baptism. He experiences "a continual struggle with the silence that confronted him, that demanded he baptize the child and begin at once the life the old man had prepared him for" (*VBIA* 160). At the same time, the voice of the devil warns him of the consequences of obedience to that urge: "If you baptize once, you'll be doing it the rest of your life" (*VBIA* 166). Francis is trapped and unable to escape from either demand; his violent struggle ultimately leads Francis to kill Bishop, as the satanic voice pushes him to action. As Francis baptizes and simultaneously drowns the little boy, he attributes what happens to a powerful force within himself. "'It was an accident. I didn't mean to,' he said breathlessly. Then in a calmer voice he said, 'The words just come out of themselves but it don't mean nothing. You can't be born again'" (*VBIA* 209). In one sad moment, Francis's

world collapses as he simultaneously obeys both Satan and the Holy Spirit. However, this incident and subsequent state of confusion is not the final word of the novel.

Over the course of *The Violent Bear It Away*, "Tarwater's encounters with the devil become progressively more violent; his final encounter culminates in the devil's ultimate violation of his body" (Grimshaw 6). The satanic voice eventually is personified in the lavender[40] man who gives Francis a ride, inebriates him, and rapes him. In a tragically prophetic moment, Mason anticipates how Satan tempts Francis, foreshadowing the tragic outcome of Francis's journey to the city beforehand: "You are the kind of boy . . . that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke or a drink or a ride, and to ask you your bidnis. You had better mind how you take up with strangers. And keep your bidnis to yourself" (*VBIA* 58). This comment predicts in great detail what happens to Francis in the latter part of *The Violent Bear It Away*. Francis remembers Mason's cautioning as he enters the stranger's car, but he chooses to dismiss and ignore them: as

---

[40] The colors associated with the satanic figure, lavender and purple, are deeply meaningful in the context of the American South in the 1950s; at the time when O'Connor wrote *The Violent Bear It Away*, the color lavender symbolized homosexuality. What was known as "[t]he 'Lavender Scare' . . . became widespread," as homosexuals were persecuted during the Cold War period along with communists. The US Senate investigated whether there were "perverts" employed by the Federal Government, considering gays and lesbians who were disguising their sexual orientation to be highly "unstable" and therefore likely to "compromise state secrets" (Miller 235). O'Connor's use of a homosexual rapist to personify the devil raises questions regarding her own view of homosexuality. Much of O'Connor's personal life remains a mystery to her readers; however, we may gauge her position on this issue from her response to Betty Hester's revelation that at one point Hester "was dishonorably discharged from the military for sexual indiscretion, having been intimately involved with another woman" (Gooch 281). O'Connor's biographer Brad Gooch notes that Hester felt "unbearably guilty" about her past, but that O'Connor was quick to reassure her that the new information did not make her see Hester any differently, and furthermore, she stated "Where you are wrong is in saying that you *are* a history of horror. The meaning of the Redemption is precisely that we do not have to *be* our history" (282; emphasis in the original). As with all things, O'Connor views the homosexual rape she uses to bring about a change in Francis's self-understanding in *The Violent Bear It Away* through the gospel of Christ, keeping in mind the power of grace to transform lives. To her mind, the past does not define the individual, and a person's identity does not lie in sexual acts.

Francis begins drinking, "simultaneously there came into his head all his great-uncle's warnings about poisonous liquor, all his idiot restrictions about riding with strangers. The essence of all the old man's foolishness flooded his mind like a rising tide or irritation" (*VBIA* 229).

The person of the lavender man disembodies and his odor mingles with the voice of the devil that tells Francis, as he approaches Powderhead after the rape:

> Go down and take it. . . . It's ours. We've won it. Ever since you first begun to dig the grave, I've stood by you, never left your side, and now we can take it over together, just you and me. You're never going to be alone again.
> The boy shuddered convulsively. The presence was as pervasive as an odor, a warm sweet body of air encircling him, a violet shadow hanging around his shoulders. (*VBIA* 237)

The demonic voice pursues Francis even after he has given in to killing Bishop. Francis is not free from his compulsion, and he has now seen his "friend's" true face. He is alone and afraid, unable to save himself, his confidence is utterly shattered.

6. Conclusion

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, Hurston and O'Connor demonstrate that the divided mind cannot stand. When Jesus walked the earth, performing exorcisms, and His opponents accused Him of being possessed by Satan and driving out demons in Satan's name, He contended, in words that have inspired many:[41]

> How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if

[41] For example, they are at the heart of Abraham Lincoln's "House Divided Speech" (1858).

> Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. (Mark 3:23-27)

Division within a structure leads to the inevitable downfall of that structure. This is one of the central points that both Hurston and O'Connor make in their novels. The divided mind must either yield to one side or cease to exist altogether. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* introduce protagonists that are stretched to the point of tearing apart.

John is a deeply divided individual, though not on account of his racial background. Though his complexion causes sneering comments and other expressions of jealousy from those around him, it does not seem to affect him. He is, however, torn from within in different ways that all relate back to his treatment of women, his inability to resist adultery, which stands in the way of his marriage, his career, and his personal faith. The evil forces at work are made visible as one of his mistresses uses voodoo to distract John from his wife and causes him to treat her in ways that cause his heart to break once he realizes what he has done.

Francis cannot choose between two positions: he is only increasingly divided as Mason and Rayber battle for his attention. As two voices counsel him to go in opposite directions, he cannot seem to decide which one to follow. Ultimately, he murders an innocent victim because he obeys both men and both voices simultaneously, which simply is impossible. Francis's universe collapses and he runs on aimlessly, a murderer and baptizer in denial, a homeless rape victim, looking for a place to rest.

Double consciousness is not the final word, however, according to the Bible, one of the texts with which these two novels engage. Christ Himself, in that moment of separation from the Father, when He bore the sin of mankind, experienced ultimate division. Though He is, as the second Person of the Trinity, completely one with the Father, He was, at that moment, forsaken by God. It is this moment of division that, according to the Bible, brings healing to mankind's existence and grants a singular focus – Christ was condemned so that humanity could be set free. Hurston's and O'Connor's characters struggle with division, longing for release. John and Francis are enslaved by their own passions and desires, in desperate need of a deliverance from bondage. My next chapter examines the struggle I have identified here in the context of slavery and seeks to introduce the sources of freedom that Hurston and O'Connor suggest to their readers in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*.

The Word against the World?: Slave Narratives

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

1. Introduction

O'Connor writes in one of her letters that "all good stories are about conversion, about a character's changing" (*HB* 275). Transformation is essential to many literary genres; however, it is taken to an extreme level by the ante-bellum slave narrative, which describes a complete change of identity and legal status of the individual, centered on a turning point at which the enslaved person claims his or her own life and refuses to be regarded as a mere object any longer. As Southern women authors, Hurston and O'Connor write many years after the American Civil War and the abolition of American slavery, but nonetheless during a time period that is marked by race violence and important post-bellum Supreme Court Decisions. Yet, while both Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* are concerned with slavery, it is slavery of a different kind, as certain habits keep the individual in bondage. In this chapter, I suggest that these two texts can be read as slave narratives in a spiritual sense, each introducing a quest for meaning that sends the respective protagonist on a journey, striving to be liberated from obsessions that control his life. That is, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* embrace certain characteristics of the slave narrative on a spiritual level, as they deal with a life's journey, the transformation of the mind, and the nature of true conversion.

The present chapter begins by briefly examining the racial climate in the American South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, analyzing the relative disinterest O'Connor and Hurston take, as is commonly observed, in questions of injustice

and racial discrimination. Following this, I discuss some of the structural elements of the ante-bellum American slave narrative, as well as its possible association with the gothic tradition. I then analyze important biblical passages that deal with slavery and show how the American slave narrative makes use of the Bible, in ways that are reflective of the dual nature of this kind of literature, to denounce slavery. Finally, I read *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* in light of all the chapter has previously achieved, showing that both novels are what I call spiritual slave narratives, which, although they have vastly different endings, point to similar conclusions about human nature.

2. Beyond Race Relations

Critics generally suggest that works of literature produced in the American South, like the novels by Hurston and O'Connor I discuss in my dissertation, cannot be seen apart from a "cultural web," formed by concerns of race and religion, in which they are caught and through which they are connected to other works by Southern writers (Caron 2-3). However, aspects of race relations and racism, although they certainly have their place, are relatively marginalized in the fiction of these two writers, despite the fact that the times during which *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* were written were anything but uneventful. Rather, after the so-called Reconstruction came to an end, race relations in the American South were extremely tense, as the era was dominated by two

important Supreme Court decisions: Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

My analysis of the racial climate of the post-Reconstruction era begins with and is galvanized by an epistemological problem: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, different American states had different laws as to who was considered white and non-white, a fact that came to the fore during the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision, which altered the course of history in its proclamation of the doctrine of "separate but equal," which reinforced discrimination through Jim Crow Laws. The case was meant to challenge laws mandating racial segregation in the post-bellum American South, which were not only objectively unjust but also logically unenforceable because many mixed-race individuals could pass for white. These laws "were designed to keep the races separate, yet already widespread racial mixture played havoc with efforts to divide the population into purely black and white categories" (Thomas 3). The scenario that led to Plessy v. Ferguson was intended to put the validity of those laws into question, as Homer Plessy, one-eighth black, allowed himself to be arrested in a train, although his appearance would have made it possible for him to ride in the white car (Thomas 4-5). In Plessy's defense, his lawyer, Albion Winegar Tourgée, pointed to "the arbitrariness of racial classification" and the fact that "determination of who was 'colored' varied from state to state" (Thomas 29-30). The case was lost because the majority of the judges believed that racial inequality was just and "natural," and that Jim Crow Laws, if they did not violate the constitution, were justified (Thomas 34). Plessy v. Ferguson lead to a hostile climate in the southern states, which used

the decision as an excuse to enforce segregation in every possible scenario. The lynching of African Americans subsequently became more and more common: "In every year between 1883 and 1905, more than fifty persons, the vast majority of them black men, were lynched in the South" (Foner 564).

Segregation reigned in the American South during the early twentieth century and was not seriously challenged until Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954), which questioned the very core of segregation. In a court case initiated by a father's concern about his third-grader's safety on her way to school, NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall argued

> that the time had come to attack not the unfair applications of the 'separate but equal' principle but the doctrine itself. Even with the same funding and facilities, he insisted, segregation was inherently unequal since it stigmatized one group of citizens as unfit to associate with others. (Foner 835)

After a turbulent trial, segregation was ruled unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the American Constitution (Foner 836). The Brown v. Board of Education decision, although limited to desegregation in public schools, was significant as a first important step towards racial equality and justice; however, racism continued to haunt the American South, and in many ways does so until this very day.

Jonah's Gourd Vine was published in 1934, and thus was written after Plessy v. Ferguson and before Brown v. Board of Education. O'Connor began writing *The Violent Bear It Away* in 1952 and published it in 1960; the period in which the novel was created falls thus directly into the time span of Brown v. Board of Education. I aver that, considering the times in which the two works discussed in my dissertation were written,

they seem relatively uninterested in questions of racism and the legacy of slavery. Rather, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* deal with a kind of enslavement that transcends aspects of race and transfers the battlefield onto the mind of the individual.

Hurston is uninterested in laboring questions of the injustice of racism and the institution of slavery in a conventional manner in her work. In an attempt to justify her avoidance of the historical events most significant to the African-American mind, Hurston writes that

> I see nothing but futility in looking back over my shoulder in rebuke at the grave of some white man who has been dead too long to talk about. That is just what I would be doing in trying to fix the blame for the dark days of slavery and the Reconstruction. From what I can learn, it was sad. Certainly. But my ancestors who lived and died in it are dead. The white men who profited from their labor and lives are dead also. I have no personal memory of those times, nor no responsibility for them. Neither has the grandson of the man who held my folks. (*DTR* 229)

Hurston emphasizes that she hates slavery and all it did; yet she finds herself unable to do anything about it since she was not yet born at the time. Critics often explain Hurston's avoidance of raising questions of racial injustice in her fictional works by her background: "Raised in an all-black, self-governing town, Hurston often looks in her fiction beyond black/white binaries to study the common denominators of human psychodynamics - a fact obscured by ethnocentric criticism of her work" (Kanthak 113).

As an African-American, Hurston, who refuses to see anything tragic in the fact that she is "colored," does not think that influences from other cultures pose threats to her own tradition: "Belying a fading culture to be salvaged, African American folklore grows and gathers strength, absorbing and transforming elements of other cultures, rather than being

subsumed by them" (Jirousek 422). This attitude frees her from a desperate need to justify herself and to jealously defend her people in retrospect. Hurston, as an anthropologist, is secure in her knowledge of the uniqueness and beauty of African-American culture, and she chooses to look into a hopeful future rather than back to a past of pain and injustice. This position did not make Hurston popular among her contemporaries; her "most highly controversial stand [being] her opposition to the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision, which she criticized because she thought it implied the inferiority of black teachers, black students, and black schools in the South" (Washington 19). As I show throughout this dissertation, Hurston is a highly independent thinker, often notoriously unpredictable and never willing to feel sorry for her race.

O'Connor's distance from racial questions is obvious in her fiction; though some of her fiction places an emphasis on "Southern race relations, O'Connor's stories demonstrate an emphasis upon her white characters' 'moment of grace,' and Southern blacks are just the impetus of her white characters' 'salvation' . . ." (Caron 50-51). Her African-American characters are marginal and undeveloped and in her letters, O'Connor occasionally pokes fun at her black neighbors, as when she says about rheumatism that "[c]olored people call it 'the misery'" (*HB* 926); she also expresses very strong negative sentiments: "The Negro's method of escape is foolproof. [Louise, Regina Cline O'Connor's employee] can effect complete mental absence when she wants to – she's there, grinning, agreeing, but gone gone. No white person can cope with this . . ." (*HB* 508). Critics hotly debate the question of whether or not O'Connor was a racist. In her introduction to *The Habit of Being* (1980),

a selection of O'Connor's letters, Sally Fitzgerald, editor of the volume, attempts to clear O'Connor of charges of racism. Fitzgerald points out that, as O'Connor herself has noted, African-American characters often play redemptive roles in O'Connor's fiction; the suffering of their race becoming a redeeming force, as in "The Artificial Nigger,"[42] or perhaps less directly in *The Violent Bear It Away*, where it is the African-American character Buford who buries Mason and erects a cross over his grave (xviii). Furthermore, Fitzgerald quotes biographical incidents, such as an encounter in a bus that led her to call herself an "integrationist,"[43] to argue that, while O'Connor was not actively involved in the African-American community or civil rights causes, she was nonetheless not a racist (xviii). According to Fitzgerald, a close friend whom O'Connor considered to be like family (Gooch 181), the latter acted in a manner that was respectful but unsentimental towards African Americans, often showing a certain impatience towards specific concerns, such as "the militant movement and some of its spokesmen," as well as the African-American workers on her mother's farm, who, Fitzgerald writes, "were as primitive as some of the whites she wrote about, and . . . perhaps served as trees obscuring her view of the social forest" (xix). Fitzgerald suggests that, perhaps out of humility, O'Connor did not speak for

---

[42] In "The Artificial Nigger," O'Connor introduces a grandfather and grandson who objectify African Americans, but who are ultimately unified, after having experienced an apparently unbridgeable separation following a betrayal, by their shared experience of a "plaster figure of a Negro" (*Complete Stories* 268). O'Connor's black characters serve as catalysts, as foils, but never as individuals who experience transformation or the power of grace as her white characters do.

[43] "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is a widely-known story that deals with issues related to integration, as the story describes a mother who cannot let go of the past, dwelling on the fact that her ancestors "had a plantation and two hundred slaves" (*Complete Stories* 408) and yet another ungrateful intellectual son, who seeks interaction with African Americans to make up "for his mother's sins" of racism (*Complete Stories* 409) and yet objectifies them in the very process.

African Americans because she did not want to trivialize their experience, and if she did not engage with their cause, it might have been because she considered others more needy: "[I]t was perhaps because it was her well-met responsibility to her gift to give dignity and meaning to the lives of individuals who have far fewer champions, and enjoy considerably less sympathy, and are far lonelier than they" (xix).

Many critics today, agreeing with Fitzgerald, conclude that O'Connor was not a racist, "[n]either politically nor theologically" (Wood, "Racial Morals" 1). Rather, she is often seen as "a writer who, though not without temptation and struggle, offers the real antidote to racism" (Wood, "Racial Morals" 1). Indeed, while O'Connor made racist remarks in her letters, she refrained from publicly stating her opinions about race, which might be an indicator that she saw her own attitude to be flawed (Wood, "Racial Morals" 2). Regardless of whether she personally had a problem with racism, a sentiment that was certainly common among European-American in the American South, her fiction states clearly that the solution to racism is

> the subtle grace inherent in suffering that can be redemptively borne because God in Christ has borne it himself. Only as we take such suffering upon ourselves, in acts of civil courtesy and racial generosity, can our unmannered, unjust and discourteous society find its radical remedy. (Wood, "Racial Morals" 8)

While many of O'Connor's critics follow her friend Fitzgerald in trying to exonerate her, I proffer that it is ultimately impossible to gauge O'Connor's personal views. While we cannot know with certainty the reasons why O'Connor avoided the subject of race, I believe it is fair to say that O'Connor's greatest interest is in the condition of humanity in general, regardless of race. O'Connor proclaims the need for the liberation of the minds of

individuals who are apart from God, excluding none from the grace of Christ, who explicitly challenged racism not only in His teachings, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), but also, more importantly, in His actions towards racial outsiders (e.g., John 4:1-42).

3. The Structure of the Slave Narrative

At their very core, slave narratives are not just truthful accounts of the situation in the American South prior to the Civil War, they are also "powerful commentaries on certain aspects of the human condition" (Phillips 43). Going beyond mere social critique, slave narratives expose what human beings are capable of and they uncover the mechanisms of justification that allowed for Africans and African Americans to be degraded to the status of animals. Following an intricate structure, accounts like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), which I use as an example because it is arguably the most prominent African-American slave narrative, tell the story of an individual's progress from slavery to freedom. In this section of the chapter, I isolate some of the features common to the slave narrative, pertaining to the narrative structure and the gothic element.

Before any discussion of characteristics of the American slave narrative, however, must come an acknowledgement of the question that lies at its very heart. It is the same question that Pontius Pilate asked, turning away from Jesus Christ, who stood on trial

before him: "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Slave narratives, which "share a rhetoric of truth, a rhetoric of witness testimony" (Phillips 44), are heavily dependent on their own claims to authenticity and truthfulness; their effectiveness collapses when they are proven to be merely fictional. All discussions of the structure of the slave narrative must be seen under the umbrella of this claim to truth, and all discussions surrounding the actual content of these texts are equally concerned with truth.

The plot of the nineteenth-century American slave narrative, based on the structure of the Judeo-Christian narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, traditionally utilizes four phases in chronological order:

> First comes the loss of innocence, which is objectified through the development of an awareness of what it means to be a slave. . . . Second is the realization of alternatives to bondage and the formulation of a resolve to be free. . . . The third phase is the escape. . . . The fourth phase is that of freedom obtained. It is the arrival at the City of God or the New Jerusalem and it corresponds to the jubilation period of ancient ritual. (Foster 85)

These steps can be identified in most slave narratives, as slave narrators, who make references to accounts from the Scriptures and examine their surroundings through the lens of the ethical standards of Christianity, seek to mirror the Bible structurally as well (Foster 83). This is obvious in Douglass's narrative, as he writes about his childhood, the moment at which he realizes that he is unjustly enslaved, the battle that sets him free inwardly, the actual escape, and finally the arrival up north, the newly-gained freedom leading to Douglass's active involvement in the struggle for the abolition of slavery.

The culmination of the aforementioned structure of the slave narrative is the so-called turning point. In slave narratives written by male authors,[44] this is the moment at which the slave recognizes his individuality and claims freedom, fighting violently "[f]or his own humanity" in an act that "connotes a bridge to cross from a beastly life" (Williams 55). Douglass describes this moment addressing the reader directly: "[y]ou have seen how a man was made a slave: you shall see how a slave was made a man" (2069). He conceives of his realization of manhood in Christian terms: "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom" (2072). This is understandable since, as mentioned above, most slave narratives have a "testimonial structure" (Phillips 45), since they describe a journey out of captivity, a reclaiming of identity and subsequent "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) as individuals are "transformed by the renewing of [their] mind[s]" (Romans 12:2).

The two most noticeable characteristics of the voice of the slave narrative are the somewhat moralizing tone, emphasizing that the author is describing a horrible truth that ought to be changed by the audience, and a simplicity and clarity of style. The approach of the slave narrative is by necessity didactic, as it "is bound to its context in a manner that shapes the narrative voice into a distinct kind of moral speech" (Phillips 52). Virtually everything about the slave narrative is determined by the circumstances out of which it is created and the purpose for which it is conceived: "The narrators' desire to inform and to

[44] There is a marked difference between slave narratives written by males and those written by females. Women, who often had children and families to worry about, and who lacked the physical strength to claim their freedom in an act of violence, could not simply leave everything behind and flee. This can be seen in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

convert their audiences could accommodate some preconceived expectations, but, after this, the stories of bondage and freedom had to be told as their particular world view necessitated" (Foster 23). The slave narrative is extremely purpose driven, as its sole goal is to attack and eventually abolish the institution of slavery. To achieve this purpose, "authors of slave narratives usually wrote in a simple, direct style with a realistic eye upon the need and expectations of a variety of readers" (Foster 3). By means of a rather plain rhetoric that simply reflects reality as it is, slave narrators depended on the effectiveness of a truth that was bound to stir the audience to protest against the abuse of a human life that had come to be considered nothing more than "a species of property" (Phillips 53). There is no hollow rhetoric anywhere to be found in this kind of text that often directly addresses and challenges the reader, written by an individual who has narrowly escaped from the horrors of slavery and whose greatest concern are those who still remain under its yoke.

While they have many elements of the gothic novel, critics hesitate to associate slave narratives with gothic fiction, which belongs to the genre of the romance, because of conflicting approaches to reality: the gothic novel "is viewed as an imaginative product of the unreal or the sensational, conjuring up images of the supernatural and the spiritual rather than the material effects of history," while "the documentary form of the fugitive slave text insists on authenticity and the rejection of imaginative rendering" (Edwards 35). Thus, regarding the aforesaid central concern of the truthfulness of the slave narrative, it appears to be a compromise of its very nature to read it as a part of the gothic tradition. Even more severely, undermining the claim to truth of the slave narrator renders him or her

a liar and ultimately then supports the cause of slavery. Nevertheless, it is possible to differentiate and to conclude that

> [t]he more novelistic aspects of the slave narrative frequently incorporated the gothic [in] its description of slavery as a feudal institution, its horrifying scenes of bloody violence and imprisonment, its secrets of mixed bloodlines and primogeniture, and its images of rape and adultery. (Edwards 35-36)

Hence one very specific way in which the slave narrative is linked with the gothic is the approach to the human body. The particular understanding of the body within the gothic tradition, more specifically "the loss of the body into the control and power of another" (Punter 61), is central to slave narratives, which are tales of the use and abuse of helpless individuals, both male and female, at the hands of their masters.

Analyzing the gothic element of the slave narrative in a section of *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997), Teresa A. Goddu suggests that "the African-American experience, written as a realist text, resembles a gothic narrative" (131). A central scene that exemplifies the gothic nature of the slave narrative is the whipping of Aunt Hester in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, an incident which Douglass uses to initiate his readers into the bloody reality of slavery (Goddu 137). The scene plays on certain gothic characteristics, such as the violent, abusive male who has his way with a helpless female (Goddu 137). Douglass presents himself as an outsider, a small boy watching this spectacle, and therefore "signifies against white narratives of gothic spectatorship. Framing the scene with his response to it, Douglass both plays to northern readers' sympathy and critiques their voyeurism" (Goddu 137). Douglass's goal is to

communicate the horrors of slavery to his readership, hoping that it will be affected the same way that he is (Goddu 137).

The slave narrative interacts with gothic fiction on yet another level that goes beyond the body: while the slave narrative is not ahistorical, it is certainly, like the gothic novel, concerned with superstition. Frederick Douglass recounts in his *Narrative*, for example, that a fellow slave, Sandy provided him with a root that is meant to be a means of protection:

> He told me, with great solemnity, I must go back to Covey [the slave breaker]; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain *root*, which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it *always on my right side*, would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. He said he had carried it for years; and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it. (2071; emphasis in the original)

Douglass remains uncertain as to the effectiveness of the root; however, the fact that it is mentioned in the explicitly Christian *Narrative*, and that Douglass is not willing to fully dismiss it, is significant. It points to a traditional interest in voodoo in African-American literature that was present in African stories from their very origins and that can be found in the works of contemporary African-American writers.

I conclude, then, that, regarding the treatment of the human body and elements of superstition, American slave narratives written in the nineteenth century mirror the then-popular genre of the gothic novel. Slave narrators attempted to shock their white Northern readers and convince them to take another close look at the "peculiar institution" with which they had grown so familiar. Describing the horrors of slavery, slave narrators make

use of the fact that "the Gothic . . . embodies and gives voice to the dark nightmare that is the underside of 'the American dream'" (Savoy 167) to challenge those who had grown all too comfortable with the abuse of the unjustly enslaved. Every aspect of the American slave narrative, from the narrative structure to the gothic elements, aims at convincing its readership to take a stance against slavery; simultaneously, all such works are idiosyncratic because they are autobiographies, the stories of men and women who escaped dehumanization in their own, unique ways.

4. Spirituality, the Word, and the Slave Narrative

It is certainly not a stretch to discuss questions of religion in connection with slavery, because, undeniably, spirituality in general and the Bible in particular played a central role in the struggle that lead up to the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. The anonymous author of the Letter to the Hebrews contends that "the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12). In ante-bellum America, the Word was used and abused by supporters of slavery as they attempted

to justify the system through Scripture and entered into a debate with abolitionists.[45] Without claiming racial equality too obviously (Foster 4), slave narrators countered by providing alternative interpretations of Scripture, carefully weighing each word as they put their experience of slavery on the page and denounced it on a biblical basis, since "[t]he war of words between antislavery and proslavery writers took place as a war over the practical meaning of certain keywords like master, slave, black, white, happiness, kindness, cruelty, freedom, Christian, and America" (Phillips 47). With the addition of prefaces and other commentaries by white abolitionists, who could be more bold in their claims to the equality of enslaved Africans, slave narratives in their entirety reminded a northern readership of the fact that the slaves were human like themselves, and that Scripture, twisted around for the justification of the "peculiar institution," assumes from Genesis to Revelation that all human beings are created in the image of God and are therefore, although of different nationalities, inherently equal (Genesis 1:27).

---

[45] George D. Armstrong, a minister in the Presbyterian Church, was one of those who attempted to justify slavery in their interpretation of the Bible, for example in *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (1857), one of his many publications (Griffith 239). Seeking to refute Christian abolitionist Albert Barnes, Armstrong claims, as other proponents of slavery had done, that he himself has the best interest of both masters and slaves in mind (241). Armstrong tries to challenge Barnes and other abolitionists on the term "American Slavery," claiming that "[t]here is a radical fallacy involved in the use which is made of [that] expression" (242), because, according to Armstrong, it is vital to consider the difference between "essential" and "incidental" attributes of slavery (243). Barnes, writes Armstrong, merges both aspects "under the guise of dealing with 'American slavery'" (243). Furthermore, he accuses the opponents of slavery of neglecting the distinction between the Church and the State, thus acting "in direct violation of the ordinance of God" (Armstrong 243); he also claims that Barnes is twisting Scripture "to make the Bible declare that slave-holding is a sin, when it plainly teaches just the contrary," and that the institution of slavery ought to be maintained because it has proven to be successful (244). Armstrong's writings provide an example of the elaborate attempts that many proponents of slavery made to defend the institution of slavery. However, as much as they tried, their arguments eventually collapsed because they were unable to adequately substantiate their point that the Bible provides justification for American slavery.

The present section of my dissertation introduces the biblical perspective on slavery and analyzes how Scripture is used in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to support the abolitionist cause. First, I discuss a few central biblical references to slavery, most importantly the account of Noah cursing Canaan, son of Ham, which, "has been the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years," despite the fact that not a single reference to people of color can be found in the text (Goldenberg 1). Second, I show how Scripture is applied on various levels in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*: The white abolitionists who testify to the truthfulness of Douglass's account use the Bible to underline that slaves, just like their masters and the northern readership, are human beings. Douglass himself, who, as a black person, cannot risk claiming equality with his Northern white audience, focuses on the injustice of slavery and the immorality and hypocrisy of slave owners who have abandoned the true nature of Christianity for material gain. He simultaneously describes his own journey of faith, from slavery to freedom, from death to life, fully aware of God's provision in his life. This duality can be found in all slave narratives because "the genre . . . is characterized by both polemics and autobiography" (Gates 147).

At the beginning of the biblical discourse on slavery stands the account of Genesis 9:20-27, which is also the most widely-quoted means for the justification of slavery. Noah curses his son Ham, who "saw his . . . nakedness" (Genesis 9:22) while he was drunk, with servitude and subjection to his brothers Shem and Japheth:

> "Cursed be Canaan!
> The lowest of slaves

> will he be to his brothers."
> He also said,
> "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem!
> May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
> May God extend the territory of Japheth;
> may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
> and may Canaan be his slave." (Genesis 9:24-27)

To the unassuming reader, there is nothing in this passage that justifies racial slavery; however, beginning with rabbis and the early church fathers, such as Origen and Augustine, the people of Ham have been associated with Africans, and "the writings of abolitionists indicate that by the 1760s the 'curse of Ham' was being employed as a sanction for black enslavement" (Haynes 7-8).

Questions surrounding why this specific account became so popular can be answered by glimpsing into the cultural concerns of the American South. The concept of honor lies at the very heart of the society and, therefore, scholars conclude: "proslavery Southerners were drawn to Genesis 9:20-27 because it resonated with their deepest cultural values" (Haynes 66). Southerners who supported slavery, they argue, were interested in the account of Noah's curse because it explains slavery as the result of "an episode of primal dishonor" (Haynes 67). To this day, Genesis 9:20-27 is often read as having some kind of sexual implication and this was in fact one of the main elements of the account that was used to justify slavery: "given the general propensity to view members of marginalized groups as sexual predators, a sexualized Ham would be doubly attractive to members of the Southern Bible-reading elite" (Haynes 68).

A biblical account of slavery that is closer to the heart of the African-American community, though, is that of the Exodus, as the nation Israel escapes Egyptian slavery because God's favor rests upon them. The account of the Exodus is one in which God reveals His character and shows His power as He inflicts ten plagues upon Egypt to deliver Israel, climaxing in the death of the firstborn, to be commemorated in the celebration of the Passover, which demands the nation to remember "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). This story obviously resonates with a wrongfully imprisoned and cruelly mistreated people who dream of liberation and divine justice:

> Enslaved by law or custom, African Americans have found the Promised Land metaphor an apt vehicle for describing the epic proportion of their suffering. Using this metaphor, they can identify with the Old Testament Israelites who were under God's special providence. When read typologically, their persecutions offer evidence that they are God's new chosen who, like the biblical Jews, can hope for a better life in a different place - a land attainable by a "flight out of Egypt," implying a "crossing over" the Red Sea or its symbolic equivalent. (Weathers 201)

The story of Moses and his rise to leadership fascinates individuals all over the globe, to the point where it was incorporated into legends and appropriated in literary works such as Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain.*[46] In this novel, Hurston combines the biblical story with African-American tradition in order to present her readers with "an extended folk homily on the Exodus" (Ciuba 119). Hurston attempts to transcend "the common concept

[46] Melanie J. Wright refers to two other American adaptations of the account of Moses, namely Lincoln Steffens' book *Moses in Red* (1926) and Cecil B. DeMille's film "The Ten Commandments" (1956) (4).

of Moses in the Christian world," showing how other cultures have turned the character into a legend (*Moses* 337).

On a practical, day-to-day basis, slave owners most often used accounts of the New Testament to demand their slaves' obedience, quoting passages in which the authors encourage slaves to respect their masters out of love for Christ, including: "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered" (1 Timothy 6:1); "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (Ephesians 6:5); "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord" (Colossians 3:22). Still, contemporary expositors show that the Bible, while prescribing behavior within a system of slavery, by no means condones or advocates it. Furthermore, texts like the Letter to Philemon, in which the Apostle Paul explicitly states that Christian slave owner Philemon should welcome back his slave, Onesimus, who is now also a follower of Christ, "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Philemon 16), challenge both the nature and the very existence of slavery. The sacrifice of Jesus, who became a Servant to redeem enslaved humanity, achieves the same on a larger scale.

The importance of the Bible to the slave narrative is easily shown in a brief analysis of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass, an American slave, born in 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland, believed in the power of Scripture; however, in 1839, a

year after he had escaped from slavery and six years before publishing his first abolitionist work, Douglass chose the vocation of a slave narrator over that of a pastor,[47] the subject of slavery over that of salvation, because he "could not marry the two religions, Christianity and antislavery" (McFeely 84). Douglass was consumed with helping individuals who remained enslaved in the American South, and he found the church to be too passive and altogether indifferent. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that it was through association with Christians, and, more importantly, through an understanding of the true power of the Word, that he took on the fight against slavery (McFeely 85), and the Bible becomes a powerful tool in his abolitionist writing.

Douglass captured the story of his life three times, in three different accounts: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), the more detailed and somewhat more philosophical work *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and finally his memoir, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, revised 1892). I focus on the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which is the briefest account of Douglass's life; it is the "pungent declaration of freedom of a runaway slave writing a powerful antislavery tract" (McFeely 7). Douglass's *Narrative* is at once his first autobiography and a carefully executed work of political propaganda; he describes the process in which his identity is shaped, but he also

---

[47] Jarena Lee's spiritual autobiography *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (1836), revised as *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849), exemplifies the more spiritual aspects that many slave narratives have, even though the text itself is not a slave narrative. Lee, who was born in 1783, had a great passion for sharing the gospel and eventually became "the first woman ordained to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church" (Griffith 197). She fought for the right to speak, as she felt a strong calling towards preaching and believed that she was resisting God and also neglecting a responsibility to issue a warning to the lost (Lee 17).

strives to present his life in a way that makes his experience applicable to any other slave, desiring to show the effects of slavery not just on him personally, but on all slaves, to further the cause of abolition. His use of Scripture and his discussions of the Christian faith are therefore similarly informed by a duality; on the one hand, Douglass writes of personal experiences of God; on the other hand, he refers to the Word to direct his white Northern reader's attention to the religious hypocrisy that is evident in the way he and his fellow slaves are abused by their owners who claim to be followers of Christ.

The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is set up as an instrument for the abolition of slavery from the very first page, and it quotes from and alludes to the Bible effectively to counter claims to the natural inferiority of enslaved Africans. White abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who writes the preface for Douglass's *Narrative* as a means of attesting to its truthfulness, uses principles from Scripture to underline the injustice of slavery, which denies "the godlike nature of its victims" (2033). He quotes from the Bible, in particular from the Letter to the Hebrews, applying the description of Christ being "made a little lower than the angels" (2:9) to Douglass:

> There stood one, in physical proportions and stature commanding and exact – in intellect richly endowed – in natural eloquence a prodigy – in soul manifestly "created but a little lower than the angels" – yet a slave, ay, a fugitive slave, – trembling for his safety, hardly daring to believe that on the American soil, a single white person could be found who would befriend him at all hazards, for the love of God and humanity. (2033)

Garrison points out the contrast between who Douglass is, an individual created in the image of God, and as what he is treated, a mere "brute, . . . even by those professing to have the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus!" (2035). Finally and ultimately, he

denounces the system of slavery as one that "entombs the godlike mind of man, defaces the divine image, reduces those who by creation were crowned with glory and honor to a level with four-footed beasts and exalts the dealer in human flesh above all that is called God," assuring his reader that slavery signifies "the absence of all fear of God" (2036). Garrison ends with a call for the rejection of slavery to become his readers' "religious and political motto" (2037). Thus, he uses the Bible to remind his white northern readership of the godlessness of slavery and assures them that the principle that lies at its heart, namely that slaves are somehow less than human beings, cannot be sustained by the biblical principles that were fundamental to nineteenth-century American society. Garrison, as a white male, can boldly claim what Douglass himself dares not, namely the equality of all human beings.

Douglass's approach, then, focuses not so much on claims to equality, but rather on uncovering religious hypocrisy. As he begins his *Narrative*, he immediately addresses the Bible passage that is central to all ante-bellum justifications of slavery, Genesis 9:20-27. Douglass describes how the intermixing of races in the American South, often resulting from immoral masters taking advantage of their female slaves,

> will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. If the linear descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the south must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers [are] most frequently their own masters. (2041)

Douglass does not attempt to question the popular interpretation of the passage itself, which many theologians and scholars have done by simply arguing that there is no evidence that Ham's descendants are black. Rather, probably as a means of appeasing his audience, he

accepts the supposed biblical condemnation of dark-skinned people and questions the certainty with which people can be placed in racial categories.

Douglass presents slave owners as religious hypocrites who are cruel and immoral while pretending, occasionally even to themselves, that they are "good Christians." He shows by the example of Mrs. Hugh Auld how slavery can transform "angels" into "demons" (2054) and lists example upon example of Christian masters who mistreat their slaves to the point of death; for instance, masters may let their slaves starve and, being fully conscious of this fact, "kneel every morning, and pray that God would bless them in basket and store!" (2063). Douglass narrates how slave owners misuse the Bible to justify their inhumane actions: Master Thomas Auld's cruelty increases substantially once he becomes a Christian, because "[p]rior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty" (2064). As an example, Douglass describes how his master quotes Luke 12:47, "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows," as he cruelly beats a helpless female slave, "causing the warm red blood to drip" (2064). Similarly, Mr. Covey, the slave breaker whom Douglass calls "the snake" because he tends to appear "like a thief in the night" (2067) is "a professor of religion – a pious soul – a member and a class-leader in the Methodist church" (2065). Covey hosts constant prayer meetings and even "deceives himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high

God," while simultaneously using a female slave as a "breeder," forcing her to have children with another slave, a married man (2067).

Alongside his presentation of the hypocrisy and immorality of Christian slave owners, Douglass also speaks of his own experience of being enslaved. He describes being broken by Covey "in body, soul, and spirit" (2068) and subsequently resurrecting after the turning point in the *Narrative* (2072). Thus, in addition to the many instances where he quotes Scripture to underline the moral shortcomings of those in support of slavery, Douglass's *Narrative* also documents his own relationship with God and deals with Scripture on a very personal level. For example, at the risk of sounding sentimental, he speaks about a moment of being "chosen," as he is sent away from the plantation to live in Baltimore. The move to the city is an important step towards Douglass's liberation, and he sees a divine favor and providence in the fact that he was selected (2053). God's presence is real to Douglass in his struggles, as he acknowledges that, throughout being enslaved, he felt uplifted by what he calls a "living word of faith and spirit of hope . . . This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise" (2053). There are points in the narrative where Douglass wrestles with God, asking how He can tolerate the injustice of slavery, but Douglass never turns away from God.

In the appendix to the *Narrative*, Douglass addresses his personal faith in conjunction with the distorted version of Christianity that justifies slavery, as he clarifies his view on religion. He distinguishes between, on the one hand, "the Christianity of this land," and, on the other hand, "the Christianity of Christ" (2093), and argues that only a

proper understanding of true Christianity will lead to the condemnation of slave owners. The Word of God is central to Douglass's understanding of who he is; it is also his most effective weapon in the battle against slavery. Without demanding equality straightforwardly, Douglass draws on biblical principles to convince his northern white audience that it is time for them to act as true Christians. The white abolitionists by his side, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, state more directly that slaves are "God's children" (2038). The battle surrounding the abolition of slavery thus becomes one about interpretations of the Bible, which is signified by the fact that slave owners react so violently to attempts by their slaves to learn how to read in order to study the New Testament (Douglass 2064; 2076). At the heart of the struggle for freedom lies the power of the Word, which has the potential to change unjust societies, and simultaneously transforms individuals from within as they find meaning in the fact that God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

5. A Frontal Crash

My discussion of the slave narrative has shown that there are a number of structural and textual components that most texts of this kind share, and that this type of literature has a significant spiritual element. In what follows, I argue that the two novels by Hurston and O'Connor that I am analyzing in this dissertation can be read as spiritual slave narratives, as they are works which mirror the structure of the African-American ante-bellum slave

narrative and bring the religious nature of these texts to a different level. The kind of slavery portrayed in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* is not racial, nor is it tangible or visible. Rather, the characters presented in these novels are enslaved by obsessive minds and held hostage by certain ideas that keep them from being supernaturally transformed. The battles portrayed are spiritual ones, as the protagonists wrestle with questions of identity, meaning in life, and embark on a quest for a love that is fulfilling and sets the heart free. Being entrapped in his own mind, each protagonist seeks to escape the hell that is a purposeless and directionless existence.

Jonah's Gourd Vine is less obviously concerned with slavery than a work like *Moses, Man of the Mountain*; however, on a spiritual level, it is the story of a man caught in adultery, sadly enslaved and constantly on the run, engaged in "the inevitable struggle to master his world" (Wilson 65). The protagonist, John, is in some ways similar to Douglass – like Douglass, John is unaware of who his father is, but has every reason to suspect that his mother's former master and his own boss is his father. John, like Douglass, exemplifies that it is impossible to neatly place individuals in categories, as Douglass writes in the *Narrative*, because they are both the descendants of masters and their slaves.

Jonah's Gourd Vine describes a successful escape from forced labor and violations suffered at the hand of John's stepfather, Ned Crittenden, but only failed attempts to set the heart free and renew the mind. Being persecuted in his youth by Ned, who calls him a "house nigger" because of his light skin color, John eventually flees "over de creek" (*JGV* 11) to work for Pearson. His initial passage of the creek is a joyful one; John feels liberated,

"singing a new song" (*JGV* 12). However, his mother, Amy, makes him return to help his family. He is extremely reluctant and begs to be allowed to stay: "Mist' Alf, Ah don't treasure 'cross dat creek. Lemme stay heah wid you, please suh" (*JGV* 41). Nonetheless, John obeys his mother and works with his abusive stepfather again, until the only real turning point of the novel takes place. John gets into a violent argument with Ned and becomes angry enough to kill him, which makes him decide to leave for good. It comes to him "like a revelation" (*JGV* 47): "Tuh keep from killin' uh sorry somethin' like yuh, Ahm goin' way from heah" (*JGV* 47). He throws a stone "with all his might" against a tree trunk that he imagines to be Ned and walks away liberated, enjoying the beauty of nature and feeling good about himself and life (*JGV* 47). John manages to escape physical slavery; however, he cannot free himself from his desires, and there is no turning point in the battle against his obsessions.

Above, I show the spiritual element of Douglass's *Narrative* that runs parallel to the racial one; he writes about being carried by God in all his struggles and living life in awareness of its divine purpose. Douglass considers himself "chosen," and as he gains physical freedom, he is also able to find spiritual rest. John, however, is constantly on the run. Before getting married, he flees from the jealous husband of a woman he has become involved with and, more importantly, the communal gossip that he fears will alienate Lucy from him (*JGV* 57). Even after getting married, John frequently leaves for several days at a time, "cheerfully riding away from Lucy" (*JGV* 85). He continually makes promises to be faithful and goes through various new beginnings: "Dat's de brute-beast in me, but Ah sho

aim tuh live clean from dis on if you 'low me one mo' chance" (*JGV* 88). He blames, essentially, his own nature for his inability to be faithful. His instincts and his lack of self-control lie at the heart of most of John's problems, and while "[w]ith Lucy, John develops a sense of love detached from the physical" (Wilson 68), this love does not keep him from straying. In the midst of all this, John goes through what ought to be a defining moment in his life: he lifts up a glorious prayer in church and other members acknowledge that he "is called tuh preach and don't know it"; however, immediately afterwards, the reader learns that, although his wife is close to delivering his baby, "John was away from both home and church almost continually in the next month" because of an affair with another woman (*JGV* 89). When John steals a pig and assaults his brother-in-law, he barely escapes criminal charges, only due to the intercession of Lucy and Pearson. Pearson tells John that "distance is the only cure for certain diseases" and sends him on his way yet again (*JGV* 99).

Lucy's power over John, her superior ability that is so clearly observed and freely commented on by other characters of the novel, may be a part of the explanation of John's inability to control himself. "Lucy's and John's inherited marital templates begin to come into conflict when John becomes aware that his friends consider him to be little more than a man who had the dumb luck to marry a master puppeteer" (Kanthak 120). John rebels and seeks comfort in the arms of women over whom he has full control, and he increasingly uses physical violence as a means to control females. Never staying with the same person,

John's life is one of constant unrest and dissatisfaction, negatively affecting everyone around him.

When his little daughter, Isis, falls ill, John runs away yet again: "John fled to Tampa away from God, and Lucy stayed by the bedside alone" (*JGV* 117). The phrase "away from God" is significant, of course. It shows both how John idolizes Lucy, giving her a status that is similar to that of God, and how aware he is of what the right thing to do would be, although he is unable to live up to this knowledge.

> Flight always has been John's response to any trouble from which Lucy cannot save him. . . . When he fears little Isis is dying, he flees into Hattie's arms. At this moment, when we would expect to see John light out for the territories, he instead stands lost in his own thoughts, rudely awakened to the fact that the spiraling clashes which characterize symmetrical relationships can escalate to physical abuse. (Kanthak 125)

A hopeless slave to his own instincts, John cannot act like a man. He is on the run even in his dreams (*JGV* 155), which prompt him to leave when things get tough in Sanford: "What Ahm hangin' 'round heah for, anyhow?" (*JGV* 185). John is unable to take responsibility for his family, something that Douglass would love to do, but he is unable to get married to "Anna, [his] intended wife," until after he is free (Douglass 2089).

Hurston's novel includes various hopeful glimpses of change; however, John continues to be a slave because, no matter how hard he tries, he cannot be faithful to his wives. He still does not find freedom from the enslavement of his tempestuous desires in turning to Christ. In fact, when he becomes a preacher, the reader learns nothing about a spiritual commitment. John himself notes that his troubles are rooted in the fact that his profession changes while he himself remains the same, so that habits that used to be

acceptable are suddenly perceived as being sinful. John says that "Ah don't believe Ahm fitted tuh preach de gospel – unless de world is wrong" (*JGV* 182); he is unaware of the fact that his behavior does not only contradict communal expectation but the gospel of Christ from which he preaches.

John cannot escape from his habits and lives caught in an eternal vicious circle; the few moments of both spiritual growth and personal conviction he experiences remain futile. No matter how desperately he tries, John remains a slave until his death in a car crash, as he runs away from his final act of adultery, "fle[eing] homeward" to his third wife, Sally (*JGV* 200). There is no hope for John because he is never transformed, although he tries several times to start afresh and take on a new identity. He spends his life running, yet never arriving anywhere, eternally enslaved as he loses the battle with his own habits again and again. Unlike Douglass, who breaks free in a violent battle, John remains a captive.

Jonah's Gourd Vine not only mirrors the structure of the slave narrative, it also shares its interest in the gothic. Hurston's fiction includes various scenes of physical violence experienced by women at the hands of men and vice versa. At the climax of her most popular novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is forced to murder her husband, Tea Cake, who was bitten by a rabid dog while saving her from drowning and who is violently threatening her (*EWWG* 325). Here, as in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston appears to challenge the classical gothic paradigm of the weak female and the dominant male. John is heavily dependant on Lucy, being driven by her, and he finds himself manipulated by Hattie, his second wife, and is provided for both financially and emotionally by his third

wife, Sally. At other moments, however, the novel enforces traditional gender roles and assumes female weakness. All three women are portrayed as John's victims, even Hattie, towards whom Hurston is clearly unsympathetic: "the next morning at breakfast when John grumbled about the scorched grits and Hattie threatened to dash hot coffee in John's face, he beat her soundly" (*JGV* 156). His wives suffer his physical abuse and his adulteries and are ultimately powerless in light of what he calls the "brute-beast" within him. John sees himself driven by a force which he cannot control, and which he deems animalistic, in an attempt to avoid responsibility.

Hurston's novel is, in many ways, a novel of violation. John beats the dying Lucy, a scene which continues to haunt him. She rightly accuses him of "livin' dirty" and he slaps her: "There was a resounding smack. Lucy covered her face with her hand, and John drew back in a sort of horror, and instantly strove to remove the brand from his soul by words, 'Ah tole yuh to hush.' He found himself shaking as he backed towards the door" (*JGV* 129). Even seven years later, John vividly remembers the horror of this moment. After a fight with Hattie, "[s]uddenly a seven-year-old picture came before [John]. Lucy's bright eyes in the sunken face. Helpless and defensive. The look. Above all, the look! John stared at it in fascinated horror for a moment. The sea of the soul, heaving after a calm, giving up its dead" (*JGV* 145). Unlike Douglass, who has to watch his aunt being beaten, John is the one who executes violence towards a dying woman, his own wife, who is completely at his mercy. Lucy, then, has turned into the specter commonly haunting works of gothic fiction.

Lucy's death scene is gothic in an almost exaggerated sense; it is marked by horror and injury done to the helpless dying Lucy and her defenseless little daughter, Isis, who is pushed aside when trying to ensure that her mother's last wish is not ignored. The moment of death is portrayed unsentimentally: Isis, insisting that her mother said not to take the pillow from under her head during her last moments, is "pulled . . . away from her place over Lucy's head" and "[t]hey drew the pillow from beneath Lucy's head and she gulped hard once, and was dead. '6:40' someone said, looking at a watch" (*JGV* 133). It is in moments such as this one that *Jonah's Gourd Vine* shows gothic elements that are more than subtle. They serve to underline the violence done by human beings to each other, shocking the reader, but they also speak of the uncertainty of a death that the author desires to express, despite the faith Lucy proclaims. Ultimately, Hurston's novel includes many gothic elements common to the slave narrative that support my reading of the work as a spiritual slave narrative.

Taking into account both her fiction and her non-fiction, Hurston defines freedom apart from God. As I show in my introduction, Hurston considers personal faith as a sign of weakness: "[p]eople need religion because the great masses fear life and its consequences" while "[s]trong, self-determining men are notorious for their lack of reverence" (*DTR* 225). Hurston decided to accept her fate whatever it may be, and, as a consequence, saw life as a constant battle: "I am in the struggle with the sword in my hands, and I don't intend to run until you run me" (*DTR* 227). In a sense, however, Hurston's entire life can be seen as a restless roaming, "both geographic and spiritual," beginning with her mother's death in

1904 (Hoffman-Jeep 338). This quest is mirrored in her fiction, which presents characters on a journey seeking fulfillment.

Hurston's writing "exemplifies Southern blacks' continual need to reinterpret the Bible to create a nurturing and sustaining community in the midst of this violently segregated and unregenerate region" (Caron 20). As a writer, Hurston is fascinated with the struggles of people, both as individuals and as part of a community, which she perceives as being closely linked because, to her mind, the individual cannot be seen as separate from the community and cannot experience freedom apart from it (Kawash 169). However, Hurston does not have a fixed concept of God and His interaction with human beings and is therefore not convinced of the transforming power of a relationship with Him. As Hurston re-invents the most extensive biblical slave narrative, the story of the Exodus, she contends that Moses had "crossed over" in various ways, gaining freedom from an oppressive system, Egyptian law, and the persecution he faced both from Egyptians and fellow Israelites (*Moses* 409-410). In one sense or another, at the heart of all Hurston's writing, both fictional and non-fictional, lies "the story of a search" (Carr 303).

6. Surrender

O'Connor's stance on slavery is easily summarized: she holds "that we are all slaves to evil, that we all suffer considerable indignities from the unavoidable fact of our mortality, [and] that the blows of fortune strike all and sundry alike" (Wood, *Christ-*

Haunted South 119). Most importantly, however, she believes that "the scales of the New Testament find both the righteous and the unrighteous woefully wanting" and she sees hope and freedom only in the person of Jesus Christ (Wood, *Christ-Haunted South* 119). The key to understanding O'Connor's fiction lies in her personal approach to faith, as she writes in "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South": "Often the nature of grace can be made plain only by describing its absence" (*MM* 204). Her characters struggle immensely precisely because they do not have Christ within them and they do not know His power to set them free. O'Connor states that

> The Catholic novel can't be categorized by subject matter, but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality. It cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace. And it will see this grace as working through nature, but as entirely transcending it, so that a door is always open to possibility and the unexpected in the human soul. Its center will be Christ. . . . (*MM* 196-197)

Grace is defined as unmerited favor; it is what leads to lasting transformation, according to O'Connor, who also holds that suffering is essential because, through it, the individual "takes part in the Redemption" that is necessary because mankind has been alienated from God through sin (*Letters* 921).

In her fictional works, O'Connor desires to challenge the assumption that human beings in themselves are sufficient and the measure of all things. To her mind, an appropriate view of reality must account for the spiritual realm and, most importantly, the Creator of the universe, who installed in human beings what C.S. Lewis calls "the Moral Law" (*Mere Christianity* 10). O'Connor attempts to question any "emphasis on human

nature as its own standard of moral conduct . . . by looking at the phenomenon of human nature struggling against itself, in the experience of the 'unnatural'" (Srigley 99). This theme is obvious in *The Violent Bear It Away*, which portrays the human desire for liberation and the absurdity of a meaningless existence. In my previous chapter, I have shown the deep division within O'Connor's characters – in what follows, I show the escape from this. That is, using the structure of the slave narrative, I describe the escape from the terrible dilemma O'Connor's protagonist Francis finds himself in.

O'Connor's novel is a spiritual slave narrative in its own right, structurally in many ways similar to Douglass's *Narrative*: Francis is constantly on the run, desiring to first define and then find freedom. Being kidnapped as a baby by Mason, who is convinced that the Lord "had sent him a rage of vision, had told him to fly with the orphan boy to the farthest part of the backwoods and raise him up to justify his Redemption" (*VBIA* 5), Francis finds himself wanting to break free. As I discuss in my chapter on prophecy, Mason envisions Francis as a prophet like himself, "set[ting] out for the city to proclaim the destruction awaiting a world that had abandoned its Saviour" (*VBIA* 5). Francis "had always followed his uncle's customs" until the death of the latter (*VBIA* 13) and is thrown into a moral dilemma once he is on his own, having to re-think and re-define concepts like freedom and individuality for the first time. His great-uncle had claimed that his act of violence provided freedom for Francis: "I saved you to be free, your own self!" (*VBIA* 16); "[T]here you sit. In freedom" (*VBIA* 20). However, Francis is no longer sure that the identity his uncle imposed on him is really what he desires for himself.

Mason's teaching haunts Francis and compels him to try to baptize Bishop, his uncle Rayber's "dim-witted child" (*VBIA* 23). Francis repeatedly proclaims "I'm free," to which Rayber replies mockingly: "You don't know what freedom is" (*VBIA* 111). He continues to announce that Francis is doomed: "You're going to grow up to be a freak if you don't let yourself be helped" (*VBIA* 173); "Every day . . . you remind me more of the old man. You're just like him. You have his future before you" (*VBIA* 175). Francis seems to be trapped, unable to break free. As I have shown in the previous chapter, he is constantly torn between the teachings of the two major influences in his life who constantly slander each other in his hearing: his uncle, Rayber, and his great-uncle, Mason. However, his true struggle is not to make a decision between their respective positions, that is, whether God does or does not exist, but rather, to determine how to relate to God (Srigley 105-106). This becomes clear in a moment of direct confrontation between Rayber and Mason when they discuss Francis's fate, as narrated by Mason:

> [Rayber] said "I'm sorry, Uncle. You can't live with me and ruin another child's life. This one is going to be brought up to live in the real world. He's going to be brought up to expect exactly what he can do for himself. He's going to be his own saviour. He's going to be free" The old man turned his head to the side and spit. "Free," he said. "He was full of such-like phrases. . . ." (*VBIA* 70)

Francis tries to be his own savior, as Rayber has done before him, and he fails even more miserably than the latter, as Francis actually commits the murder that Rayber, out of a supernaturally motivated love for his son, is kept from.

Francis resists the call to be a prophet "not because he is opposed to being a prophet, but because he resents any claim of control over his life, either when he must listen

to Mason's exhortations of his mission or when he is waiting for a sign from God to determine his actions" (Srigley 107). Unlike Douglass, who sees God's hand in his life and considers each step towards freedom as an example of divine favor, Francis is resentful "that [his] freedom had to be connected with Jesus and that Jesus had to be Lord" (*VBIA* 20-21). The title "Lord" is prominent in the novel and it is Christ's Lordship, His authority over him, which Francis resists. Francis knows that the ultimate struggle is between God's will for his life or an insistence on his own priorities. Francis finds freedom only when he surrenders to God.

The two older men who attempt to manipulate Francis are both terrified of being manipulated themselves: "Mason does not accept the control of being inside 'anybody's head,' and Rayber does not accept the religious control of belief and action" (Srigley 107). Mason separates himself from the world because he fears its negative influence and its persecution; thus, freedom comes through being set apart. For Rayber, freedom is created by scientific knowledge; however, ultimately this is clearly not fulfilling, nor satisfying in any way. Even the love he has for his own son terrifies Rayber because he cannot explain it: rather, it is something that has come upon him, "love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding, the kind that would cause him to make a fool of himself in an instant" (*VBIA* 113). Rayber is terrified that this love might go beyond his son: "It began with Bishop and then like an avalanche covered everything his reason hated" (*VBIA* 113). It is this loss of control that

Rayber cannot stand; the supernatural, which he considers to be irrational, is his greatest fear.

There are several instances in the novel when Francis seeks to bring about a violent turning point; however, all of his initial attempts are doomed to fail and he seems to be caught in a vicious circle, ever returning to his very starting point. In a desperate claim to freedom, Francis burns down Powderhead after Mason's death, and leaves it behind to seek out Rayber, the schoolteacher, from whom his great-uncle claims to have saved him. He flees towards the city, only to be under the impression that he is returning to the very place he came from: "we're headed in the wrong direction. We're going back where we came from. There's the fire again. There's the fire we left! . . . That's the same fire we came from! . . ." (*VBIA* 51). Because Francis has not truly faced up to his internal struggle, his change of location remains simply that, he cannot escape his own repetitive thought patterns in this manner. The places of his destination and his arrival both evoke a metaphorical description of the hell that he cannot leave behind.

Francis achieves a breakthrough moment that makes the reader think that he will be able to overcome his obsession with baptizing Bishop, as he is finally able to look the child in the eye; however, Rayber reminds him: "It means you're making progress but you needn't think that because you can look him in the eye now, you've saved yourself from what's preying on you. You haven't. The old man still has you in his grip. Don't think he hasn't" (*VBIA* 192). There cannot be a peaceful outcome to this struggle. The narrative reaches its climax as Francis simultaneously baptizes and drowns Bishop, an experience

that both condemns him and pushes him forward on the road towards freedom. At this important moment, he begins to realize his own powerlessness and impotence. Francis decides to return to his great-uncle's property: "Even if I did baptize him that was only an accident. Now all I have to do is mind my own bidnis until I die. I don't have to baptize or prophesy" (*VBIA* 210). Francis arrives at a false sense of security, telling himself that, having killed Bishop, he is now free:

> with all the old man's fancies burnt out of him, with all the old man's madness smothered for good, so that there was never any chance it would break out in him. He had saved himself forever from the fate he had envisioned when, standing in the schoolteacher's hall and looking into the eyes of the dimwitted child, he had seen himself trudging off into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, lost forever to his own inclinations. (*VBIA* 220-221)

Believing himself to be his own savior, Francis celebrates a counterfeit freedom that cannot last. He experiences extreme violation on the way home, and, awakening naked and helpless in the backwoods, he is a changed person. Like Douglass, Francis is finally able to free himself from the chains that have held him down; however, the manner in which this happens in *The Violent Bear It Away* is remarkably different from the *Narrative*. The true turning point of O'Connor's novel, I suggest, takes place as Francis suffers violence rather than as he violates others. It is at this moment that he can make sense of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, in which, to O'Connor's mind, all suffering finds its meaning. Francis is, of course, not an innocent, sinless victim like Christ. Nonetheless, this traumatic moment leaves Francis not only physically altered, but helps him to finally look above, as he is "drawn beyond himself and what has happened, to a 'final revelation'" (Srigley 131).

This revelation clearly goes beyond the rape; Francis has come to a point where his eyes are finally opened, and "what he will see as a prophet who has suffered and come to understand the implications for his irresponsible behavior is a community that draws him beyond his self-interest" (Srigley 131). Earlier in the novel, Francis had been terrified by the thought of the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ:

> In the darkest, most private part of his soul, hanging upsidedown like a sleeping bat, was the certain, undeniable knowledge that he was not hungry for the bread of life. Had the bush flamed for Moses, the sun stood still for Joshua, the lions turned aside before Daniel only to prophesy the bread of life? Jesus? He felt a terrible disappointment in that conclusion, a dread that it was true. The old man said that as soon as he died, he would hasten to the banks of the Lake of Galilee to eat the loaves and fishes that the Lord had multiplied.
>
> "Forever?" the horrified boy asked.
>
> "Forever," the old man said.
>
> The boy sensed that this was the heart of his great-uncle's madness, this hunger, and what he was secretly afraid of was that it might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood and might strike some day in him and then he would be torn by hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill but the bread of life. (*VBIA* 21)

Francis desires to be his own master; he is afraid of depending on God in the same way he has always had to depend on his great-uncle. He desires to lead a meaningful existence but wants to do so on his own terms, he, like Pilate, asks "What is truth?" and cannot be bothered to wait for an answer until immense suffering stops him in his tracks. C.S. Lewis says that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (*Pain* 91). Because of his own hardened heart (Mark 6:52), everything that happened to him was necessary to awaken Francis and cause the "scales [to] f[a]ll from [his] eyes" (Acts 9:18).

At the end of *The Violent Bear It Away*, Francis finally sees the Answer to all of his questions about meaning and truth. The One who had claimed that He is the Bread of Life indeed fills. Francis, who, throughout the novel, is constantly hungry but finds himself unable to eat, dissatisfied with anything he eats, and at times even physically sick when he forces himself to consume food, as I have shown in my chapter on prophecy, now envisions his own presence at the feeding of the five thousand, recorded in the Gospels as one of the miracles Jesus performed. To Francis, the field before him

> seemed . . . no longer empty but peopled with a multitude. Everywhere, he saw dim figures seated on the slope and as he gazed he saw that from a single basket the throng was being fed. His eyes searched the crowd for a longtime as if he could not find the one he was looking for. Then he saw him. The old man was lowering himself to the ground. When he was down and his bulk had settled, he leaned forward, his face turned toward the basket, impatiently following its progress toward him. The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him. His hunger was so great that he could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied. (*VBIA* 241)

Francis's experience has changed drastically, as he is transformed inwardly, finally breaking free from his great-uncle's obsessions and having experienced his own sinful nature as well as that of others in the events since Bishop's death.

In a dramatic scene, seeing a vision of a burning bush and throwing himself on Mason's grave, Francis hears God command him with words "as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood" (*VBIA* 242). After getting up again, he "stooped and picked up a handful of dirt off his great-uncle's grave and smeared it on his forehead" and set out towards the city to share the good news (*VBIA* 242-243). The act of smearing dirt on the forehead is significant because it expresses a deep connection between Mason and Francis

– thus, the two prophets, flawed as they both may be, are united at the end of the novel. It may be seen as an act of repentance and mourning for his previous acts of rebellion.[48]

In the ending of O'Connor's novel, all tensions are resolved and the divided mind becomes unified, the prophet accepts his call. O'Connor explains in a letter that many of her readers misunderstand the ending of *The Violent Bear It Away* and are saddened by the fact that Francis is "off to make a fool or a martyr of himself," forgetting that Francis now is defending the truth and "doing what is right" (*HB* 536). The conclusion of the novels brings resolution and unity to the divided soul of the protagonist. The satanic voice within his head has yielded, he has chosen to follow in the footsteps of his great-uncle, and he is headed towards the city. To O'Connor's mind, Francis has made the right choices, and while many of her readers and critics disagree, she seeks to convey a sense of peace and surrender on the last few pages of this violent book.

A true transformation has taken place within Francis and he is able to take up his prophetic call, whatever the consequences may be. Like Douglass, Francis ends up being a new man, different from who he was in the past, filled with unexpected power and driven by a higher purpose. He is a man on a mission, desiring to proclaim God's love for the sake of the lost, in the same way that Douglass is determined to do whatever he can to achieve the liberation of those who still live under slavery.

---

[48] The Bible describes many instances of mourning and/or repentance "in sackcloth and ashes" (e.g., Matthew 11:21).

A central characteristic of the slave narrative that is present in O'Connor's fiction is a fascination with the gothic and grotesque, which she uses to describe the lack of grace in her characters: "O'Connor's work asserts her belief in the need for personal redemption through Christ to stop the grotesque violence she sees as perpetrated because of a willful distancing from God" (Caron 20). The violation of the helpless is a prominent theme in *The Violent Bear It Away*, as can be seen in the rape of Francis at the hands of an anonymous man, and in Francis drowning Bishop to avoid baptizing him. O'Connor considers the grotesque to be "the face of good under construction" (Lake 142), and desires to shock her readers by showing the sad results of the absence of Christ within them, often mirrored in physical violence. Much like Douglass, although she refrains from addressing the audience directly, O'Connor hopes that her readers will actively change and react to her writings in very specific ways.

The title of O'Connor's novel, in its ambiguity, addresses questions of mastery and submission: "*The Violent Bear It Away*, perfectly exemplifies a biblical intertext employed to spur her readers to Christian commitment" (Caron 28). With its reference to violence, O'Connor's title speaks to the topic of the gothic; however, the verse on which the title is based, taken from the Gospel of Matthew, is highly ambiguous. The version of the Bible O'Connor uses, the Catholic Douai, which references the Latin Vulgate translation rather than original sources, reads "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matthew 11:12). However, if one turns to the original Greek, the term can be understood to be active or passive, and thus

mean either "forcefully advancing" or "suffering violence" (Kaiser 480). A different translation of the verse, such as, for example, that of the New International Version, changes its meaning entirely: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Both the active and the passive embody violence; however, only the recipient of that violence differs. That is, the translation that O'Connor uses, which translates the verb as in the passive voice, describes the kingdom of God as suffering violence at the hands of violent men, perhaps in the sense of the persecution Christ's followers had to face, whereas the active voice suggests expansive growth of the kingdom.

O'Connor uses the title and epigraph of her novel to construct a narrative, based on her personal interpretation of the verse: "According to O'Connor, the understanding of violence that is expressed by Christ in the Gospels suggests a pattern of self-sacrifice that the followers of Christ are called to imitate . . ." (Srigley 100). In his *Narrative*, Douglass describes violence that he and other slaves had to endure. His only choice is to strike back with violence. O'Connor, however, promotes another way. The kind of violence described in *The Violent Bear It Away* is not directed at others, but rather against the individual's own self, for the sake and by the strength of God's kingdom (Srigley 101). The kingdom is subject to violence "from the desire of human beings to manipulate it according to their own will, and the prophetic call to justice and repentance further engenders violence when it is resisted" (Srigley 101-102). Thus, the violence that lies at the surface of O'Connor's novel, only hints at a much deeper and more complex meaning (Desmond, "Mystery of

Evil" 128). The novel describes violence as resulting from resistance to God, a resistance which, however passionate it may be, is ultimately doomed to fail, as Francis is forced to surrender.

7. Conclusion

While *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* have much in common, as my dissertation shows, they are also entirely different. This is most obvious in the endings of the two works, which leave the characters in opposite places as the struggles portrayed in the novels come to an end – one is dead, the other is alive. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* ends as John drives his car into a train. A slave until the end, he never manages to find the strength to be liberated; like the biblical character Jonah, he does not experience a change of conviction. He cannot resolve the division in his own mind and, having lived a life of form rather than content, he is unable to find help. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is all about religion, but it is not about a relationship with God. The god of the novel is mystical, powerless, and unwilling to save. John is the true god, and he falls apart completely, as he disappoints his congregation and cannot save himself.

When O'Connor writes about an element of change being essential to fiction, as I have quoted in the opening lines of this chapter, she does not stop there:

> The action of grace changes a character. Grace can't be experienced in itself. . . . Therefore in a story all you can do with grace is to show that it is changing the character. . . . Part of the difficulty of all this is that you write for an audience that doesn't know what grace is and don't recognize it when they see it. All my stories

> are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it, but most people think of these stories as hard, hopeless, brutal, etc. (*HB* 275)

O'Connor's characters are all about change, and change, to O'Connor, is caused by grace. There is freedom in the act of recognizing one's own helplessness and crying out to God. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, Francis struggles immensely, but eventually succeeds in breaking free as he embarks on a "journey toward God, [which,] O'Connor claimed, is often impeded by emotion" (Askin 58). The novel offers glimpses of his transformation in its deliberately ambiguous and yet, to O'Connor's mind, incredibly hopeful ending that shows Francis with a completely new approach and a newly found sense of love for his fellow human beings. Hurston and O'Connor write spiritual slave narratives with vastly different endings; however, both works leave the reader with a sense of the struggle that lies behind true human growth and transformation.

The Word for the World: Conclusion

"[I]f the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Hurston and O'Connor, two female voices from the American South, demand to be heard even now, years after their respective deaths. Each withstood societal expectations and communicated in the way that she considered most effective to reach her readers. As Hurston writes a semi-autobiography and O'Connor ponders grace, they both engage with what is closest to their hearts, what they know best, in light of the changing environment of the American South. Their prose is personal and powerful, offering rare insights into who these women are as intellectual and cultural workers. As prophetic artists, they express powerful challenges to society through the male protagonists of their respective novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*.

Gender becomes significant, as Hurston and O'Connor use their male protagonists to engage with theological concerns that were not commonly discussed by women, raising issues of infinite importance. Their male characters' quests in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* become religious metaphors that speak to a political and cultural process of reclamation and redefinition as the South finally begins to engage with its painful history. Hurston's and O'Connor's work must be seen as a part of a larger process the American South underwent in coming to terms with its past and reevaluating traditions. However, it is also deeply personal in its engagement with faith and religion.

Prophetic voices in their own right, both Hurston and O'Connor express uncomfortable truths to the society they live in. Prophecy is a question of perspective, O'Connor writes in one of her letters, it "is a matter of seeing, not saying, and is certainly the most terrible vocation" (*HB* 372-3). Hurston affirms this notion when she states in

Jonah's Gourd Vine that God "has cursed but few [men] with vision. Ever hear tell of a happy prophet?" (*JGV* 99). The American South is haunted by daunting memories of slavery and racism, and it has a long heritage of the Christian faith, predominantly Protestant. In this context, Hurston and O'Connor speak up as marginalized voices – two women; the former constantly struggled to support herself financially and was thus at the mercy of wealthy white patrons who attempted to control her work; the latter was an invalid, at times too unwell to even hold her pen, raising peacocks and other fowl at a remote location, building and maintaining relationships almost exclusively through letters. In spite of, or perhaps because of, their outsider positions, these two women desired to bring about change.

Hurston was constantly under pressure to write in a certain way. Being a black writer in her day meant writing about "the race question," and Hurston was not prepared to do this in the manner that was expected of her, despite significant pressure and criticism from male writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Like the biblical prophets who spoke unpopular truths, she faced much opposition for calling things the way she saw them; she refused to indulge in, what she considered, self-pity and accept the mantle of a victim. Similarly, O'Connor was often pressured to write propaganda for the Catholic Church, which she was very hesitant to do. She notes in a letter that her mother pressured her to write "popular" fiction that people would enjoy (*HB* 326), whereas O'Connor herself desired to shock her readers into seeing their own depravity and acknowledging their need for grace. Their gender significantly affected their input, yet Hurston and O'Connor were

determined to find a way to embody their principles. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, they manage to do so by introducing male characters who are called to prophesy, but who, unlike the women who envisioned them, are very reluctant to speak for their generation and struggle against their call. It is through the failure of these men that Hurston and O'Connor make an impact.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, writing about theological matters was typically the purview of men working within an institutional framework; both Hurston and O'Connor, however, decided to engage with the deep mysteries of the Christian faith. As writers, they dare to tackle what C.S. Lewis calls Christianity's greatest miracle, a concept that is closely linked to the doctrine of the Trinity, as God the Father sent God the Son to die at the hands of His own creation. There are tremendous implications to the fact that the Word became flesh. In fictional works, the connections between language and the body are often highlighted. This is especially true for a writer like Hurston, who found herself in the middle of a battle about the appropriate literary representation of her people, and O'Connor, who saw her body deteriorating and who put her hope in the bodily resurrection as a reality she constantly lived in anticipation of.

The concept of the incarnation implies the possibility of change, as mysteries become visible and the abstract is made tangible. Hurston seeks to capture the beauty of African-American culture on the pages of her fiction, to portray that which is unique without having to prove a point or making excuses. She claims a unique voice for a body that is now technically free from slavery, but still bound in many ways, as *Jonah's Gourd*

Vine exemplifies. In Hurston's work, the formerly hopeless flesh itself comes to signify hope, as she seeks to underline the giftedness of her people, encouraging them to take pride in their artistic achievements and to see themselves as complex cultural entities. She writes that "until we have placed something upon this street corner that is our own, we are right back where we were when they filed our iron collar off" ("Race" 3).

Producing what she herself calls incarnational art, O'Connor turns abstract ideas into physical reality. She seeks to materialize grace as an agent that affects the characters of her novels and short stories. She writes about people who are, literally, ugly, but who have the potential of changing and becoming beautiful. As an author, O'Connor engages with the very depth of human existence, not shying away from portraying the worst in our nature, both to show that there is a desperate need for grace, and that grace is completely undeserved. In *The Violent Bear It Away* and her other works, O'Connor challenges a generation that cannot imagine not only that God *would* become human, but that He actually *could*. It is O'Connor's implicit purpose to make spiritual realities visible to a generation that has closed its eyes to them, advocating God's limitless power to an audience that views Him as impotent.

Writing to a secular readership about spiritual matters, both Hurston and O'Connor arrive at a dualistic understanding of reality and capture an internal division in their fictional characters. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violet Bear It Away* show how this internal struggle leads to a deep sense of dissatisfaction. Being their own obstacles to self-fulfillment, the protagonists stand in the way of what they most desire, caught in a vicious

circle. The novels map these struggles carefully and raise questions regarding the possibility of escape.

By necessity, Hurston engages with the racialized understanding of double consciousness; however, in the same way that she herself refuses to be "tragically colored," her characters are by no means torn between being African and American. Rather, Hurston's characters manage to bring the two into harmony, and she explicitly critiques DuBois and other intellectuals who tell people that they ought to feel disadvantaged. As an artist and as a modernist, Hurston reconstructs African-American culture through Christianity for her own purposes of cultural anthropology. Examining the beauty of religious discourse and black language, she seeks to modernize the literary representation of the language of her people.

O'Connor conveys a different kind of division in her work as a modernist writer with an interest in the spiritual realm. Acknowledging that her audience's point of view is vastly different from her own, she seeks to bridge the gap between spiritual and earthly realities, making the eternal spiritual battle between good and evil visible on the pages of her fiction. Desiring to convey a supernaturalist point of view to an audience of naturalists, she seeks to introduce a perspective that looks beyond the obvious. Capturing scenes from the "spiritual" American South, she simultaneously challenges an overly zealous regional faith that is, to her mind, too much based on personal feeling and experience, and also attempts to stir the rest of the nation in its spiritual apathy.

This lack of interest in the supernatural, O'Connor suggests, is synonymous with slavery. Both Hurston and O'Connor contend that there are different ways of being enslaved, just as there are different kinds of freedom. Racial slavery, legally practiced in the United States until the middle of the nineteenth century, which saw the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of its victims, is only one side of the story. The mind can be enslaved by addictions, habits, and emotional dependences. As writers, Hurston and O'Connor seek freedom of expression. For their characters, they envision freedom from bondage.

Jonah's Gourd Vine describes a new beginning as the American South emerges from racial slavery and introduces characters who remain enslaved mentally, emotionally, spiritually. This shows clearly in the violence they do to each other, and the futility of their struggles and attempts to change. John remains caught in adultery, a slave of his own desire, unable to resist temptation. Hurston's protagonist cannot achieve spiritual liberation because his engagement with religion remains purely a matter of form, there is no content behind it. John cannot look beyond himself and thus does not experience freedom from himself.

In *The Violent Bear It Away*, as in her other works, O'Connor shows grace as a force that brings about true freedom. Francis has to see his own sinfulness, and he has to understand that he cannot save himself. It is not until he is driven to utter despair that Francis cries out to God and obeys His command to prophesy to the city. O'Connor is no idealist, however. There is no guarantee that Francis, having experienced grace, will

succeed. She is very aware of the pitfalls of life; nonetheless, she shows a glimmer of hope, a bright light in the darkness. Francis will be one of God's prophets, proclaiming the glorious gospel of Christ to a world that desperately needs good news.

My analysis of the two novels shows that Christianity cannot just be a religion; it has to be a relationship. Faith is a dialogue between the Creator and the created. In Hurston's novel, God is silent, and her characters effectively speak to themselves as well as those around them when they pray. There is no supernatural element to John's faith, which explains that this faith cannot transform the individual. To O'Connor, God is a Changer, making Jesus "who had no sin to *be* sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21; emphasis mine). Grace is powerful, says O'Connor, and it brings human beings from darkness into light, from death to life, from bondage to freedom. The writer does not pay tribute to art for art's sake, O'Connor writes to Hester, but "[t]he human comes before art. You do not write the best you can for the sake of art but for the sake of returning your talent increased to the invisible God to use or not use as he sees fit" (*HB* 419).

My dissertation begins and ends on a note about authorship. In my reading of Hurston and O'Connor, I have considered the author's own voice because I believe that this is necessary for meaningful discourse. In writing these novels, they put words to their own flesh, describing their own experiences and advocating their own position. I do not desire to limit the freedom of the interpreter. However, I propose that the interpreter is not the measure of all things. Rather, I am interested in that specific level of meaning in a text that

can only be found in relation to the author. Authorial intention has in some ways become a taboo, and yet we so desperately crave meaning. There is hope in meaning, in the thought that there is more to our lives than what meets the eye.

This, then, leads to an understanding of the human life as a story. Rather than numerous unrelated events, it is a meaningful progression towards a destination. My discussion of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *The Violent Bear It Away* illuminates this longing in the spiritual journeys that the authors describe. To the Christian, God is a Writer. He writes on stone tablets (Exodus 31:18), in the dust (Jeremiah 17: 13), on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), on the ground (John 8:6-8). Even more so, God writes a story for each individual's life, and He writes the names of His beloved on His hands: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16).

Works Cited

Abell, Aaron Ignatius. *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1943.

Adell, Sandra. *Double Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994.

Armstrong, George D. "From *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery.*" *American Religions: A Documentary History.* Ed. Marie R. Griffith. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. 239-244.

Askin, Denise T. "Anagogical Vision and Comedic Form in Flannery O'Connor: The Reasonable Use of the Unreasonable." *Renascence* 57.1 (2004): 47-62.

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962.

---. "Performative Utterances." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 1430-1442.

Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." Trans. Stephen Heath. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 1466-1470.

---. "From Work to Text." *The Rustle of Language.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: FSG, 1986. 56-64.

Baumgaertner, Jill P. *Flannery O'Connor: A Proper Scaring.* Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1988.

Berben-Masi, Jacqueline. "From Brothers and Keepers to Two Cities: Social and Cultural Consciousness, Art and Imagination: An Interview with John Edgar Wideman." *Callaloo* 22.3 (1999): 568-584.

Binet, Alfred. *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies*. Chicago: Open Court, 1890.

Bohmbach, Karla G. "Names and Naming." *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. David Noel Freedman.Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 944-946.

Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr. *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2000.

Brown, Fahamisha Patricia. *African American Poetry as Vernacular Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999.

Bruce, Dickson D., Jr. "W.E.B. DuBois and the Idea of Double Consciousness." *American Literature* 64.2 (1992): 299-309.

Brueggemann, Walter. *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*. Ed. Patrick D. Miller. Minneapolis: Fortress P, 1994.

Burns, Charlene P. E. *Divine Becoming: Rethinking Jesus and Incarnation*. Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2002.

Byars, John. "Prophecy and Apocalyptic in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 16 (1987): 34-42.

Caron, Timothy P. *Struggles over the Word: Race and Religion in O'Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2000.

Carr, Brian, and Tova Cooper. "Zora Neale Hurston and Modernism at the Critical Limit." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 48.2 (2002): 285-313.

Carroll, R.P. "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel." *Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum.* Leiden: Brill, 2000. 56-71.

Chesnutt, Charles. *The Conjure Woman. Charles W. Chesnutt: Stories, Novels, & Essays.* Ed. Werner Sollors. New York: Library of America, 2002. 1-96.

Ciuba, Gary: "The Worm against the Word: The Hermeneutical Challenge in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine.*" *African American Review* 34.1 (2000): 119-133.

Colebrook, Claire. "The Work of Art that Stands Alone." *Deleuze Studies* 1 (2007): 22-40.

Connor, Kimberly Rae. *Imagining Grace: Liberating Theologies in the Slave Narrative Tradition.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000.

Dapaah, Daniel S. *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth: A Critical Study.* Lanham: UP of America, 2005.

De La Torre, Miguel A. *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007.

Desmond, John F. "Flannery O'Connor and the Displaced Sacrament." *Inside the Church of Flannery O'Connor: Sacrament, Sacramental, and the Sacred in Her Fiction.* Ed. Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede. Macon: Mercer UP, 2007. 64-76.

---. "Flannery O'Connor's Misfit and the Mystery of Evil." *Renascence* 56.2 (2004): 128-137.

---. *Risen Sons: Flannery O'Connor's Vision of History*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself. The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. 6th ed. Vol. B. New York: Norton, 2003. 2032-2097.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk. Three Negro Classics*. New York: Avon Book Division, 1965. 207-389.

Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2003.

Egar, Emmanuel E. *Black Women Poets of Harlem Renaissance*. Lanham: UP of America, 2003.

Ellens, J. Harold. "Logos." *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 819-820.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Emerson's Prose and Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Joel Porte and Saundra Morris. New York: Norton, 2001.

Ernst, Josef. *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation – Geschichte – Wirkungsgeschichte*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989.

Faber, Frederick William. "From 'The Eternal Word.'" *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*. Ed. D. H. S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1917; Bartleby.com, 2000. www.bartleby.com/236/. (April 25, 2009).

Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty! An American History*. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 2006.

Foster, Frances Smith. *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 46. Westport: Greenwood P, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. "The Order of Discourse." *Language and Politics*. Ed. Michael J. Shapiro. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984. 108-138.

Freedman, David Noel. "Between God and Man: Prophets in Ancient Israel." *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*. Ed. Yehoshua Gitay. Atlanta: Scholars P, 57-87.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2000.

---. *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1993.

Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust: Der Tragödie Erster und Zweiter Teil*. Kehl: Swan Buch, 1994.

Goldenberg, David M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

Gooch, Brad. *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.

Gordon, Sarah. *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination.* Athens: U of Georgia P, 2003.

Griffith, R. Marie, ed. *American Religions: A Documentary History.* New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

Grimshaw, James A., Jr. *The Flannery O'Connor Companion.* Westport: Greenwood, 1981.

Harper, Frances. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted.* New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Harris, Shanette M. "Constructing a Psychological Perspective: The Observer and the Observed in *The Souls of Black Folk.*" *The Souls of Black Folk: One Hundred Years Later.* Ed. Dolan Hubbard. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2003. 218-250.

Haynes, Stephen R. *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of the Spirit.* Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977.

Helbling, Mark. *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many.* Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 195. Westport: Greenwood P, 1999.

Hemenway, Robert E. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1970.

Hill, Lynda Marion. *Social Rituals and the Verbal Art of Zora Neale Hurston.* Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1996.

Hoffman-Jeep, Lynda. "Creating Ethnography: Zora Neale Hurston and Lydia Cabrera." *African American Review* 39.3 (2005): 337-353.

Holloway, Karla F. C. *The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston*. New York: Greenwood P, 1987.

---. "The Emergent Voice: The Word within Its Texts." *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 67-75.

Hughes, Langston. *The Langston Hughes Reader*. New York: George Braziller, 1958.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Dust Tracks on a Road*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.

---. *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1995.

---. *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.

---. *Moses, Man of the Mountain. Zora Neale Hurston: Novels and Stories*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Library of America, 1995. 335-595.

---. "The Race Cannot Become Great Until It Recognizes Its Talent." *Washington Tribune* 29 Dec. 1934: 3.

---. *The Sanctified Church*. Berkeley: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981.

---. *Their Eyes Were Watching God. Zora Neale Hurston: Novels and Stories*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New York: Library of America, 1995. 173-333.

---. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*. Ed. Carla Kaplan. New York: Doubleday, 2002.

Hutton, Rodney R. *Fortress Introduction to the Prophets*. Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2004.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981. 3 vols.

Jirousek, Lori: "'That Commonality of Feeling': Hurston, Hybridity, and Ethnography." *African American Review* 38.3 (2004): 417-427.

Johnson, James Weldon. "Preface to the Revised Edition." *The Book of American Negro Poetry: Revised Edition*. Ed. James Weldon Johnson. San Diego: Harvest Books, 1969. 3-7.

Jones, Gavin. *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.

Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity P, 1996.

Kanthak, John F. "Legacy of Dysfunction: Family Systems in Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.2 (2005): 113-129.

Karem, Jeff. "'I Could Never Really Leave the South': Regionalism and the Transformation of Richard Wright's American Hunger." *American Literary History* 13.4 (2001): 694-715.

Kawash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.

Konzett, Delia Caparoso. *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Kreyling, Michael. Introduction. *New Essays on Wise Blood*. Ed. Michael Kreyling. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 1-24.

Lake, Christina Bieber. *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2005.

Lee, Jarena. *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*. Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2008.

Leitch, Vincent B et al, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.

---. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. Glasgow: Fontana, 1976.

---. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 2001.

Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Madden, David. "Flannery O'Connor, Old Testament Storyteller." *Flannery O'Connor: In Celebration of Genius*. Ed. Sarah Gordon. Athens: Hill Street P, 2000. 79-85.

Martin, Karl. "The Prophetic Intent of O'Connor's 'The Displaced Person.'" *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 23 (1994-95): 137-157.

McGlamery, Tom. *Protest and the Body in Melville, Dos Passos, and Hurston*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

McKenna, Megan. *Prophets: Words of Fire*. Maryknoll, Orbis, 2001.

McMahon, Frank. "Rereading the Outsider: Double Consciousness and the Divided Self." *Mississippi Quarterly* 50.2 (1997): 289-305.

Meisenhelder, Susan Edwards. *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

Miles, Margaret R. *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought*. Malden: Blackwell, 2005.

Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*. New York: Alyson Books, 2006.

Moberly, R.W.L. *Prophecy and Discernment*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Mufwene, Salikoko S. "Ebonics and Standard English in the Classroom: Some Issues." *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*. 1999. http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mufwene/gurt99.html (March 12, 2005).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Götzen-Dämmerung oder wie Man mit dem Hammer Philosophiert. Friedrich Nietzsche Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 17. München: Musarion Verlag, 1920.

North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.

O'Collins, Gerald. *Incarnation*. London: Continuum, 2002.

O'Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: FSG, 1971.

---. *Flannery O'Connor: The Habit of Being*. Ed. Sally Fitzgerald. New York: FSG, 1979.

---. *Letters. Collected Works*. New York: The Library of America, 1988. 865-1220.

---. *Mystery and Manners*. Ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: FSG, 1969.

---. *The Violent Bear It Away*. New York: FSG, 1966.

---. *Wise Blood. 3 by Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Penguin, 1983. 3-120.

Paffenroth, Kim. *The Heart Set Free: Sin and Redemption in the Gospels, Augustine, Dante, and Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Phillips, Jerry. "Slave Narratives." *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. 45-57.

Pierce, Yolanda. *Hell without Fires: Slavery, Christianity, and the Antebellum Spiritual Narrative*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2005.

Porte, Joel. *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004.

Potts, Donald R. "Body." *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. David Noel Freedman.Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 194.

---. "Flesh." *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. David Noel Freedman.Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 464.

Prown, Katherine Hemple. *Revising Flannery O'Connor: Southern Literary Culture and the Problem of Female Authorship*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2001.

Punter, David. *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1998.

Rickford, John R. "The Creole Origins of African American Vernacular English: Evidence from Copula Absence." *African American English: Structure, History and Use*. Ed. Salikoko Mufwene, et al. London: Routledge, 1998. 154-200.

Savoy, Eric. "The Rise of American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 167-188.

Seitz, Christopher R. *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets*. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademics, 2007.

Shulman, George. *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

Sidnell, Jack. *African American Vernacular English (Ebonics)*. http://www.une.edu/langnet/aave.htm (Jan 23, 2005).

Smith, Carl B., II. *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004.

Smith, Ralph L. "Zechariah 13." *Word Biblical Commentary: Micah-Malachi*. 32. Dallas: Word, 2002.

Spina, Frank Anthony. *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Spivey, Ted R. *Flannery O'Connor: The Woman, the Thinker, the Visionary*. Macon: Mercer UP, 1995.

Srigley, Susan. *Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Art*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2004.

Stark, Rodney. The *Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or Life Among the Lowly*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

Sundquist, Eric J. "'The Drum with the Man Skin': *Jonah's Gourd Vine.*" *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 39-66.

Swinburne, Richard. *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Thomas, Brook, ed. *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997.

Thompson, Gordon E. "Projecting Gender: Personification in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston." *Zora Neale Hurston: New Edition*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: BLC, 2008. 65-88.

Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. San Francisco: Harper, 1961.

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Ed. Walter Blair and Victor Fischer. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Wagner, Jean. *Black Poets of the United States: From Paul Laurence Dunbar to Langston Hughes*. Trans. Kenneth Douglas. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1973.

Walker, Alice. Dedication. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: Feminist P, 1979. 1-5.

Wallace, Margaret. "The *New York Times Book Review*, May 6, 1934." *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 8-9.

Washington, Mary Helen. Introduction. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: Feminist P, 1979. 7-25.

Weathers, Glenda B. "Biblical Trees, Biblical Deliverance: Literary Landscapes of Zora Hurston and Toni Morrison." *African American Review* 39.1/2 (2005): 201-212.

Weaver, Raymond. Introduction. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or Life Among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. New York: Modern Library, 1948. vii-xx.

West, Genevieve M. *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2005.

Wideman, John Edgar. Foreword. *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States*. Ed. Carla Kaplan. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. xi-xxxi.

Williams, Roland L., Jr. *African American Autobiography and the Quest for Freedom*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 191. Westport: Greenwood P, 2000.

Wilson, Anthony. "The Music of God, Man, and Beast: Spirituality and Modernity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*." *Southern Literary Journal* 35.2 (2003): 64-78.

Wood, Ralph C. *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

---. "Flannery O'Connor's Racial Morals and Manners." *Christian Century* 16 Nov. 1994: 1-8. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_n33_v111/ ai_15969380/. (2 June 2007).

Wright, Melanie J. *Moses in America: The Cultural Use of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Wright, Richard. "Between Laughter and Tears [Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*]." *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. New York: Hall, 1998. 75-76.

Yuval-Davis, Nira et. al., eds. *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. London: Sage, 2006.

Appendix A

Phonological features of AAVE include the omission of the postvocalic *r*, for example in *sister* as *sistuh*; the deletion of the final consonant in consonant clusters, for example in *fast* as *fas*; the substitution of the voiced *th* sound in the initial-word position for a *d* sound, for example *they* as *dey*; or, the substitution of the voiceless *th* sound in mid-word position, for example *nothing* as *nufn* (Sidnell 4). Dealing with literature, phonological features are especially interesting because written language does not usually reflect its own pronunciation. When words are transcribed phonologically – for example in the realist fiction of the mid- to late nineteenth century–, this is usually done to create a specific effect. To the present-day reader, it easily appears to underline the "otherness" of AAVE because it ignores the gap between writing and speech.

Aspects of syntax on the other hand, are extremely significant in the analysis of literary texts written in AAVE. A very noticeable feature is the copula absence. Speakers of AAVE delete the copula (the conjugated form of the verb *to be*) in certain syntactical contexts where speakers of MUSE use it. Copula absence in AAVE depends on the type of sentence. It appears, for example, in sentences of the future that use *gon* or *gonna* (*If the sun is shining, we __ gon go to the pool*); before the progressive (*he __ smiling at me*); before adjectives (*they __ sad*); and before nouns and noun phrases, as in (*he __ the guy who wrote that poem*) (Sidnell 5). Another salient grammatical feature of AAVE is the absence of the third person singular *s*, for example in *she nice.* If a speaker of AAVE does add the *s*, this is done with special emphasis. MUSE "also has agreement in a number of

irregular and frequently used verbs such as *has* vs *have* and *is* vs *are* and *was* vs *were*. In AAVE these distinctions are not always made" (Sidnell 5).

In AAVE, the tenses are marked differently from MUSE. To express past events, AAVE sometimes simply uses the past participle preceded by *been*, for example *she been hit by her husband*, implying that she is still being hit, which should not be confused with MUSE present perfect, as in *she has been hit by her husband*, implying that she is no longer being hit. To express the notion that an event or action is over in AAVE, its speakers place *done* before the infinitive of the verb, as in *she done read the book*, which is equivalent to MUSE perfect: *she has read the book*. Events that lie in the future can be expressed with *gon* or *gonna*. Events that are in progress are usually marked by *ing*, yet there are a couple of other possibilities for speakers of AAVE to express an ongoing event, like the word *steady*, or, most notably, the usage of *be*, to express a habit, as in *they be running every morning* (Sidnell 5). Negation in AAVE is also handled differently than in other varieties of English. Different from MUSE, but in accordance with many non-mainstream dialects of English, AAVE substitutes *ain't* for *haven't*. However, AAVE also uses *ain't* instead of *didn't*, for example in *I ain't call you yesterday*. Multiple negation, for example *I ain't seen no dog*, is also possible in AAVE (Sidnell 5). Furthermore, AAVE is characterized by elliptical sentences, grammatical constructs that often leave out the subject or other parts of the sentence.