CHAPTER – II
The sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a dirty deal. Black lives are only defensive reactions to white actions.

Zora Neale Hurston

I was curious to know why people in families especially black families are often cruel to each other and how much of this cruelty is caused by outside forces such as various social injustices, segregation, unemployment, etc.

Alice Walker

Both Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker gave much value to the African American culture as they essentially concentrated folks of the community in their writings. Awareness of being black is the most powerful and the most fertile single inspiration for these writers. They took interest in issues like painting about realism among blacks with lighter and darker skin groups, painting the black community in poor form and using the traditional southern black phonetic dialect.

More than any other black author at work today, Walker has concerned about grounding her work in a matrilineal tradition of black writing, paying particular homage to the exuberant imagination of Zora Neale Hurston. It was Walker who located Hurston’s resting place and set a monument there. And it was Walker who, more than anyone except her biographer, Robert Hemenway, resurrected Hurston’s work and reputation from the burial grounds of obscurity. Walker’s patient work established Hurston at the structural center of a tradition of African American women’s writing, and indeed, within a larger tradition of black letters, as a counterpoint to the naturalist art of Richard Write. Walker thus, gave important to Hurston by following her themes in her novels.

As they share common bond, even similarities can be understood in their novels, out of which *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, by Zora Neale Hurston and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* are analyzed. A serious study finds resemblance in various aspects i.e. father-son relation, the impact of slavery and poverty, husband-wife relation, women’s responsibility, and moving in search of fortunate from south to north.
Jonah’s Gourd Vine (1934) is Hurston’s “story about a man.” The idea for the novel had come to her in 1929, while she was doing research in black folklore. This is about the “Race Problem,” a popular and timely subject during the 1930s:

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. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. Circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes (Dust Tracks on a Road. 214).

The main tension of the novel is caused by John’s attempts to live the life Hurston outlines. John Buddy Pearson, an illegitimate child born during slavery which impacted the lives of black people, lives on the wrong side of the creek with his mother and stepfather, Amy and Ned Crittenden, in Alabama after Emancipation. When he and his stepfather have irreconcilable differences it causes in his personal life an unusual behaviour as to Brownfield, by his father Grange Copeland in Third Life of Grange Copeland (Walker, 6),

In my immediate family too there was violence. Its roots seemed always to be embedded in my father’s need to dominate my mother and their children and in her resistance and verbal and physical, to any such domination.

Here Brownfield reveals that “his father almost never spoke to him unless they had company” and feels that as if he was a strain and burden to his father. His mother is an obedient housewife who like a dog, shows her submission to his father. African Americans previously faced as sharecroppers, discrimination and domination which reflected in their homes. Grange and Ned neglect their families and behaved with wife and children inhumanly due to psychological upset caused by white men. As Lawrence comments, the white man becomes a symbol of black man’s oppression; a black man becomes a symbol of the black women’s oppression (Lawrence Hogue, 4).

John seeks work at his mother’s former home, the Pearson plantation on the other side of the creek. While living there, he discovers his unusual susceptibility to
the charms of women. He actually loves only Lucy Potts, the smartest girl in his class at school but later he continues to venture from one affair to another which even Lucy cannot control his promiscuity. Soon, to escape imprisonment for stealing a hog and for attacking Lucy’s brother, John is forced to leave town. So he wanders south to Eatonville, Florida, where his carpentry and ministry earn him a position of respect. Though he comes to high position, he cannot curb his sexual urges. After Lucy’s death, he again marries Hattie Tyson who knows hoodoo and later to a wealthy women but he becomes blind with the guilty of prostitution and he drives his car into the path of an oncoming train and is immediately killed.

John Pearson is essentially a man in conflict with himself and with society. The direction of the story is determined by his insatiable desire for the flesh of women and the tension that exists between that desire and his desire for the ministry and the Word of God. The tension is essentially between the spiritual and the physical, between a man of God and the temptations of the world or the evil. On a literal level, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* concerns one man’s search for spiritual equilibrium. On a broader level, however, John Pearson is a universal symbol for every man who seeks a balance between irreconcilable opposites. The theme of the novel is man’s search for spiritual equilibrium; man’s search for peace within himself so explores these attitudes and attempts to reconcile them.

Through the course of the novel, Jonah’s spirituality encounters two major disruptive forces, each emblematic of modernity’s challenges to traditional African American spirituality; first, the mingling of African religion with Lucy’s orthodox Christianity, which imposes strictures on Jonah’s sexuality and subjectivity even as it empowers him and makes him a man; and second, the encroachment of the outside world, the enabling of travel and the destruction of community embodied in the symbol of the train. Each new force calls a new kind of understanding: John finds himself compelled to learn language to express his new spirituality as his newly Christian God moves from the physical and natural world around him into the rarefied and hither to inaccessible realm of words. Further, as he encounters the fascinating, terrifying train for the first time, John must decipher the language he insists lies beneath the impersonal clamour the other men hear: “Naw, it some words too. Ahm comin’ heah plenty mo’ times and den Ah tell yuh whut it say.” Each new force is its
own distinct intellectual challenge each demands a new form of understanding and the mastery of a new language.

For Hurston, though, ever a proponent of an almost primivistic “Pure art” of the folk against the politicized “propaganda” of Locke, DuBois and the new Negro (Hemenway, 38), the “Progress” of modernist philosophical and intellectual understanding was always deeply suspect, representing at least as much loss as gain to African American culture, Identity, spirituality and true self – expression. In his efforts to master the cognitive understanding necessary to assert him in a world he is initially ill–equipped to understand, John Pearson sacrifices a kind of prelapsarian intuitive wholeness, an idealized and ultimately unsustainable marriage of nature and self generated language, of instinct and intellect. The protagonist of Hurston’s first novel embodies the dilemma in joining the inevitable struggle to master his world John Pearson loses his essential sanctity the intuitive wholeness that Hurston presents as true divinity shatters, enacting Hurston’s vision of a culturally specific “death of God.

Hurston presents each element of John’s spiritual self – African religion, new Christianity and the disruptive train in the context of its own unique type of music. It may be suggested that the following formulation fits the logic of the novel and serves as a valuable system in understanding John’s spiritual evolution (or devolution). The drum – based music of John’s original community, the music that expresses John’s most intuitive and uncomplicated connection with the divine, the music which Hurston describes as speaking to gods as a man and to men as a God”, becomes the “music of God”. Lucy’s music and the religion it represents filter intuitive spiritual knowledge through words, and become the “music of man” in this schema. The music of the train becomes the music of “the beast”: it is the universal symbol of modernity that bears John away from his community, enables his betrayals of Lucy and robs him of his very humanity as he surrenders to the urges of “De Beast” within him. The train comes to signify John’s newly demonized physical self; the aspect of his being that he cannot reconcile with the language driven religion that Lucy represents the natural physicality that morally exiled from John’s language-based spirituality becomes transformed into adulterous urges and destructive carnality. Thus contextualized, a study of each of these stages in John’s development provides an intriguing perspective on the manner in John’s development provides an intriguing perspective on the
manner in which modernity’s encroachment threatens spiritual community, as well as the subjectivity and agency it provides.

At the beginning of novel John lives in a community sequestered from modernity and change by an intervening creek. Hurston’s depiction of John’s early community is too complex for the Edenic imagery she weaves through her narrative to be completely effective: the heavy legacy of slavery and Ned’s resentment and abuse mitigate against the easy formulation of John as African American Adam exiled from the Garden. Rather Hurston presents this community in an ambivalent manner that reflects both the residual African proximity to natural divinity and the lingering specter of slavery. John embodies this dual characterization profoundly physical, powerful and beautiful, he is marked by a light colouration that attests to his plantation owner father and leads the cruel and resentful Ned to designate him a “Yaller god”. Though such a formulation has become cliché, John is a conscious and active participant in the music of nature before he crosses over into the modern world.

John plunged on down to the creek, singing a new song and stomping the beats. The big creek thundered among its rocks and whirled on down so John sat on the foot – log and made some words to go with the drums of the creek. Things walked in the birch – woods creep creep creep. The hound dog’s lyric crescendo lifted over and above the tree tops (12).

John’s subjectivity, as envious in his rebellion against Ned’s cruelty and his satisfaction in solitude is more secure and uncomplicated before he enters the creek than at any other point in the novel. Though he will later puzzle over the words of train, agonize over his inadequate vocabulary in wooing Lucy, and disavow any personal responsibility in speaking as God’s conduit from the alter, John himself consciously makes his own words to accompany the creek’s drum.

The easy coexistence of John’s linguistic self – expression and the natural, physical world around him at this stage in his development is essential to understanding the relationship between language and spirituality that Hurston posits in John’s initial community. John’s return to his mother Amy and to the rest of his family after their initial separation occasions Hurston’s stunning evocation of traditional African survivals in African American culture embodied in the music of the drum: “the voice of kata – kumba, the great drum, lifted itself within them and
they heard it. The great drum is made by priests and sits in majesty in the juju house. The drum with the man skin that is dressed with human blood, is beaten with a human shin–bone and speaks to gods as a man and to men as a God” (29). Here, Hurston strongly asserts a link between John’s early plantation community and the spiritual community of an African tribe. In *The Power of Black Music* Samuel Floyd interprets a strikingly similar ceremony and explains it significance to African religious tradition: “Dance, drum and song was inseparable from the traditional communities in which it existed-communities in which social and cultural conformity and egalitarianism prevailed in which the failure to live up to one’s social obligations was interpreted as hostility toward the community” (33).

In the context of *John’s Gourd Vine*, dance, drum and song are important not only in their role in the cohesion of John’s initial traditional community, but in their inherent eroticism as well. The sacred music that the community creates celebrates the physical; it comes directly from their bodies with no intermediary instruments or other artifacts interposed between the worshipper and prayer: “They called for the instrument they had brought to America in their skins – the drum – and they played upon it” (29). As Floyd writes, “African song in general is erotic because fertility and sexual prowess are central values in African life; African dances are designed to educate boys and girls for their adult sexual roles in a polygynous world”(27). Further, Floyd points out that, although African communities have a vivid and complex idea of the afterlife, “salvation and redemption are not part of the African Religious conception” (18). The idea of sin particularly sexual sin being a discrete, predefined act is alien to African Religion as Floyd describes it. At this stage, then, John’s theology carries with it no conception of adulterous sin. His sexuality is central, not antithetical, to his identity and membership in the community. John’s youthful lack of any idea of sexuality as sinful becomes clearest late in the novel, as a shamed, fallen John ruefully says to Hambone, “Don’t it look funny, dat all mah ole pleasures done got tuh be new sins?.. Havin’ women didn’t useter be no sin. Jus’ got sinful since Ah got ole” (169). Sin becomes a function of John’s distance from the community of his youth. This youthful prelapsarian spiritual stage, characterized by dance, drum and song the “music of God”, finds John at his most powerful self-assured and innocent.
When John reaches the far side of the creek and encounters Lucy, a crucial and ultimately tragic bifurcation begins in his understanding of his physical and spiritual selves. John’s relationship with Lucy signifies the onset of the second stage in his spiritual development. Despite her abiding religious faith, Lucy in many ways signifies modernity. Hurston aligns her early on with education and financial success and at their first meeting she shames John for the apparent backwardness of the life he has led: “He felt ashamed of his bare feet for the first time in his life. How was he to know that there were coloured folks that went around with their feet cramped up like white folks?”(14) Shoes become an important signifier in Hurston’s heavily biblical symbology: John’s community over the creek, where people go unshod, resonates with biblical descriptions of hallowed ground while John’s arrival on the far side of the creek indicates a removal from an inherently sanctified space. Further, with John’s first encounter with Lucy comes his first discomfort with his own body – in this new world, the body becomes something to conceal and to contain. His association of this new world, the body becomes something to conceal and to contain. His association of this behaviour with “white folks” indicates its separation from the cultural practices John knows and follows – in her disdain Lucy interposes herself between John and his body and between john and his culture. The “yaller god” that Hurston presents in the novel’s first chapter will soon understand him self as an uneasy and irreconcilable mixture of man and beast.

Although Lucy becomes in one sense the catalyst for John’s dissolution, Hurston certainly does not condemn her. Admittedly in later essays Hurston endorses more purely African and Afro – Caribbean forms of spirituality over the artificial overlay of Christianity that occludes them in African American society; but John’s Gourd Vine’s autobiographical dimension complicates its theological dimension. Loyalty to her mother may keep Hurston from a wholehearted endorsement of old religion over new: in his literately biography of Hurston, Robert Hemenway relates that, on her deathbed, Hurston’s mother requested that no one perform the traditional rituals that accompanied death in her community taking the pillow from under her head and covering the mirror and hourglass with cloth.

However, ignoring the nine year old Zora’s demands that they stop, the elders carried out the ritual: “Her father held her and despite her protests the mourners softened dying by removing the pillow and turning the bed to the East (so it would not
be cross ways of the world), while the hooded clock and mirror preserved the good fortune of the household” (16). In spite of her own developing theories of theology and spirituality, Hurston’s maternal loyalty produces a more complex relationship between African tradition and Christianity in her first novel than she, in later days, could be expected to endorse. Further, Lucy’s status as essentially faultless martyr only underscores the mechanistic, fatalistic vision of John’s moral and actual destruction that Hurston creates: the “World historical forces” are at work, and the individual has little power to resist them.

Early on, Hurston conflates John’s relationship with Lucy and his relationship with the church and hence with a new vision of the spiritual. They develop their relationship in church singing in the choir and passing surreptitious notes in their hymnals. Well before their marriage, John realizes that his love for Lucy, occupies a spiritual plane far removed from his dalliances with other women as he tells Mehaley. “Ah tastes her wid mah sould, but if Ah didn’t take holt uh you ah’d might soon fuhgit al about you” (81). With Lucy, John develops a sense of love detached from the physical and thus a sense of the Christian duality of body and soul that comes to torment him.

Lucy’s religion and its accompanying music stand in sharp contrast to the African Christian Community of the far side of the creek. It is a religion of texts and lyrics rather than of rhythms and physical exultation. John hears of Lucy’s musicality early on: “Her brother leads de choir at Macedony Baptis’ Church, an’ she trebles right ‘long wid dem grown women and kin sing all de notes de square ones de round ones de triangles” (27). Hurston’s descriptions of Lucy’s singing emphasize that she trebles her notes; combined with her often reiterated facility with words this fact indicates a marked distinction between her music and the religious music of John’s initial community. John’s plantation community makes music that is all drums and rhythm. Its lyrics are wholly subordinate to the transcendent rhythms that invoke an intuitive connection to community and to deity. Lucy’s music however, is treble rather than bass, and centers on words and notes rather than on rhythms. In Lucy, John finds himself introduced to his second form of spiritual music: the music of man. In hopes of winning her, he attacks his lessons with vigour, and commits himself to learning the art of speech: “He kept on making imaginary speeches to her. Speeches full of big words that would make her gasp and do him “reverence” (33).
For all the romantic significance that John’s speech takes on, Lucy makes it very clear that language for her must have nothing to do with the erotic. Even a faint suggestion of impropriety in John’s speech draws her disapproval:

“Don’t you do nothin’ but warm a chair bottom?” Lucy drew away quickly. “Oooh, John Buddy! You are talkin’ nasty.” John in turn was in confusion. “Whuss nasty?” “You didn’t hafta say ‘bottom.’” John shriveled up inside. He had intended to recite the rhymes to Lucy that the girls on the plantation had thought sowitty, but he realized that – some love collards, some love kale. But I loves uh gal wid uh short skirt tail would drive Lucy from him in disgust. (68)

Lucy and her Christian religion seem to have little use for the erotic or even the physical. In trying to please her, John begins the profound separation of the physical and linguistic, intellectual and spiritual aspects of himself. For Hurston, this division will become the central tragedy of his life, as the physical, quarantined from all that John considers good and sacred, will devolve in to the sum total of his inassimilable sexual urges: “de brute beast in me.”

John Lowe claims that Lucy “becomes a mother figure for John gives him detailed instructions, on how to handle his ministry, and in her loving forgiveness of his sins simultaneously creates a never ending source of quit it” (87). Lowe thus touches on the central paradox of Lucy’s relationship to John’s subjectivity. Lucy and her form of spirituality stand at a transitional point in the novel’s overarching scheme of encroaching modernity. Figured as a signifier of spiritual as well as earthly community, of spiritual as well as sexual union, Lucy empowers John in spheres, cementing and safe guarding his identity and masculinity while simultaneously compromising his agency. Lucy claims that all she seeks to do is to make John a man. “Good Lawd, John dat’s all justice been beggin’ righteous to do be uh man. Cover de ground you stand on” (95). Lucy’s connection of John’s essential manhood with the idea that he “covers the ground he stands on” lends a rootedness and stability to the term, thus placing this identity in direct conflict with the impermanence and uncertainty of modern selfhood.
Delores Williams underscores Lucy’s status as John’s bulwark by appropriating the novel’s title metaphor: “Like the ground vine Lucy is the shield for John’s irregular actions and she saves him from the discomfort of having to answer to the church for his profligate conduct” (95). Throughout the novel, John is characterized either with praise or sneers as a “wife made man,” thus reinforcing the idea that John owes his very identity to Lucy’s intervention. Though John may have been a “yallergod” through his own essential merits in his old world, he requires Lucy’s help to become a man in his new one as Mem tries to keep Brownfield in a respectable position by joining in a factory instead of working as sharecropper when he forces her to move to another white man’s farm.

John owes his power as preacher to Lucy, as well. Hurston prefigures Lucy’s enabling John to find his voice during John’s proposal, as he begs her to “kiss me and loose me so ah kin talk” (76). Lucy becomes John’s muse, granting him access to a new sphere of spirituality that blends with the old. John’s sermons, intensely rhythmic and lyrical, represent not so much a transition from the “music of god” to the “music of man” as a divinely inspired marriage of the two evoking John’s own marriage to Lucy: as Eric sundquist puts it “the primordial energy of hammer and drum have.. moved into John’s voice, where the sermonic form, with its own incorporation of the rhythms of the work song, carried from the middle passage through slavery and beyond, transfigures the intricate dexterity of song into verbal performance”(75).

John’s ability to preach constitutes his link both to community and to personal power. Time after time, as his sins threaten to bring him exile, his sermons, preached by Lucy’s advice, cause the community to rally behind him and his deacons to bear him up. As soon as he leaves the pulpit after his crowing sermon, John finds him self deserted. Separated from spiritual community, John is lost. His existential doubts encapsulate the central dilemmas of western modernity: “May be nothin’ ain’t real sho’ nuff. Maybe tain’t no world. No elements no nothin’. May be we’re jus’ somewhere in God’s mind” (187). John comes to rely upon Lucy and the church to such an extent that the nature to which he was once so unquestionably attuned becomes a mirage in their absence. Only when he returns to the church does John feel “lack Samson when his hair begin tuh grow out again” (189).
Even as Lucy empowers John, like Mem her husband, Brownfield (*Third Life of Grange Copeland*) who expresses an interest to read and write and she offers to teach him. When school begins in the fall, she takes him along with her class. It is from her that Brownfield learns to read and write his own name. Lucy threatens his agency by alienating his spiritual self from his physical body. Lucy’s church community, in contrast to John’s plantation community, lives by a more restrictive set of values that target and demonize sexual expression. Just as it made him ashamed of his bare feet upon first crossing over the creek, Lucy’s community singles out and condemns another seemingly natural element of John’s self: his sexuality. John comes to understand sexual sin through Lucy; as John Lowe says, “his infidelity in some way seems a rebellion against both Lucy’s authority and her charity which forms an analogue with that of the church he serves” (88).

Further, through Lucy empowers John to preach and thus brings about his greatest moments of triumph, John feels an acute separation between the man who speaks so powerfully from the pulpit and his true self, his speech is something outside himself that he channels and disseminates but does not truly own: “When Ah speak tuh yuh from this pulpit, dat ain’t me talkin’, dat’s de voice uh God speakin’ thru me. When de voice is thew, Ah jus’ uhnother one uh God’s crumblin’ clods… Ahm uh natchel man but look lak some uh y’all is dumb tuh de fack”(122). The preacher cannot be a “natchel man”: in Lucy’s church, sanctity and nature must remain mutually exclusive.

The division between John’s sermons and the truth of his character echoes an aspect of modernism that Berman describes as connected chiefly with theorists like Roland Barthes and artists like Clement Greenberg. The idea of the work of art as autotelic, removed from modern life: “Modernism thus appeared as a great attempt to free modern artists from the impurities, the vulgarities of modern life” (30). Indeed John reveals an acute consciousness that his linguistic creation is profoundly removed from his status as a “natchel man”: sacred speech has little to do with base action, and for all Lucy’s efforts, John’s preaching cannot effect the change in his behaviour she so earnestly desires. This moment then, clearly reveals the sharp division in John’s self that his immersion in the modern world has wrought: the linguistic John and the physical John exist on separate and irreconcilable planes.
John’s feelings immediately following Lucy’s death underscore the connection between Lucy and the church, and thus between his spiritual self and his physical self. He feels freed from any religious guilt his sexual trysts might have carried: “There was no more sin, just a free man having his will of women” (136). Hence, John’s allegiance to or betrayal of Lucy signifies an allegiance to or betrayal of the church. Alan Brown’s understanding of John is instructive here: “Like many black males at this time, John is a tragic figure in the Greek sense of the term” (79). Brown’s evocation of a classical model figures John as an inherently good man marked by the central flaw of promiscuity and lust his sexuality becomes the one element that mars his connection with Lucy and her new Christian God. In a manner consistent with the classical model, John’s flaw grows, as does Oedipus’s, out of the very part of his character that once made him “great” the nature, bodily power that designates him as a “yaller god”.

The connection of sex and sin, running counter to John’s natural and acculturated impulses, becomes Lucy’s greatest threat to John’s sense of agency. Figured as counter to the “man making” impulse of Lucy and her church, John’s sexuality paradoxically becomes something removed from his subjective manhood. As he discusses his infidelities with Lucy early in their relationship, John characterizes his adulterous urges not as conscious rebellious assertions of agency but as manifestations of what he calls “de brute beast in me”. John’s and Alf Pearson’s repeated conflation of John’s sexual appetites with “de beast’ links infidelity with inhumanity. As Lowe puts it, “his sexual exploits do little more than enable him to ‘keep up with the pigs’ and other animals in gargantuan sexual appetite” (115).

The train provides the most explicit link between John’s sexuality and an animalistic lack of control. Introduced as an aural presence, the train produces music freighted with dual significance. “Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika – black – and dirty, Opelika – black – and – dirty!”(41). As John’s apprehension of its music implies, the train plays a double role in the novel’s symbology: it signifies both sexuality and phallic power and the encroachment of technological modernity and its attendant threats to community and self. John’s time working on the railroad underscores the fundamental sexuality of the train’s music. Hurston describes this period in John’s life in a way that curiously echoes her descriptions of his early community, with its intense physicality and eroticized
rhythms: “All day long it was strain, sweat and rhythm” (105). However, John’s new religion allies sexuality not with community and self-expression, but with uncontrollable, bestial desire.

The connection between the songs and the clearly sexual act of driving home spikes presents another form of sexual music connected to the train a variant of the music of “De Beast”. Lucy’s religion as an intermediate steps is key to my formulation of the train’s cacophonous music as the “music of the beast”. For John, sexuality becomes equated with the bestial and inhuman only through the intervention of Lucy’s Christianity. The train, both symbol and enabler of John’s driving sexuality becomes a signifier of his hamartia, or tragic flaw, after he accepts Lucy’s value system and it is thus directly opposed to his place is his new spiritual community. The train’s ominous refrain, “Wolf coming! Wolf coming!,” Presages its role in John’s developing, bestial sexuality. In one notable instance, John’s flight on the train is presented as a movement, “away from God” as Lucy remains alone by their sick child’s bed. Removed from the familial sphere, John succumbs to his adulterous urges: “He was gutted with grief, but when Hattie Tyson found out his whereabouts and joined him, he suffered it” (117).

The intensely modern music of the train suggests the most notable form of African American music of the modern era: Jazz. Noted playwright and jazz critic LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) comments on the limitations of musicological analysis of jazz in a way that illuminates John’s folly in attempting to understand the train’s music in the form of language: “Not only are the various Jazz effects almost impossible to notate, but each note means something quite in adjunct to musical notation……The notes means something; and the something is regardless of its stylistic considerations, part of the black psyche as it dictates the various forms of Negro culture”(15). The music of the train may well “mean something”, but even as Jazz cannot be captured in the language of musical notation, the cultural meaning of the physicality embodied in the train eludes John’s attempts to grasp it linguistically. John can hear only ominous warnings of the bestial, and evocations of filth. The train becomes the signifier of a transformed physicality, the transformed deformed, to alter Byron: its intense physicality is no longer intelligible as part and parcel of African American culture, but is degraded in John’s modernized mind until it speaks only of lust and betrayal.
The train’s bestial music not only represents an enabling of John’s sinful indulgence, but a general threat to spiritual community as the novel’s most direct signifier of encroaching modernity. Emerging from the luminal space and symbolic baptism of the river, John regards the monstrous train, whose “very sides seemed to expand like a fiery lunged monster” (16), with a mixture of fear and administration:”. Hit sho look frightenin’…but hits pretty thing too” (17). The threat of the train and of the new world it symbolizes to John’s spiritual selfhood becomes clear before John’s first train ride as he characterizes the machine in divine terms. “He marveled that just any body could come along and be allowed to get on such a glorified thing …. The greatest accumulation of power he had ever seen” (104). The train becomes God’s rival – the tangible embodiment of unbelievable power as well as serpentine sexual temptation.

The train’s threat to the larger community resonates throughout Hurston’s novel. Hurston makes that, in large part due to its trouble some connection with a fallen eroticism of industrialization, the train menaces both of John’s religious communities. Trains decorate the fancy new hymnals in the slowly dissolving Christian church. Amy, upon regarding the train, “stands trembling between her son and husband” as the train tempts her children away from her: “Their whole talk was ‘over de Creek;’ and ‘Man when us get on dat ole train’” (44). The train threatens all tradition, threatens both communities autonomy and cohesion. Ultimately, it signifies modernity’s disruption of any spiritual order, whether African, Christian or anything between.

The train’s music represents the final stage in John’s spiritual trajectory. This “music of the beast” draws him away from the church, subjectivity and man hood and eventually becomes his physical as well as spiritual executioner. Ultimately, John’s death by the train can be figured in a loose appropriation of Dupre’s phrase, as the final death of the “yaller god,” the killer of the spiritual man by the inevitable engine of progress. Still, Hurston’s use of the train at the novels end remains too complex to be accurately characterized by such a seemingly simplistic and primitivist symbolic statement. Like Jazz, the music of the train is poly rhythmic and multivalent. John’s final, stunning sermon attests to the essential bifurcation of his spiritual and physical selves brought about by his enactment of Berman’s dialectical struggle to meet the impersonal forces of modernization with intellectual and linguistic ways of
understanding, and powerfully expresses his yearning for reconciliation. In his
sermon John presents not only the damnation train, the “iron monster on de rail,”
alogous to lustful blood flowing through sinful veins, but another “Train of time”
Christ’s chariot, that will meet the other at the time of apocalypse:

For in dat mor-ornin”; ha! When we shall all be
delegates, ha! To dat judgment Convention When do
two trains of Time shall meet on de trestle And wreck
de burring axles of de unformed ether And de
mountains shall skip like lambs When Jesus shall place
one foot on de neck of sea, ha! One foot on dry land, ah
When his chariot wheels shall be running sub-deep in
fire He shall take his friends thru the open bosom of an
unclouded sky (181).

Thus, John’s vision of the ultimate salvation is a vision of unity, of a meeting
of the two trains of the sacred and profane. In a sense, the restoration of the sanctified
body and spirit are split by the modern world, and asunder in him. As uplifting and
powerful as John’s sermon is, it also carries a note of futility that bears Hurston’s
ultimate comment on humanity’s fate in the face of modernity’s fragmenting forces.
The unity lost as Hurston’s prelapsarian African community dissolves can only be
restored after death, by powers beyond human comprehension. In this world John can
only ride the damnation train to its violent conclusion.

Late in the novel, Hurston diverges from her central narrative to set aside a
discrete chapter devoted entirely to an impressionistic rendering of modernity’s
effects on southern African Americans. She foregrounds her image with a deistic
characterization of a world whose progress is very similar to that of a locomotive:
“The Lord of the wheel that turns on itself slept, but the world kept spinning, and the
troubled years sped on”(141). With the train comes an impulse to the younger
members of John’s church to travel north, to abandon the southern spiritual
community:” And black men’s feet learned roads…… the wind said North. Trains
said north. The tides and tongues said North and men moved like great herds before
the glaciers” (148). While Hurston clearly recognizes that progress, as embodied in
the train and played out in the Great Migration, has filed John’s and Lucy’s world
with far more possibilities than Ned and Amy enjoyed, her complex pastoral remains ambivalent, Earlier, Hurston has hinted at a tension between political progress for African Americans in the South and the sanctified community embodied in the church. When presented by the Politically Progressive preacher, Reverend Cozy, who defines himself as “a race man,” two of the elder women sit unconvinced, passing judgment with the simple condemnatory phrase, “Ah ain’t heard whut de tex’ wuz”(158). If sacred words are the” man – making” instruments of the church, the elder women’s dismissal of Cozy’s speech as a lecture rather than a sermon attests to the inadequacy of political speech in building their paradigm of spiritual manhood. The final effect of political progress and the new migration is troublingly clear in Hambone’s lament near the chapter’s close that the church “done lost two hund’ed members in three months”(149). Hurston’s characterization of the travelers as “great herds” underscores their distance from the “man – making” institution of the church: with progress and possibility comes an implicit loss of spirituality and thus humanity.

Throughout the novel, Hurston laments the inevitability of division, on both personal and communal levels. Modernization, to her, means that self and community must dissolve, and despite the ideals of many of her modernist contemporaries, the dissolution cannot be countered through visions and ideas. Marshall Berman encapsulates the central dilemma of modernity in a way that resonates with Hurston’s account of John and his community: “Modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe” (15). Hurston’s largely neglected first novel dissects this unity of disunity in human terms, and shows that ultimately, though the train may lead to salvation or damnation, it must always lead to a death.

Out of them is *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Her major concern in this novel is man-woman relationship. In an interview, Alice Walker has stated about her aim behind writing this novel:

And I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity, why women are so easily “tramps” and “traitors” when men are heroes for engaging
in the same activity? Why do women stand for this? (John O’Brien, 197).

The plot of Alice Walker’s first novel, *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, exposes the pattern of terror over a span of sixty years in the lives of one black family of sharecroppers. It describes sharecropping as an efficient system of exploitation by manipulation of debt and wage cutting. In a satiric vein, Robert Coles comments on how slavery affects Grange through this system:

Equally vivid is Grange Copeland, who is more than a representative of George’s black field hands, more than someone scarred by what has been called “the mark of oppression”( 157). Grange Copeland abuses and beats his wife, Margaret, and neglects his son, Brownfield like Ned, John’s stepfather, in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* who uses to beat his wife. Ned “uncoiled the whip and standing tiptoe to give himself more force, brought the whip down across Amy’s back”(22) , because Grange feels himself less than a man in a land where his entire life is indebted to the white boss. As he grows older, he feels trapped by his family, for they hold him to this life. Increasingly he feels guilty because he can neither protect his wife from the white hairy arms of Shipley nor make possible a better life for his son. As he drinks solace from the overflowing breasts and bar of Josie, the local whore, Margaret takes on lovers, reacting to Grange’s abuse by abusing herself. When her husband leaves his life of indebtedness for the North, Margaret poisons herself and her young, illegitimate baby.

Deserted by his parents, Brownfield, a young man of sixteen, follows his father’s path only to end up working for and sleeping with Josie, which is very similar to John’s life in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* who runs after different women for his physical lust. While Brownfield is employed at the Dew Drop Inn, Brownfield meets and falls in love with Mem, Josie’s schoolteacher niece. In love and passion they marry-only to repeat the pattern of depression and abuse Grange and Margaret had already drawn. In spite of Mem’s efforts to better her life and the lives of her daughters, Brownfield drags her down. Feeling less than a man, he, too, buries himself in Josie only to lose even her to the father that deserted him.

The pieces, slightly rearranged, remain essentially the same, Walker graphically, tells the story of Brownfield and Mem’s deterioration. In revenge for his father’s rejection, Brownfield kills his newborn albino son, a white baby that looks
like his father. In a moment of terrible strength, Mem threatens her husband with a
gun and tears his defenses apart. In a clear drunken stupor, after years of mangling
guilt and self-hatred, Brownfield murders Mem, leaving his own children, as his
father had done before him, to fend for themselves. Here Brownfield doesn’t consider
his wife, Mem’s efforts but neglects with his male domination feeling which can be
observed even in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, to John who doesn’t recognize his wife, Lucy’s
importance in his survival until after she is dead.

Grange, who has returned from the North, takes on the responsibility of raising
Ruth, his youngest grandchild, with the same vigor that he had shunned the
responsibility of raising his own son. Ruth in her innocence gives Grange a new life.
In both Zora and Walker’s novels it is clearly observed that black people in search of
fortune or escape from the torture of whites, they move from south to north but most
of the times it will be in vain. Here with Jealous and angry, the imprisoned
Brownfield plots with Josie, Grange’s now neglected wife, to wrest the girl from her
grandfather. After he leaves jail, Brownfield manages to have a white judge give the
custody of the sixteen-year-old Ruth to him, her father but also the man who has
killed her mother. Calmly, deliberately, Grange kills his son Brownfield in the court
of justice to make life possible for Ruth. Grange, in turn, is shot at his home by the
sheriff’s men. That is the plot. The story is marked throughout by the motif of
physical and spiritual murder, by suicide and infanticide, by wife beating and killing,
set against a background of the horror of racism in the South. The pervasive pattern of
this quilt is kin killing.

The novel saturated with murder and violence of all kinds, for which Walker
substantiating the pervasive myth that black people, particularly black men, are by
their very nature, violence on their own blood as Grange’s neglect of Margaret and
Brownfield’s abuse of Mem give fuel to idea that black men hate their women. In the
afterword to the 1988 edition of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* Walker writes: In
my immediate family too there was violence. Its roots seemed always to be embedded
in my father’s need to dominate my mother and their children and in her resistance
and ours, verbal and physical, to any such domination. (Winchell, 7). It is as if
Walker consciously selects all the nasty bits and pieces about black people that they
as well as white people believe. Then she examines each bit, lucidly arranges the
pieces so we might see the savage nibblings of everyday oppression at the souls of black southerners.

Of all the savage nibblings racism, the most poisonous bite is the abnegation of responsibility for one’s own soul. The novel, through its juxtaposition of parts, relates the monstrous ramifications that result from blacks believing what society, at every turn, teaches them—that they are capable of being responsible for their own actions, that white folks are to blame for everything. This abnegation of responsibility is what it means to be a “nigger.”

Through her graphic description of the Copeland’s everyday lives, Walker illuminates a basic strategy of racism. Because it is so obvious, that the most effective way to control anyone is by confusing his or her sex definition according to the norms of society. The masculine thrust in this society manifests itself in forms of power and acquisition, phantom qualities to which neither Grange nor Brownfield Copeland have access. The female, according to southern norms, should present herself in images of passivity, chastity, and demure beauty and should receive from men the rewards of security, comfort, and respect, rewards that neither Margaret nor Mem Copeland can exhibit. Although physically grown, the adults in this novel are never treated by the majority culture as men or women or even as boys or girls. They are seen as sexual beings without the human qualities necessary for sex definition, except in purely physical terms. They are the objects of exchange, waiting to be exchanged by those who wield phallic power. Commenting on the Lacanian perspectives of women’s position in patriarchy, Lorraine E. Tamsin (68) argues:

She (woman) will take on position of the sex that lacks instead of maintaining the experience of wholeness she had in the mirror stage in a layering of repetitions where she repeatedly plays the phallic whole that is mirrored in other’s responses to her, she will find her identity by mirroring others’ wholeness back to them.

Depressed by their condition, Margaret and Grange fight as if to preserve some part of the feeling of being alive. Crushed by the deadly labour of her days, and the neglect of her husband, the kind, submissive Margaret becomes “a wild woman looking for frivolous things, her heart’s good times in the transient embrace of
strangers.” But in spite of, even because of, her amorous adventures, she believes that she is at fault; she blames herself, without knowing what she can do, for everything, especially for not being able to deliver her husband from his lot in life. So when Grange leaves her, Margaret accepts the responsibility for his failure and the pain of her loss.

The irony in black women’s lives is that they did really make choices on default assumptions. Confronted with double jeopardy of race and gender, that is the cruelty of facing both of them at one and the same time, she preferred race to her gender. She could not attach much importance to the simultaneity of her oppression. She remained silent on the issue of multiplicity of her oppression, which according to Deborah King (80), “refers not only to several simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism.” Impaired in her perceptions, she accepted the male-defined tenets of racial solidarity and racial liberation as her sole preoccupation and allowed her femininity to fade into the background especially when her womanhood was persistently and systematically negated by phallic race men. Brenda Elchelberger (22) writes:

By and large, black women will define their struggle as part of The black struggle and not as part of women’s struggle because They know that if sex barriers were removed there would still be Race barriers…Black women can visualize superficial sex barriers Of the larger society going away before race barriers. When we Are viewed by the larger culture, we are not looked on in terms of Our class or sex first, but in terms of our black skin.

Alice Walker has described her novel as “a novel that is chronological in structure, or one devoted, more or less to rigorous realism.” The purpose is undercut by ruptures generated by the narration of competing histories. Although one night expect Grange to be the primary focus of the novel, he becomes largely a vehicle through which the broader racial experience is narrated and is then displaced and challenged by previously subordinate narratives that focus specially on the experiences of Black women. In addition to inscribing the narratives of Grange and
Brown Field, the novel commits itself to the stories of Mem, Margaret, Josie and communities of anonymous women. The personal histories of Brownfield and Grange remain the dominant focus of the narrative but the women’s stories serve significant textual and ideological functions.

The ideological enterprises that the novel undertakes may be viewed as having two dimensions: through her symbolic use of Grange and Brownfield, Walker advances the argument that the culture of poverty, with its racial underpinnings is essentially dehumanizing. At the same time, she asserts that one has a responsibility to transcend the humanization. What is involved is not merely a symbolic representation of the humanization but the constant intervention of an external narrator who comments and interprets for the reader, keeping Walker’s argument in the foreground. The narrative, by shifting the centers of consciousness throughout the novel, aids her in this strategy.

Grange’s “first life” is viewed by the child Brownfield whose perceptions are refined and transmitted by the narrator. A congeries of details invites the reader to construct a picture of the sharecropper’s life. The single image is integrated into a pattern that ultimately forms a delineation of the culture of poverty. Brownfield develops sores because of poor nutrition; Margaret is forced to work in a bait of factory as her husband labours as a sharecropper; at age six, Brownfield begins working in the fields; the family lives in grossly substandard housing. A significant manner in which this Gestalt is constructed is having the sharecropping experience viewed thorough Brownfield’s eyes. The scene in which the narrator tells of Brownfield’s reaction to Grange’s fear of Mr. Shipley the white foreman for whom he works, illustrates this:

Once the man touched Brownfield on the hand with the handle of his cane...and said, “You’re Grange Copeland’s boy, ain’t you?” And Brownfield had answered, “Uh huh, “chewing on his lip and recoiling from the enormous pile of gray-black hair that lay matted on the man’s upper chest and throat. While he started at the hair one of the workers-not his father who was standing beside him as if he didn’t know he was there—said to him
softly, “Say ‘Yessir’ to Mr. Shipley, “and Brownfield looked up before he said anything and scanned his father’s face. (9)

Brownfield’s reaction to this incident, reinforced by the narrator’s interpretation of it, places the episode in a broader context, in what Hayden White has called the “domain of human experience.” The reader’s response goes beyond the particular experience of Grange to the larger issue of racial oppression. Grange’s response is filtered through Brownfield’s mind.

This strategy of employing a single image to make a broad ideological statement characterizes most of the novel. Grange’s total impotence is conveyed through physical description. These descriptions may involve objects or persons, as can be seen by the juxtaposition of a description of the Copeland house with the physical description of Grange. The house has “rotting gray wood shingles” and is marked by a pervasive grayness. It resembles “a sway back animal turned out to pasture,” and the surrounding area is marked by “a litter of tree trunks, slivers of car cass bones deposited by the dog and discarded braces and bits that had pained the jaws and teeth of a hard – driven mule.” This bleak image is then reinforced in the description of Grange:

He was a tall, thin brooding man, slightly stooped from plowing, with skin the deep glossy brown of pecans. He was thirty-five but seemed much older. His face and eyes had a dispassionate vacancy and sadness, as if a great fire had been extinguished within him and was just recently missed. He seemed devoid of any emotion, while Brownfield watched him, except that of bewilderment. (13)

The two descriptions make up the broad picture of exploitation and dehumanization. The description of Grange illuminates the oppression and it is made more poignant by having it filtered through the mind of the child. At the same time, an alternative narrative on the oppression of the Black women is subtly introduced. Margaret’s oppressive situation is revealed early in the novel when she agrees with Grange during a family dispute. Brownfield’s response is as follows: “His mother agreed with his father whenever possible. And though he was only ten, Brownfield wondered about this. He thought his mother was like their dog in some ways. She
didn’t have a thing to say except to show her submission to his father” References to Grange’s infidelity, his drunkenness and the terror it instills, and his abandonment of his family follow. Naturally “Margaret interprets her husband’s infidelity as rejection and proof of some personal failing on her part which allows in her mind self-contempt to grow.”(Vernessa C. White, 4)Because of his behaviour, Margaret sinks in to alcoholism and sexual promiscuity, resulting in her having a child out of wedlock. Her death is briefly described after Grange has abandoned the family:

“Well. He’s gone”, his mother said without anger at the end of the third week. But the following week she and her poisoned baby went out in to the dark of the clearing and in the morning Brownfield found them there. She was curled up in a lonely sort of way, away from her child, as if she had spent the last moment on her knees (21).

Margaret’s story is largely contained within the dominant narrative frame. Her suffering is represented as part of the larger spiritual annihilation that is characteristic of the sharecropping system. The narrative strategy of having events filtered through the mind of Brownfield precludes a telling of Margaret’s story, yet her story remains a disturbing presence embedded within the dominant narrative. Even at this early stage, the text moves toward its own decent ring.

In earlier chapters, the focus on Brownfield allows to sympathize with him. Brownfield the child is the one we see as the primary victim of racism and economic exploitation. This procedure is followed as Brownfield assumes the role that Grange had played before fleeing the south. The narrator invokes the same strategy of physical description to address Brownfield’s plight:

He had once been a handsome man, slender and tall with narrow beautiful hands. From trying to see in kerosene lamplight his once clear eyes were now red – veined and yellow with a permanent squint. From running after white folk’s cows, he never tended much to his own, when he had any and he’d developed severe athlete’s foot that caused him to limp when the whether was hot or wet. From working in
fields and with cows in all kinds of weather he developed a serious bronchitis aggravated by rashes and allergies (83).

The physical description of Brownfield becomes the embodiment of the oppressive conditions under which the sharecroppers lived. Disease, illness and dehumanization underscore these destructive conditions.

Therefore, the movement away from Brownfield as victim to Brownfield as oppressor requires a shifting of the narrative focus. It is to be understood the verbal and physical violence inflicted on Mem by Brownfield with a shift in judgment of Brownfield’s character.

What was largely suggested in the Margaret-Grange marriage is presented in graphic detail in the description of the union between Brownfield and Mem. Here sharecropping dehumanizes him to the point of beating his wife and brutalizing his children. Harris comments, “Brownfield’s degeneracy cannot be blamed on sharecropping. He had more options about determining his life; his situation is not at all the naturalistic counterpart to Grange’s… (240). The larger history is subordinated as domestic violence dominates. Individual scenes record Brownfield’s increasing brutality: Mem beaten and dehumanized; the children Daphne, Ornette, and Ruth living in constant fear of their father; the gradual physical and moral destruction of Mem. As attention shifts to Brownfield’s victims, pathos, become the dominant representation of the household. Brownfield children construct an imaginary narrative about a more generous and kind Brownfield; and Mem, in a moment of rebellion threatens to kill Brownfield unless his behaviour changes.

The focus on Mem as a victim of brutality and the responses of her children to the brutal treatment mark a move away from the original ideological purpose. As the text focuses more intensely on the domestic violence, the outer world recedes. The argument shifts its perspective from Brownfield as victim to the women and children as the most victimized. At this point the text reintroduces Grange, now older and wiser, as the antithesis of Brownfield.

The return of Grange in his “second life” endows him with larger than life dimensions. He is protective of his granddaughter, Ruth to whom he seems to be totally devoted; he is now the story teller, the person who has traveled far and
returned to share his wisdom. Here it is understood that Grange has undergone a major conversion. This change in character presents Grange as the embodiment of human possibility. At the core of Grange’s transformation is the novel’s ideological statement which cannot be so dehumanized by a system as to lose one’s own humanity. In a heated argument with Brownfield, Grange articulates the philosophy.

“By George, I know the danger of putting all the blame on somebody also for the mess you make out of your life. I fell into the trap my self! And I’m bound to believe that that’s the way the white folks can corrupt you even when you done held up before. ‘Cause when they got you thinking that they are to blame for everything they have you thinking they’s some kind of gods! You can’t do nothing wrong without them being behind it. You gits just as weak as water, no feeling of doing nothing yourself. Then you begins to think up evil and begins to destroy everybody around you, and you blames it on the crackers. Shit! Nobody’s as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls don’t we? (207).

This statement, while addressed to Brownfield, forces the reader to modify initial response. The destruction of Margaret and Mem can no longer be attributed solely to racism; it is also directly related to the moral failures of the men. In this respect, the novel follows a conventional plot development. Grange moves from a state of equilibrium, marked by a significant change in behaviour. Conversely, Brownfield becomes increasingly dehumanized. The novel does not offer any reasons for these changes in the men’s personalities; it merely presents them. What is important is that these reconstructions of the characters of Grange and Brownfield force a rereading and reinterpretation of the entire novel.

In the Grange and Brownfield episodes, the early stages of the novel are clearly focused on the dehumanizing aspects of racial and economic oppression. The novel then proceeds to focus on victims other than Black males. And the Characterizations of Grange and Brownfield, two men marked by exaggerated qualities of good and evil, become signs of opposing Ideological positions, with the narrator clearly on the side of Grange. Both Grange and Brownfield are similarly oppressed by a white racist society. The Southern whites regard blacks with
contemptuous eyes that distort their vision. But at least they focus upon them as human beings. Compared to this, the white Northerners Grange meets tend to reduce blacks to complete anonymity. In his second life up North, Grange discovers this narrow-minded white prejudice to be pervasive. He becomes a masterly masked man there; slick, manipulative, unfeeling. He is forced into adopting this type of a masked role because of his surroundings that force so. T.O. Mason Jr. comments that, “The North offers only the illusion of freedom that masks the reality of complete imprisonment” (298). Grange tries to save the life of a pregnant drowning white woman who initially fears that he intends to rob her. Her initial fear is soon replaced by a narrow-minded white prejudice:

“Look at the big burly head,” she said and laughed again. Grange swallowed. He hated her entire race while she stood. Before him, pregnant, having learned nothing from her own Pain, helpless except before someone more weak…between them. She stood there like a great blonde pregnant defied cow. She Was not pretty, but only a copy of a standardly praised copy Of prettiness. She……but believed herself far above him.

This feeling of being superior to a black is so strong in the drowning white lady that although she reaches up and grabs Grange’s helping hand with her own small white hand, she immediately lets go when she realizes it was his hand. She refuses his help and pushes Grange back into the category of “thing”. With her last breath she calls him “nigger” in a tone of disgust. This episode depicts whites as putting on the mask of not recognizing a fellow human being in a black. Gayl Jones comments, “When the woman sees Grange, she dons her mask of fortitude, refuses his pity, refuses to see his corresponding” (159). Life itself is less important to her than this feeling of superiority. Grange believes that the reformation of America is impossible and that the only way blacks can feel free, easy and at home is to leave the country.

If the personal history of Grange and Brownfield reflects some of the areas of conflict in Walker’s ideology, the representation of Black women reveals even stronger ambivalences and ambiguities. Margaret’s life, which is seen solely through
the eyes of Brownfield as a child, leaves these ambiguities largely unresolved. Mem, although more directly represented, has her life viewed largely within the context of the abuse she suffers in her marriage to Brownfield. The most problematic representation is another female character, Josie. Here the narrator vacillates, at times sympathetic to Josie and sometimes not. For example, Josie’s independence is both praised and derided in the text. All three women’s narratives are part of the larger design of the novel, however, and their individuality is suppressed.

Margaret is largely delineated within the initial Grange-Brownfield narrative. Mem emerges not as a specific woman but as a repository of various traits and virtues. The narrator stresses Mem’s formal education, her physical attractiveness, and her assertive approach to life. Although these things differentiate her from the other women in the novel, and help provide a background for her in which her goodness stands in contrast to Brownfield’s evil, Mem’s personal history is not revealed. Mem’s life, as depicted in the text, is one of the omissions and gaps. For example, amid all the verbal and physical abuse that Mem suffers at the hands of Brownfield, his reaction is more fully delineated than hers. This can be seen in the episode in which Brownfield ridicules Mem because of her language:

In company he embarrassed her. When she opened her mouth to speak he turned with a bow their friends, who thankfully spoke a language a man could understand, and said “Hark, mah lady speaks, lets us dumb niggers listen”, Mem would turn ashen with shame, and tried to keep her mouth closed thereafter. But silence was not what Brownfield was after, either. He wanted her to talk, but to talk, what she was, a hopeless nigger women who got her ass beat every Saturday night. He wanted her to sound like a woman who deserved him (56).

The passage focuses on Brownfield. The simple images of Mem’s face “ashen with the shame” and her acquiescence in trying “to keep her mouth closed thereafter” are of Mem’s response. The focus is even more intensely on Brownfield through a narrative strategy which Paul Hernadi calls “substitutionary narration”. In this technique, Hernadi argues, the point of view of the narrator is merged with the character so that the two become inseparable (32-43). Hence the description of “their
friends, who thankfully spoke a language a man could understand” and observation that Brownfield” wanted her to talk, but to talk like what she was, a hopeless nigger woman who got her ass beat every Saturday night,” although attributed to the narrator, represent the perception and language of Brownfield, thereby placing the primary focus of the episode on him. The intensity of Mem’s rage must be supplied from the isolated images in the text.

This strategy is reintroduced when the text purports to represent Mem’s despair which gains a largely elliptical view of Mem’s feelings as the text shifts immediately to Brownfield’s response:

She wanted to leave him, but there was no place to go. She had no one but Josie and Josie despised her. She wrote to her father, whom she had never seen, and he never bothered to answer the letter. From a plump woman she became skinny. To Brownfield she didn’t look like a woman at all. Even her wonderful breasts dried up and shrank; her hair fell out and the only good thing he could say for her was that kept herself clean. He berated her for her cleanliness but, because it was a small thing, and because at times she did seem to have so little, he did not hit her for it (58).

The first three sentences sum up the isolation and despair that Mem feels, but cannot know the depth of her emotions. Speaking of Mem’s isolation, this discourse rather hurriedly describes it, but provides no depth of feeling. Rather abruptly, beginning with the passage “From a plump woman she became skinny”, the paragraph focuses on Brownfield’s response. This mode of narrative distancing from Mem’s emotions is evident even in the scene in which Brownfield murders her. The entire episode is seen through the eyes of Brownfield and the children:

She was carrying several packages, which she held in the crook of both arms, looking down at the ground to secure her footing. Ruth wanted to dash out of the chicken house to her, but she and Ornette sat frozen in their seats. They started at her as she passed, hardly breathing as the light on the porch clicked on and the long shadow of Brownfield lurched out
onto the porch waving his shotgun. Mem looked up at the porch and called a greeting. It was a cheerful greeting, although she sounded very tired, tired and out of breath. Brownfield began to curse and came and stood on the steps until Mem got within the circle of the light. Then he aimed the gun with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired (122).

The detail in the paragraph which follows the horror is experienced by the children. Thus, except a comment on the “large frayed holes in the bottom of Mem’s shoes”, with the flat piece of paper protruding, there is no attempt to delineate Mem even at the moment of her death. She represents pathos in the text, functioning largely to highlight Brownfield’s cruelty and dehumanization. Through reading about her situation, readers are forced to reevaluate Brownfield and are seduced by Grange’s argument on the need to maintain dignity even in a world of oppression. Such a textual strategy necessarily results in Mem’s personal history remaining largely incomplete.

Josie’s narrative is significantly more flushed out than that of Mem or Margaret, but the ambivalence through which her character is constructed and produces uncertainty. She is a composite of contradictions. Both independent and dependent, she exercises absolute freedom in the manner in which she conducts her life and at the same time is seen as eager to abandon that freedom; she is kind yet vindictive and petty; and she is both celebrated and despised.

A significant development in the narrative of Josie is the attempt to create a personal history. Context is provided through which Josie can be understood, and the fragmentary pasts characterized the narratives of Mem and Margaret make way for a more fully developed character in Josie. The physical and mental abuse she endures at the hands of her father and then men who exploit her sexually are graphically represented. The following scene presents a pregnant, drunken Josie lying on the ground, surrounded by her mother, her father, and men of the community.

Her mother stood outside the ringed pack of men, how many of them knowledgeable of her daughter’s swollen body she did not know, crying----such were her cries that the men as if
caught standing naked, were embarrassed and they stooped, still in the ring of the pack, to lift up the frightened girl, whose whiskied mind had cleared and who now lay like an exhausted, over turned pregnant turtle underneath her father’s foot. He pressed his foot in to her shoulder and dared them to touch her. It seemed to them that Josie’s stomach moved and they were afraid of their guilt suddenly falling on the floor before them wailing out their names. But it was only that she was heaving and vomiting and choking on her own puke---- (40-41)

“Let’er be”, growled her father. “I hear she can do tricks on her back like that”.

A woman’s individual history is related outside the context of the Grange and Brownfield discourse. Moreover, the themes of woman as both victim and of woman as rebel are inserted in to the narrative, marking the eruption of feminine desire.

This desire is depicted as Josie’s triumph over her social situation. She is alternately lover to both Grange and Brownfield, and is totally in control of her life. But the text downplays the position through its ambiguous representation of her. After Ruth is adopted by Grange, It is clearly given interaction between the family members:

At the beginning Ruth was Jealous of Josie, for she thought may be Grange found her pretty. But Grange also thought his wife was not very nice, and he said so, often and loudly. He said she lived like a cat, stayed away from home too much. Josie was one of those fat yellow women with freckles and light coloured eyes, and most people would have said she was good working, handsome, without even looking closely. But Ruth looked closely indeed, and what she saw was a fat yellow woman with sour breath, much purple lipstick, and a voice that was wheedling and complaining; the voice of a spoiled littler fat girl who always wanted to pee after the car got moving (124).
Although the position is indeterminate, the meditation of Grange’s and Ruth’s responses to Josie clearly precludes a positive reading of her character. Grange and Ruth are the embodiments of virtue. Grange has been reconstructed as a sympathetic figure, and Ruth represents a mythologized future.

The undermining of Josie is directly related to establishing an oppositional relationship between Grange and Ruth and Brownfield and Josie. Grange, whose “one duty in the world was to prepare Ruth for a great and Herculean task, some magnificent and deadly struggle, some harsh and foreboding reality”, and Ruth, the hope of the future, with her probing mind and overall intelligence are meaningfully only in terms of their difference from others in the text. Their positive values show forth through the short comings of others. Hence it is forced to see Josie, not as autonomous and rebellious, but as weak, mercurial, and petty. The identification of her with Brownfield stresses their apparent similarity.

Near the end of the novel, Brownfield is placed in an even odious light when he conspires with a racist judge to regain custody of his daughter Ruth. This pairing of the judge and Brownfield against Ruth and Grange further cements the case against Brownfield. The novel’s violent ending, in which Grange kills Brownfield and then dies in a shootout with the police, heightens Grange’s heroic stature, giving his death, a certain nobility.

In Third Life of Grange Copeland, then, the larger historical picture becomes a containment strategy for the sub narratives that constitute it. The novel’s dominant theme dehumanization and the “correct” responses to the dehumanization totally structure the narrative and strategies of representation in the text. It is imperative to position so that it will make the appropriate response to the history presented. Thus the women become semiotic strategies, signs of suffering and oppression, rather than complex individuals with personal histories. With the characterization of Margaret and Mem, pathos becomes the dominant trope, leaving limited space in which to comprehend their full personalities. With the representation of Josie, the text assumes a more radical pose, alternately presenting her as desirable and undesirable, depending on the exigencies of the text.

Thus both Jonah’s Gourd Vine, by Zora Neale Hurston and The Third Life of Grange Copeland, by Alice Walker though run differently, they bear some common
perspectives. Both Margaret and Amy are victims for the frustration of Grange and Ned Crittenden who get it from whites. In both novels the black people are represent from south where sharecropping is main profession for blacks. Mary Helen Washington comments on how the system of slavery in the South was responsible for shadowing the lives of blacks: Rannae Toomer, in “Strong Horse Tea”, for example, struggling to get a doctor for her dying child, is handicapped by poverty and ignorance as well as by the racism of the southern rural area she lives in” (141). Both John Buddy Pearson and Brownfield are neglected sons by their fathers in two novels whose consequences affect in their family life. Both writers mentioned the travel of blacks from south to north in finding of fortune. Women in both novels in spite of their husbands’ cruel treatment they give importance to familial relation, obey to husbands and take care of the children. Both writers gave vivid description of African American black people especially women’s physical as well as psychological sufferings by white racists and men in their own community.