

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ASSERTING A SELF-CONCEPT THROUGH RESISTANCE:
BELOVED AND THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

LINDLEY K. HOMOL
Spring 2010

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in English
with honors in English

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Loverie King
Associate Professor of English
Thesis Supervisor

Janet Lyons
Associate Professor of English
Honors Advisor

Shirley Moody
Assistant Professor of English
Faculty Reader

*Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of resistance in the creation of a free self-concept in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Both *Beloved* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* illustrate the enduring influence of slavery on the lives of African Americans and how slavery continued to circumscribe the lives of former slaves and their progeny. In order to combat the tenacious grip of slavery, Morrison's Sethe and Hurston's Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods must resist, both actively and passively, the way that the legacy of slavery continually attempts to shape them in order to create and assert their own independent self-concepts. After examining Sethe's resistance, characterized by passive memory repression, and Janie's resistance, characterized by oration, the thesis will conclude with a brief comparison of the novels as neo-slave narratives that attempt to explain how someone can overcome the legacy of slavery through both active and passive resistance. A comparison of Janie's and Sethe's quests, and the nature of each woman's resistance, reveals two distinctly different engagements with the idea of community.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i>	3
From Sweet Home to Schoolteacher's Visit.....	4
From Schoolteacher's Visit to Paul D's Arrival.....	7
From Paul D's Arrival to Sethe's Recognition of Beloved.....	8
From Sethe's Recognition of Beloved to Beloved's Disappearance.....	11
After Beloved's Disappearance.....	14
Zora Neale Hurston's <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	16
Nanny.....	17
Logan Killicks.....	19
Joe Starks.....	20
Tea Cake Woods.....	24
Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods.....	27
Conclusion.....	29
Bibliography.....	33

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Lovalerie King. I never could have completed this project without her guidance, encouragement, and patience.

Introduction

This thesis explores the role of resistance in the creation of a free self-concept in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). In both novels, slavery and its legacy largely determine the paths that female protagonist's lives take. Slavery was an institution that robbed its victims of the ability to call anything their own. Slaves thus could not lay claim to children, mates, or their own bodies. The physical and psychological effects of such deprivations lingered long after slavery and affected subsequent generations of African Americans. Both Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Morrison's *Beloved* are neo-slave narratives, or "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative," which illustrate the enduring influence of slavery on the lives of African Americans and how slavery continued to circumscribe the lives of former slaves and their progeny (Rushdy 3). In order to combat the tenacious grip of slavery and the way it continually attempts to shape them, Morrison's Sethe and Hurston's Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods must resist, both actively, through means such as verbal retaliation and physically fighting back, and passively, through methods such as self silencing and memory repression, in order to create and assert their own independent self-concepts. Here, I use self-concept to refer to the women's self-images, or the ideas they use to define themselves.

I begin examining resistance through *Beloved's* Sethe, a former slave whose escape to the free North marks only the beginning of her journey toward extricating herself from the grip of slavery. Sethe's escape, an assertion of active resistance, allows her to re-claim her physical body and the products borne of it, including her milk and her children. Asserting an independent self-concept, however, proves a more difficult challenge. Sethe relies chiefly on forgetting as a

way of resisting the horror of her past. Instead of freeing Sethe from her memories, her selective amnesia becomes a new way that slavery defines her. Sethe cannot begin the process of asserting a self-concept free of the lingering influence of slavery until she stops resisting her memories and takes the time to examine them. While the act of “rememory” nearly kills her, the process of letting go forms a necessary component of forging an independent self-concept, revealing that resistance works both for and against Sethe’s mission to separate herself from the lingering influence of slavery.

I continue examining resistance through *Their Eyes Were Watching God*’s Janie. The legacy of slavery affects Janie even though she is born after Emancipation. In order to claim and express her sexuality, Janie must first resist the ways her husbands and her grandmother try to objectify and shape her identity. Janie’s resistance takes passive and active forms, with the primary manifestation occurring through her voice. Her realization of the power of her own voice allows her to begin controlling how others view her, while simultaneously placing less weight on their assessments.

I conclude with a brief comparison of Morrison’s *Beloved* and Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as neo-slave narratives attempting to explain how someone can overcome the legacies of slavery through both active and passive resistance. Both novels show how slavery continues to affect a female protagonist years after Emancipation, and how this hinders her ability to create a self-concept free of the restrictions of slavery. These heroines, however, use markedly different paths to reach their goal of an independent self-concept. A comparison of Janie’s and Sethe’s quests, and the nature of each woman’s resistance, reveals two distinctly different engagements with the idea of community.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* contains many topics for thought, but her dedication to "Sixty Million and more," honoring the lives lost during the Middle Passage, indicates that slavery is chief among them. *Beloved*, a neo-slave narrative, follows its cast of characters both before and after Emancipation, because an escape from slavery "must be repeated twice: first to leave physical enslavement by whites and the second time to escape the psychological trauma created by their brutality" (Erikson 79). The novel tracks the recovery in a nonlinear fashion. *Beloved* begins after Emancipation, with Sethe, a former slave who escaped with her children to the North, living in freedom with her daughter Denver near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sethe receives flashes, or "rememories" of her life before and after her escape from slavery as the story develops. Other characters, both alive and dead, also voice their particular experiences of slavery and freedom throughout the novel. The different voices and stories combine to reveal a mosaic of methods of resisting slavery, coping with its aftereffects, and establishing a free self-concept. Resistance techniques and their relative success vary widely, from Sixo's active resistance to slavery, which leads to his fiery death, to Baby Suggs' total resignation after being unable to prevent schoolteacher from entering her yard.

Sethe, however, provides the novel's most compelling portrait of resistance against slavery because of her narrative centrality and her progression through different methods of dealing with the lingering ghosts of slavery. Anita Durkin argues, "As a former slave, Sethe...lacks, or, more accurately, is denied a stable sense of self, a continuity of the self" (184). Sethe's journey from slavery to freedom is thus a discovery of self, a claiming of her free body and an establishment of her own independent self-concept. Five periods comprise Sethe's quest: from enslavement at Sweet Home through schoolteacher's arrival at Baby Suggs' house, from

schoolteacher's visit to Paul D's arrival, from Paul D's arrival to Sethe's recognition of Beloved, from Sethe's recognition of Beloved to Beloved's disappearance, and the brief period after Beloved's disappearance. I identify the chronological progression of the story in order to track Sethe's coping strategies—from her initial passivity at Sweet Home to her final hope she may be her own “best thing” (322).

I. From Sweet Home to Schoolteacher's Visit

The first period of Sethe's tale reveals Sethe's transformation from relatively passive slave to a free woman who actively resists the attempt of slavery to claim her and her kin. Her transformation, spurred by schoolteacher's inhumane treatment, involves the most variation in resistance techniques of any period of Sethe's life. The woman who finds herself capable of killing her children to avoid their enslavement, had been, by her own and Paul D's accounts, initially complacent at Sweet Home. Paul D remembers Sethe from before the Civil War as “obedient...shy...and work-crazy,” something different from the woman he meets in Cincinnati, which causes him to conclude, “This here Sethe was new” (193).

Sethe's obedience changes to passive resistance against the institution of slavery when she perceives that it threatens her children, her most important thing and a crucial aspect of her self-concept. Sethe's concerted resistance toward slavery commences when Halle admits schoolteacher said “it don't pay to have my labor somewhere else while the boys is small,” (231). Schoolteacher's implied threat provides the catalyst for Sethe's resistance to slavery; however, Sethe does not immediately consider escaping, which would represent an active resistance to slavery. Instead, Sethe believes resisting slavery involves legally buying her family's freedom: “getting away was a money thing...Running was nowhere on [their] minds” (232). Sethe's desire to leave Sweet Home by purchasing her freedom represents a key

activation of her resistance against slavery; nevertheless, her resistance remains passive because it not only works within the laws of slavery itself, but it also tacitly acknowledges Sethe as the property of someone else.

Schoolteacher's continued oppression drives Sethe and the Sweet Home men to an active commitment to escape. Sethe's resolve only intensifies after schoolteacher's nephews assault and whip her, leaving tree-like scars on her back. Mae G. Henderson argues "the scars function as signs of ownership inscribing her as property, while the mutilation signifies her diminishment to a less-than-human status" (86). Henderson's assertion implies that, before being physical abused, Sethe believed schoolteacher viewed her as human. The reversal of Sethe's delusion marks a turning point in her resistance to the institution of slavery: "First beating I took was the last. Nobody going to keep me from my children" (238). Sethe's whipping, while mentally and physically scarring, did not in itself cause her change in mindset. Instead, Sethe's ability to imagine her children suffering the same sort of abuse spurs her immediate escape from Sweet Home. She thinks, "I have felt what it felt like and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too. Not you, not none of mine" (239). Sethe's children cause her to finally commit to escaping slavery; her children form a permanent and essential part of her self-concept, of her thoughts about who she is and what she lives for. Her "too thick" love for her children, a result of being denied the right to love them as much as she wants or to claim them as her own, motivates her behavior and unique resistance to slavery throughout the rest of the novel (193).

Sethe's love for her children, strong enough to inspire an escape from slavery, only intensifies once she is free: "Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon—there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to" (191).

Having successfully escaped physical enslavement, Sethe goes about mentally distancing herself from slavery, creating a new, free self apart from its influence. Sethe's first attempt at mentally distancing herself from slavery after her escape involves claiming her body, her milk, and her children as her own. Schoolteacher's comments and experiments at Sweet Home make Sethe realize that she could not claim her body and the children borne of it while she remained a slave. She therefore asserts her "too thick" love as a manifestation of her desire to create a free identity by re-claiming her body and her offspring (193).

Schoolteacher's reappearance calls into question the new, free self-concept Sethe began to assert for herself and her children. Having experienced twenty-eight days of "a place where you could love anything you chose," Sethe cannot imagine returning to a world of loving small, of not being able to claim her own children; she would rather kill her babies than lose them or see them face the humiliations she has suffered (191). Sethe overemphasizes her maternal identity as a result of only having one month to express the maternal love she yearned to embody fully while enslaved, which allows her to see only one acceptable course of action upon schoolteacher's return: she actively resists slavery by trying to kill her children, leaving schoolteacher with nothing to claim.

The first portion of Sethe's journey tracks her progress from a single, relatively complacent slave to a rebellious free wife and mother. Sethe's love for her children and the thought of the indignities they would necessarily suffer if forced to grow up enslaved inspire her transformation. Sethe first considers buying her freedom, but she eventually realizes she would rather risk death escaping than adjust her self-concept to allow herself to only love her children a little bit. The maternal aspect of Sethe's self-concept only intensifies after her escape from slavery. The luxury of being able to love anyone she chooses, as much as she wants, intoxicates

Sethe. Schoolteacher's return, which threatens Sethe's free identity, causes Sethe to attempt to kill her children in order to keep them from "the metaphorical 'death' of the self that slavery effects" (Erikson 76).

On the one hand, Sethe's active resistance to slavery was successful; schoolteacher will never try to take her back to Sweet Home and she has kept all of her children from returning to slavery. On the other hand, Sethe's resistance results in the death of her daughter. Donna Aza Weir-Soley argues, "Sethe makes the choice of death, rather than slavery, for her child because she thinks she has a right to choose. She claims ownership of her sexuality and the products of that sexuality" (124). Sethe's choice, manifested in the claiming of the products of her slavery-scarred body, represents an outright declaration of her freedom and subjectivity.

II. From Schoolteacher's Visit to Paul D's Arrival

Sethe follows her active resistance with passive resistance in the form of memory repression. She begins to shut down emotionally because she cannot process the warring thoughts and reactions that occurring after she succeeds in killing her daughter, her act of active resistance against slavery. Sethe can only explain her choice as one of a mother who loved her children too much, yet her reasoning remains at odds with killing her child. Furthermore, Sethe's slavery-thwarted desire to love fully manifests itself in her "too thick love," which functions as a further tie to the lingering influence of slavery. Sethe therefore remains nearly paralyzed emotionally by the events she cannot let herself remember, choices that "cost too much" (18).

Sethe fails to let go of the ghosts of her past, to form plans for the future, because "the one set of plans she had made—getting away from Sweet Home—went so awry so completely she never dared life by making more" (46). Her emotional paralysis represents a passive resistance to the memory of slavery, which keeps Sethe from giving up on life or giving in to

grief. Sethe's resistance to remembrance and simultaneous refusal to let go imprisons her in limbo, a state where she remembers "as close to nothing as was safe," an existence in which she merely survives, but does not truly live (6). Sethe's continual passive resistance through memory repression in no way serves to further her efforts to create a self-concept independent of slavery. In fact, Sethe's passive resistance, which allows her to continue living in freedom, only serves to further tie her to slavery. Sethe neither actively resists as a means of forging a free self-concept nor stops resisting, allowing herself to confront her memories; therefore, she survives in a sort of stasis that provides her neither emotional growth nor renewed assertion of an independent self-concept.

III. From Paul D's Arrival to Sethe's Recognition of Beloved

Paul D's arrival interrupts the continual passive resistance which characterized the previous two decades of Sethe's existence, marking a change in her muted life. Sethe initially resists the change, refusing to examine her memories of the past, because she prefers to continue with the same coping strategy she employed for the last eighteen years. Sethe thinks she should leave things "the way they are," just getting along, not "go[ing] inside" (55). Timothy Cox argues, "Sethe, in her own way, runs away from slavery, but slavery, in its own way, catches up with her again, triggering a succession of evasions and confrontations that seemingly will not end," (123). The "succession of evasions and confrontations" begins when Paul D forces change upon the house, chasing away the baby ghost and its pulsing red light. Paul D follows the ghost's exorcism by asserting that Sethe "go as far inside as [she] need[s] to" because he will "make sure [she] get[s] back out" (55). Sethe begins to believe him when she witnesses Paul D forcibly chase away the ghost of slavery, the haunting of her past. Paul D's attempted exorcism lends Sethe hope she can begin to "trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet

Home men was there to catch her if she sank” (21). Beloved’s appearance interrupts Sethe’s hopeful plans for the future, signifying Sethe cannot banish the past so easily. As Daniels writes, “Memory...is...a matter of choice in the novel, but that choice is present in how we remember, not in whether we do. Like Sweet Home (like Beloved), it ‘Comes back,’ as Sethe tells Denver, ‘whether we want it to or not’” (19). Beloved’s return indicates Sethe will have to remember everything in her past since “nothing ever dies” (44).

Beloved’s return in bodily form marks not just the return of Sethe’s daughter, but also more. Erikson asserts, “while Denver’s attribution of ‘more’ to Beloved at the end of the novel suggests that she, at least, has recognized the multiplicity of Beloved’s identity, Sethe misreads Beloved because she fails to realize that, apart from her daughter, she is also the incarnation of all the lost and denied victims of slavery” (88). Beloved’s recollections of the time before she found Sethe describe the Middle Passage, a voyage Sethe’s young daughter never made. Thus “Beloved is neither a survivor nor a ghost of one victim of the Middle Passage, but embodies the entire historical phenomenon” of slavery itself (Erikson 92). Sethe’s reunites not only with the daughter she lost, but also with the trauma and horror of the institution of slavery. Sethe’s talks with Paul D opened her own rusted tobacco tin and the outpouring of memories will not stop. Sethe cannot keep the past from affecting the present once she has felt safe enough with Paul D to re-examine parts of it.

In her first attempt to begin a new life after Paul D’s arrival, Sethe remembers Baby Suggs’ encouragement to “Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down...Don’t study war no more. Lay all that mess down” (101). Baby Suggs’ advice instructs Sethe to stop her constant fight against the past, to just let it go. Sethe endeavors to follow Baby Suggs’ instruction by going to the Clearing, attempting to reconnect with her mother-in-law’s

presence. Sethe thinks, “Just let me feel your fingers again on the back of my neck and I will lay it all down, make a way out of this no way” (112). In response to her silent plea, Sethe feels fingers on her neck. However, Beloved’s strangling fingers indicate the past maintains a literal and figurative chokehold on Sethe. The past will not let her go yet, as much as she thinks she can leave it behind or lay it down. In order to move on and create a free self-concept, “the consuming force and presence of the dead must be confronted and eradicated” (Cox 119). Merely wanting to move on will not suffice; passive resistance will not get the job done. Sethe’s failure at passively resisting her memories reveals she must pursue some other course of action to successfully fight an opponent as tenacious as slavery.

Paul D’s questioning of Sethe about the newspaper clipping crushes Sethe’s dream of a new life, yet it also signifies an important progression of her journey toward asserting an independent self-concept. Sethe realizes, as she relates the details of the incident in the shed, Paul D does not understand—and never will: “she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off—she could never explain” (193). In response to Sethe’s confession, Paul D voices the unforgivable, “You got two feet, Sethe, not four,” shattering her hope anyone could ever understand her decision. Paul D’s insult fully brings the past back to the present for Sethe. By identifying her as an animal, Paul D comes too close to schoolteacher’s descriptions for comfort, causing Sethe to give up on ever moving on from the legacy of slavery. Paul D’s rejection effectively curbs Sethe’s efforts to assert a self-concept independent of the legacy of slavery. By deserting her, Paul D reinforces Sethe’s earlier ideas that she cannot move on from the past.

Paul D’s brief appearance in Sethe’s life does not result in the creation of an independent self-concept, yet his influence remains an important progression of Sethe’s journey. Sethe

represses her memories of slavery and its aftermath for years when Paul D arrives at 124 Bluestone Road. Sethe gains some hope that she can move on when Paul D assures her he will be there for her. She attempts to do so by letting her memories go, but as Beloved's choking fingers reveal, Sethe cannot achieve freedom through forgetting. Paul D's questioning about the newspaper clipping may dash Sethe's hope she can build a life with him, but his reaction effectively pushes Sethe to a breaking point where she can no longer continue her passive resistance, her mere survival, as she has done for nearly twenty years. Paul D's rejection thus forces Sethe into a new course of action to pursue and assert her independent self-concept.

IV. From Sethe's Recognition of Beloved to Beloved's Disappearance

Reeling from Paul D's rejection, Sethe fatefully chooses to forgo society and maintain her overemphasized maternal identity. In order to continue asserting her "mother" self-concept, Sethe must stop resisting slavery's ghosts entirely. With Paul D out of the picture, Beloved, the dual ghost of slavery and of Sethe's baby girl, can monopolize Sethe's life. Sethe's own bleak outlook aids Beloved's mission: "the twenty-eight days of having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together; of being part of a neighborhood...all that was long gone and would never come back" (204). With Sethe no longer having hope that she can let the past go and create a new life, Beloved seizes the opportunity to sink Sethe in the past. Sethe's recognition of Beloved occurs after their skating trip, when Sethe hears Beloved humming a song she only taught her children. Beloved simply asserts "I know it," causing Sethe to finally recognize Beloved as the daughter she killed eighteen years ago (207). In reality, Sethe cannot see Beloved as her daughter until she finally gives up on the future and stops even passively resisting the past, leaving Beloved free to take over. Sethe's giving in to the past may appear similar to her attempt in the Clearing, but a subtle change makes all the difference. Sethe was

still resisting the memories when she tried to let go in the Clearing. She attempted to let go of her memories entirely since her memory repression was beginning to fail, but her continued refusal to acknowledge her memories nevertheless marked a resistance to them. She wanted them gone without having to confront them. Sethe gives up on resisting altogether after recognizing Beloved. Her surrender allows Beloved to dominate Sethe's life in a way she could not before.

When Sethe wakes the next morning, she looks "straight at the shed, smiling, smiling at the things she would not have to remember now" (214). Sethe believes she will not have to remember because Beloved has forgiven her, but "Sethe of course is deluded: Beloved is not the future but Sethe's past incarnate. She will not give Sethe respite from memory. On the contrary, she will be a steadfast reminder of much that Sethe longs to forget" (Furman 267). Sethe no longer has to remember the past because it has become her present, her "memory is being pried wide open by Beloved's presence" (Horvitz 97). Sethe loses all resistance to the past as she begins living in it: "Paul D convinced me there was a world out there and that I could live in it. Should have known better. *Did* know better. Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This is all there is and all there needs to be" (215). By closing off all hope of a future, of an outside world, Sethe confines herself to 124 Bluestone Road, to the pain and suffering of her past, to living with the ghost of slavery. Sethe seems overjoyed at the prospect of letting go of memory: "I don't have to remember nothing...I can forget it all now...there is no world outside my door"; however, she does not realize that her unnaturally strong grip on her memories brought them into the present; she can only forget them now because they are no longer in the past (217).

In addition to living in the past, Sethe has also wholeheartedly taken up her past identity. Her repeated assertions that Beloved is hers and she "won't never let her go" hearken back to the

day of schoolteacher's visit, when her all-consuming love for her children made her prefer killing them to seeing them enslaved (236). Sethe's recognition of Beloved fully returns Sethe to the heightened maternity that is inseparable from slavery. Her foreboding assertion "when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours," indicates that Sethe not only claims Beloved, but that she also allows Beloved, the ghost of slavery, to claim her (239). Slavery once again holds Sethe in its grip. She remains incapable of creating a self separate from it, unable to define herself but instead allowing slavery to define her. By totally relinquishing control over her own identity, Sethe allows Beloved to suck the very life out of her.

Left to her own devices, Sethe will doubtless perish, while "Beloved...becomes a life-denying force, sucking the vitality out of Sethe and literally starving her as she herself grows bigger and bigger" (Chandra 54). Fortunately for Sethe, someone speaks up: Denver takes charge, actively resisting by stepping out of the toxic situation at 124 and asking the neighbors for help. The women of the neighborhood try to help exorcise Beloved at the same moment Mr. Bodwin drives up to the house to pick up Denver. Sethe's old instincts to actively resist slavery kick in, and as she attempts to attack Bodwin, who she perceives to represent slavery, Beloved disappears.

Sethe reaches her lowest point after her attempted assault on Bodwin, yet her botched attack actually represents an important step in the process to assert her independent self-concept. At the last moment, she actively resisted slavery, despite nearly dying from a total lack of resistance. Her attempted attack on Bodwin represented an act of active resistance. She therefore actively resisted the institution of slavery again, even though she misidentified its representation. Furthermore, Sethe's choice to try to kill the perceived slave master instead of her own children represents a progression from the overemphasized motherhood she showed in the shed. Sethe's

active resistance increased; she no longer sees killing her children as the only option. She will now attack slavery directly, an assault that occurs at the moment Beloved disappears, indicating slavery relinquished its hold over Sethe.

V. After Beloved's Disappearance

A delusional Sethe, however, perceives Beloved's disappearance as the loss of her daughter for a second time. With the loss of slavery's ghosts, Sethe necessarily loses the warped maternal identity slavery created. Deprived of the overemphasized "mother" self-concept, Sethe seems to give up on life, no longer able to define it through the self-concept she had throughout slavery and its aftermath. Beloved's presence, although toxic, nevertheless forms an integral part of Sethe's recovery process. As Deborah Horvitz identifies, "even though memory of the past can prevent living in the present, to pursue a future without remembering the past has its own and even deeper despair for it denies the reality and sacrifice of those who died" (102). Linda Krumholz further explains that though "Beloved embodie [d] the suffering and guilt of the past... she also embodie [d] the power and beauty of the past and the need to realize the past fully in order to bring forth the future, pregnant with possibilities" (115). Spaulding agrees, stating that Sethe's journey "reinforces the belief that, in order to create a liberating present, one must first liberate the constraints of the past" (23).

Sethe may move on, may redefine herself as her own best thing, once she has faced the ghosts of her past, has remembered, feeling all the pain of something dead coming back to life. Beloved's disappearance, however, causes Sethe to deem her very existence pointless—which it would be—without a new self-concept to take the place of the one finally exorcised. Paul D's reassurances that Sethe is her own "best thing" provide a small glimpse of hope (322). Sethe stands a chance at recovering from Beloved's loss if she can construct her self-concept around

herself, rather than an overemphasized maternal instinct or schoolteacher's animal traits. She will at last be able to construct a self-concept free of slavery's legacy if she can, with Paul D's help, manage to define herself through herself alone.

Sethe's journey, begun at Sweet Home, sees her cycle through phases of active, passive, and zero resistance in pursuit of freedom from the grasp of slavery. Escaping from Sweet Home marks only the beginning of her journey toward a free self-concept. Her initial act of active resistance allows her to reclaim her body; however, Sethe's years of passive resistance, a mechanism for coping with the combined trauma of slavery and killing her child, fail to establish an independent self-concept, allowing slavery to continue to shape her self-concept. Only by acknowledging the traumatic events of her past can Sethe let them go, though the process nearly kills her. Aided by the community, Sethe commits a final act of active resistance that chases away the ghost of slavery, seemingly for good, offering a small hope that Sethe can finally construct a self-concept separate from the institution of slavery.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Unlike *Beloved*, the action in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* does not take place during slavery. The lasting effects of slavery constitute dominant forces in protagonist Janie Crawford's life nevertheless, shaping her choice of husbands and her dreams of her future. From the moment Janie first has an idea of her sense of self, when she experiences her sexual awakening under the pear tree, her quest to discover and assert her own self-concept takes a backseat to the ways the people in her life attempt to shape her. In order to oppose these outside definitions, Janie must find increasingly forceful ways to resist, ones that strengthen her most powerful asset in her quest for self-definition: her voice.

Throughout her marriages, Janie uses various techniques of active resistance, from vocalizing her concerns, to literally running away, yet her passive resistance, which takes the form of internal exploration and development, remains crucial to Janie's quest for an independent self-concept. In fact, though Janie's active resistance frees her from the "mule" identity in her first marriage, not until Janie passively resists can she find the strength to assert a self-concept to supplant the "doll" role in her second one. Janie's third marriage, which represents the realization of her teenage dreams, still requires Janie's active resistance. First, Janie must actively resist her community in order to marry the man of her choosing. Then, she must resist Tea Cake when he puts her life in danger. Janie's final act of resistance reveals how far she has grown: she no longer needs any man to define her. She is complete alone.

Their Eyes Were Watching God presents a relatively straightforward narrative (at least temporally), making it easier to track Janie's stages of active and passive resistance against her husbands en route to her ability to assert her own identity. Janie's relationships with the people

in her life largely define the five main portions of her journey: Nanny, Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, Tea Cake Woods, and finally Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods herself.

I. Nanny

Nanny's portion of Janie's story explores how little Janie has contemplated her own identity. The important people in Janie's life can easily shape her because she knows so little about who she is. Nanny infuses Janie's life with the lessons she learned from slavery, teachings that profoundly influence Janie's life and decisions through the death of Janie's second husband. Janie's marriage to Logan directly results from Nanny's wishes for her granddaughter, and her advice even partially influences Janie's choice to marry Joe. Nanny believes she has the best intentions for Janie, but she does not consider how her wishes may conflict with Janie's own desires. Nanny and Janie's conflict of interest robs Janie of the right to choose her own path in life, to claim her own identity free from the legacy of slavery.

According to Janie, she and Nanny lived in the backyard of a white family named Washburn. Janie, who played with their children, "didn't know [she] wuzn't white till [she] was round six years old" (21). Janie's early confession reveals how ill defined a self-concept she possesses. Her belated discovery of the difference between herself and the Washburns displays how little Janie knows herself: "before Ah seen de picture, Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest" (21). Janie's first attempts at self-definition and exploration occur when she experiences a sexual awakening under the pear tree, which she compares to a "flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again" (23). Janie watches "the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight," thinking, "So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation" (24).

Janie's vision of sexual fulfillment, however, differs drastically from Nanny's plans for her granddaughter's future. Influenced by her slave past, Nanny sees only two options for Janie: respectable womanhood or "muledom." Nanny fears that her granddaughter might be a "mule uh de world" or that "menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup" out of her (37). Consequently, she hopes to marry Janie off to a hard-working, property-owning man so her granddaughter can "take a stand on high ground lak [Nanny] dreamed" (32). Apart from initial protestations at the displacement of her dream, Janie does not actively resist Nanny's wishes. Janie marries Logan with the belief "Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant...[she] felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn't seem so destructive and mouldy. She wouldn't be lonely anymore" (38). Janie trusts her grandmother, so she puts her search for sexual fulfillment on hold, hoping Nanny's dreams for her may somehow lead to the same end as Janie's own.

Nanny, as Janie's only living family member, one who has seen and lived through more than anyone else Janie knows, exerts a profound influence over her granddaughter. Nanny denies her granddaughter the sexual exploration that could have permitted her to claim her body and image for herself because Janie will not realize her experiences under the pear tree with Logan Killicks. Janie thus gives up her own natural desires for sexual fulfillment in order to fulfill her grandmother's unnatural hopes for a marriage of security. Rachel Blau DuPlessis identifies,

The "Nanny" section of the novel unfolds itself as a doomed dialectic between sexual pleasure and racial prejudice which issues in the enforcing of gender and class protection. Social decency, straight paths, reductions of impulse all are the desired end: Janie, her Nanny decrees, must "marry protection" (14). Protection ironically takes the form of a man; self-sufficiency is not and cannot be a thought (110).

Janie's lack of resistance results in a marriage she does not desire, which allows Nanny's expectations to shape her, rather than her own self-concept.

II. Logan Killicks

During her relationship with Logan, Janie realizes that her dreams beneath the pear tree in no way resemble her actual marriage. Her choice to submit to her grandmother's will, rather than resist and assert her own sexuality, has consequences: "She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (44). Janie's realization initially seems to suggest Janie stopped resisting, giving up on her quest to assert her own self-concept; however, her submission to a dead dream merely indicates Janie gave up on one way of defining herself. Janie's growth as a character involves exploration and she discards identities and definitions as she finds they do not fit. A key example of Janie's disposal of an ill-fitting label occurs when Logan tells Janie, "Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im," (46). Upon hearing Logan's statement, Janie fears the eventuality her grandmother predicted: Janie will not abide muledom.

In order to avoid being treated like a mule of the world, Janie begins to resist Logan verbally. She starts to create a space for herself by asserting her opinions and thoughts. Janie retorts "You ain't done me no favor by marryin' me. And if dat's what you call yo'self doin', Ah don't thank yuh for it," when Logan expects her to help with manual labor around the farm (53). Janie continues living with Logan after her outburst; however, her active resistance effectively frees her from her unnatural marriage. She cares nothing for how Logan sees her and she can view herself apart from his perceptions of her, a separation she could not achieve with Nanny. Janie's acts of verbal resistance, which effectively freed her from Logan's attempt to define her, do not automatically establish an independent self-concept. Janie verbally resisted Logan to cast

off the “mule” identity he wished for her, but did not assert her own independent self-concept to take its place.

III. Joe Starks

Nanny’s advice to her granddaughter continues to have a powerful hold over Janie, even after Nanny’s death. Nanny’s slave past and the way it shaped Janie hold at least partial responsibility for Janie’s final decision to run off with Joe. In Nanny’s dreams, security and protection figure most importantly in a marriage—she wishes to see Janie securely sitting on a front porch like a white lady. Janie, therefore, hears the pampering and security Nanny wanted for her when Joe uses his “big voice” to win Janie over, exclaiming “You behind a plow! You ain’t got no mo’ business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday!...A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo’self and eat p’taters dat other folks plant just special for you,” (49). Joe, who pairs Nanny’s dream for security with Janie’s desire for natural sexual fulfillment, seems to be Janie’s dream husband.

Joe may appear the ideal husband after Logan, but Janie goes right from a husband who expected her to work as he did to one who wants to place her on a pedestal, without considering if she really wants either. Janie’s second marriage endangers her ability to assert her own sense of self just as much as her first because “Joe provides Janie with the ‘front porch’ existence of Nanny’s dreams, but in doing so, he isolates her from direct participation in any life except his own” (Williams 23). Janie’s first experience in her trophy role comes with the opening of the new store: “Jody told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn’t mean for nobody else’s wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang” (66). Janie quickly learns that Joe prizes her for her looks and how they reflect on him. Janie also realizes the limits of her role

when Joe denies the Eatonville townspeople's request for her to make a speech: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (69). Janie made the argument to Logan that her place was in the home when he wanted her to help shovel manure; however, when Joe speaks for her she must make "her face laugh after a short pause, but it wasn't too easy" (70). Janie never considered making a speech, but Joe's refusal on her behalf stings nonetheless: "it must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or the other that took the bloom off of things" (70). Janie's reaction reveals she still lacks the self-awareness to counteract the effects of others who try to define her.

Janie's first act of resistance in her second marriage once again involves a mule. She voices her outrage when the men bait Matt Bonner's mule for sport: "They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin' dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruind wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuh death" (89). Seeing that his wife feels for the mule, Joe decides to pay Matt Bonner to free the animal. Janie expresses her pride over her husband's decision: "dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. 'Tain't everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought. Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you... You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something" (91-2). Ironically, Janie praises Joe for an idea she inspired. Joe would never have thought to free the mule if he had not overheard his wife's muttered protests.

Janie's resistance over the mule is crucial for a number of reasons. First of all, Janie does not yet identify herself with the mule in her second marriage. The mere mention of a mule made her run from Logan in her first marriage, yet Janie does not associate Joe's treatment of her with muledom. Janie's speech to Joe about the mule also marks the first time the townspeople have

heard her orate. Her impromptu debt of gratitude to her husband receives praise, and the townspeople call Janie a “born orator” (92). Janie’s resistance over the mule thus marks a turning point wherein she begins to become aware of the power her voice, a necessary tool for establishing herself as a subject capable of asserting her own self-concept. Finally, Janie’s intervention on behalf of the mule, which can function as a symbol of black womanhood, reveals her desire to speak up for and establish the rights of black women, a crucial step in asserting her own independent self-concept.

Janie’s verbal resistance separated her ideas of herself from Logan’s attempts to shape her as the mule in their marriage, a freedom she completed by running away with Joe. Her initial efforts at active resistance in her second marriage, however, fail to free her from Joe’s intentions to make her a trophy. With her efforts at verbal resistance initially thwarted, Janie “pressed her teeth together and learned to hush” (111). Janie’s self-silencing allows her to learn and grow. Janie cannot silence her voice and identity for someone she loves, so her marriage takes on the quality of a performance: everything is for show. Joe’s transition from verbal to physical violence causes Janie to retreat further into herself. Joe may interpret Janie’s silence as submission, but Janie’s emotional remove steels her from the inside out, a passive resistance that provides her the opportunity to forge her own self-concept apart from the one her husband imposed on her. Janie’s passive resistance gives her time to examine the inaccurate image she painted of Joe, permitting her to realize she would never fulfill her dreams of marriage with him. Janie’s revelation encourages character growth because it allows her to realize “she had an inside and an outside now and suddenly knew how not to mix them” (112-113). Janie surpasses Joe and can separate her thoughts, feelings, and emotions from her constructed surface identity. Before, Janie believed her inside and outside were the same and thus those closest to her easily

manipulated her. Now, Janie knows the difference and will not quickly hang her dreams on the first person who comes along. Deborah Clarke argues,

The significance of this moment lies not just in Janie's recognition of the division between inside and outside but also in the ability to turn her back on the image and "look further." No longer content with the surface vision, Janie is learning to "look further," a necessary precondition for finding an expressive voice (159).

At the age of twenty-four, Janie seems to grow up and come to grips with her current situation without losing hope her future situation can fall more in line with her adolescent dreams.

Janie's separation of inside and outside allows her to define herself and stop responding to outsiders' attempts to do the same. From her vantage point of emotional remove, Janie sees Joe growing old and realizes he picks on her as a way of voicing his fears about aging while she stays young. Even Janie's patience, however, has its limits. Joe starts "talkin' under people's clothes," causing Janie to counter publicly:

Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice...Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change of life (122-3).

Janie learned to separate her inside and outside so Joe's remarks cut no deeper than the surface, but Joe did not. His wife's insults cut him to the quick, deflating his identity, ego, and image all at once. Weir-Soley writes, "[Janie's] words bear the imprint of truth, and it is [Joe's] inability to deny them or prove them wrong that forces Jody to surrender his power and eventually his life" (54). Janie finally, and effectively, resists her husband publicly, proving herself the stronger of the two, with a single insult. Her act of verbal resistance, bolstered by passive resistance, frees Janie from Joe's attempts to define her.

Janie's realization that Joe spent their entire marriage shaping her into who he wanted her to be signals the end of Nanny's influence over her granddaughter. Janie understands that Joe

could not accept her for herself, forcing her to create a separate, inner self-concept. Joe's manipulation of Janie does not differ much from Nanny's, which also bent Janie to its will. Janie fully grasps the similarity between Nanny and Joe's influence after Joe's death, when she wonders what to do with her newfound freedom. She concludes:

She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*...but she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after *things*...Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon...and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. Most humans didn't love one another nohow, and this mis-love was so strong that even common blood couldn't overcome it all the time. She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market-place to sell" (137-8).

The language of Janie's thoughts recalls slavery: Janie sees herself as another *thing*, another piece of property to buy and sell. With Joe's death, she acquires the personal and financial freedom to do as she pleases for the first time in her life. She becomes free to go in search of those people she dreamed of long ago, free to define her inside *and* outside, no longer having to give up her dreams in favor of someone else's.

IV. Tea Cake Woods

Janie continues to actively resist outsiders' attempts to define after succeeding in freeing herself from Joe with active resistance. She first refuses to wear black for her late husband, and then she desires to participate in the activities from which she has been barred for so long. Tea Cake's offer to let Janie finally join in and play delights her. She cannot hide her joy when he asks her to play checkers: "He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice" (146). Tea Cake immediately shows himself to be the opposite of Joe, a difference Janie finds "natural," indicating her progression toward the natural sexual fulfillment she desired as an

adolescent. She has learned from her previous mistakes, however, and does not rush into another misleading match. She cannot run off with Tea Cake just to break the rules, she must want to do it for herself, because Tea Cake represents the horizon she held inside since her teenage years.

Tea Cake does begin to prove himself the kind of man Janie envisioned. Like the other men before him, he admires Janie's beauty. Unlike them, however, he wants her to admire her own appearance, to value herself: "Ah betcha you don't never go tuh de lookin' glass and enjoy yo' eyes yo'self. You lets other folks git all de enjoyment out of 'em 'thout takin' any of it yo'self...You'se got de world in uh jug and make out you don't know it. But Ah'm glad tuh be de one tuh tell yuh" (157). Tea Cake puts his love for Janie first—not his farm, not his voice—another telling difference between Tea Cake and Janie's previous husbands: "Nobody else on earth kin hold uh candle tuh you, baby. You got de keys to de kingdom" (165). Janie begins to find Tea Cake different from the others. She starts to realize she could love him, and not just an image of him like she did of Joe: "She couldn't make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring" (161). By recalling the language of her youth when thinking of Tea Cake, Janie recognizes she has found the man for whom she has been waiting.

Not even Phoeby, Janie's closest friend, can dissuade her once she makes her choice.

Janie is through letting others define her and she does not hesitate to say so:

Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived by Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine...She was borned in slavery time when folks, dat is black folks, didn't sit down anytime dey felt lak it. So sittin' on porches lak de white madam looked lak uh mighty fine thing tuh her. Dat's whut she wanted for me—don't keer whut it cost. Git up on uh high chair and sit dere. She didn't have time tuh think whut tuh do after you got up on de stool uh do nothin'. De object wuz tuh git dere. So Ah got up on de high stool lak she told me, but Phoeby, Ah done nearly languished tuh death up dere. Ah felt like de world wuz cryin' extry and Ah ain't read de common news yet (171-2).

Janie actively resists the community in defense of her own ideas of self and marriage. The fruits of Janie's resistance immediately show in Janie's third union, where the couple stands on equal footing. Janie and Tea Cake's equality in marriage carries over to their ideas of each other. Janie held a realistic idea of Tea Cake from the day she married him, so she does not mind his gambling problem: "It was part of him, so it was all right" (188). Tea Cake reciprocates her ideas of equality when he suggests they go to the Muck together because they will share everything. Their equality allows Janie to finally realize the full extent of her love for Tea Cake, a "self-crushing love" that permits her soul to crawl "out from its hiding place" (192). Janie can let her outside self and inside self merge again with Tea Cake; she can assert the independent self-concept that her previous two marriages forced her to keep inside. Janie's immediate need to resist disappears once she can assert her self-concept because she has fulfilled her dreams of sexual fulfillment, a dream that now has a willing partner and companion.

The realization of Janie's teenage dreams for a sexually fulfilling marriage is short-lived; her assertion of her independent self-concept, however, is permanent. When Tea Cake contracts rabies, putting Janie's own life in danger, she must again actively resist, shooting her husband before he can kill her. Her active resistance reveals Janie's development of a free identity, which transcends her involvement in any relationship. Janie "had wanted him to live so much," but in the end she wanted herself to live more (273). In other words, Tea Cake does not save Janie, but merely "facilitates Janie's transformation," revealing how much Janie has grown as an individual (Weir-Soley 71). Her ability to put herself first reverses her role as Nanny's granddaughter, revealing the totality of her development.

V. Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods

Janie must stand trial after killing her husband in self-defense. She cannot believe the absurdity of the legal process, one in which “twelve strange men who didn’t know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her” judge her (274). Despite Janie’s beliefs about the pointlessness of her defense, the courtroom scene offers her the chance to exercise her oratory skills. She uses the voice that successfully freed her from Logan and Joe and asserted her independent self-concept, to establish her innocence:

They all leaned over to listen while she talked. First thing she had to remember was she was not at home. She was in the courthouse fighting something and it wasn’t death. It was worse than that. It was lying thoughts...she didn’t plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed (278).

Cynthia Bond writes, “The trial marks a significant turn in Janie’s establishment of a vocal identity...in the courtroom, Janie seeks to suppress the devices of rhetoric in order to communicate the context of her relationship with Tea Cake. It is precisely her voice that is on trial” (51). Tea Cake’s friends suspect that the verdict results more from Janie’s Caucasian features than her innocent heart, but the power of her voice deserves its due. An all-white jury tried Janie and found her innocent, a testament to the power of her speaking ability, regardless of her Caucasian features.

Janie returns to Eatonville as a woman without regret, one sure of her own skin. According to Sigrid King, “Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods has survived a succession of marital and other identities,” which leaves her “empowered to tell her own story” (69). Janie tells Phoeby, “Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons” (284). She passes on her advice about her voyage of self-discovery when she says, “Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (285). Having lived the life she dreamed of as a girl,

Janie contentedly keeps Tea Cake alive inside her, in her memories, because she has freed her soul. Janie is truly and permanently alone for the first time in her life, yet she is not lonely. She asserts the self she saw under the pear tree as a teenager, letting her self-concept out of hiding so her inside and outside can match. Janie thus establishes a self-concept free of Nanny's slavery-influenced views of marriage, as well as Joe's white-master-constructions of her as property. Janie carves a space for herself in the world, realizing the sexual fulfillment she desired as a girl, without depending on any man for salvation.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* both illustrate how slavery and its legacy can limit subjectivity. Morrison's Sethe makes a successful physical escape from enslavement; however, the process of disentangling herself from the emotional and psychological hold of slavery takes years. Hurston's Janie, born after Emancipation, nevertheless undergoes a similar process of freeing herself from the grip slavery holds over her subjectivity as an African American female. Both Sethe and Janie must resist the way that the legacy of slavery attempts to define or constrain them in order to assert their own self-concepts.

Sethe resists in numerous ways, though memory seems to play the largest role. Sethe passively rebels against slavery by blocking out her memories of Sweet Home and enslavement. Her forgetting fails because it permits no renewed assertion of an independent self-concept. Sethe must therefore confront the events she has repressed, embodied in *Beloved*, if she hopes to build a life independent of the legacy of slavery. Janie's resistance consists of both active and passive techniques, with an emphasis on her voice. From the moment she first experiences her sexuality, Janie desires to express it. Janie speaks out against Logan Killicks, her first husband, when their unnatural marriage of security thwarts her natural sexual desire. Janie only strengthens her resolve during her second marriage, resisting inwardly at first, then using all the power of her speech to tear down Joe's inflated self-image. Janie openly pursues her long-held dreams of sexual fulfillment once she frees herself of her two husbandly ties to slavery's subjectification of African American women. Janie makes her dreams a reality with Tea Cake, but she is nevertheless alone at the end of the story. Janie's status at the end of *Their Eyes Were*

Watching God shows she has finally established her own independent self-concept. She is no longer any husband's property or subject to anyone else's definitions of her.

Both novels address the difficulties of resisting the legacy of slavery, but they ultimately come to differing conclusions about the community's role in asserting a self-concept independent of slavery. While Hurston represents Janie's quest as individual, the community comes to play an integral role for Sethe. Denver enlists the help of the community after she realizes the deathly toll *Beloved* is taking on her mother. Sethe can only banish the ghost of slavery with the community's aid. Afterward, Paul D helps Sethe out of her despondency by assuring her that she is all she needs to identify herself by. Morrison's novel therefore suggests that escaping slavery, both physically and emotionally, requires the action and support of an entire community.

Janie, meanwhile, lacks the same community support. Janie primarily undergoes her search for an independent self-concept alone, having already asserted her strength by the time Tea Cake arrives in her life. Her ability to put herself first, shooting Tea Cake so she can survive, is a final manifestation of her free self-concept. The community continues to judge Janie for her marriage to a younger man when she returns to Eatonville; however, Janie no longer cares. She has never been part of the community and therefore does not care what it thinks of her. Hurston's novel thus seems to argue that the quest to define oneself is chiefly a singular effort. The ultimate sign of an independent self is the ability to be alone.

Morrison provides some explanation for the novels' differing arguments about the role of community in the assertion of an independent self-concept. Morrison argues that her "sense of the novel is that it has always functioned for the class or the group that wrote it" ("Rootedness" 340). The linear narrative and emphasis on individualism present in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reflect Western literary traditions, a probable result of Hurston's own rugged individualism.

As a narrative steeped in the Western tradition, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* features a very American heroine, a rugged individualist who must go against the grain to achieve self-actualization. Morrison, on the other hand, believes that African Americans have a unique new need for the novel, which explains her more Afrocentric style of writing.

In contrast to Hurston, Morrison stresses the importance of community: “If anything I do... isn’t about the village or the community... then it is not about anything” (“Rootedness” 344). Morrison ties the sense of community to the significance of ancestors, who serve a critical role in a character’s journey. Baby Suggs embodies the protective, instructive ancestor role in *Beloved*. Without her, Sethe would be lost because the disappearance of an ancestor’s watchful, educative presence was both disturbing and menacing. Just as Sethe only recovers from her physical escape from slavery with Baby Suggs’ nursing, she only survives *Beloved*’s toxic influence because Baby Suggs intervenes spiritually, giving Denver the courage to seek the community’s help for her mother. Morrison’s arguments, therefore, largely attribute the differing roles of community in *Beloved* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to the difference between Afrocentric and Western literary traditions.

Despite their differences over the role of the community in the assertion of a self-concept, Sethe and Janie’s approaches to resisting the legacy of slavery have some similarities. While *Their Eyes* argues a new self-concept can only be achieved alone and *Beloved* proposes the need for community support to untie the fetters to the legacy of slavery, the novels agree that both active and passive resistance are necessary to establish a free self. Sethe’s passive resistance in the form of repressed memories does not allow her to move on, just as Janie’s internal resistance toward Joe is not enough to allow her to assert and fulfill her sexual desires. Janie reliance on her voice, which allows her to tear Joe apart verbally, marks the beginning of her placing her desires

first. Similarly, when Sethe attempts to kill Bodwin instead of repeating her attack on Beloved, she commits a final act of resistance against slavery that appears to break her from its grasp. By the end of *Beloved*, Sethe clearly has not reached the self-actualization that Janie has by the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, yet both women have broken free of the definitions and identities slavery tried to impose on them, a freedom attained only through the combination of active and passive resistance.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Hurston, Zora N. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987.

Secondary Sources:

Bond, Cynthia. "Language, Speech, and Difference in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. 41-55.

Chandra, Giti. *Narrating Violence, Constructing Collective Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Clarke, Deborah. "'The Porch Couldn't Talk for Looking': Voice and Vision in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. 147-166.

Cox, Timothy J. *Postmodern Tales of Slavery in the Americas: From Alejo Carpentier to Charles Johnson*. New York: Garland Publishing, 2001.

Daniels, Steven V. "Putting 'His Story Next to Hers': Choice, Agency, and the Structure of *Beloved*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Toni Morrison's Beloved*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009. 5-24.

DuPlessis, Rachel B. "Power, Judgment, and Narrative in a Work of Zora Neale Hurston: Feminist Cultural Studies." *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. 95-123.

Durkin, Anita. "Object Written, Written Object: Slavery, Scarring, and Complications of Authorship in *Beloved*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Toni Morrison's Beloved*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009. 173-194.

Erikson, Daniel. *Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Furman, Jan. "Sethe's Rememories: The Covert Return of What is Best Forgotten." *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998. 261-271.

Henderson, Mae G. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text." *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 79-106.

- Horvitz, Deborah. "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*." *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998. 93-103.
- King, Sigrid. "Naming and Power in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. 57-70.
- Krumholz, Linda. "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 107-125.
- Morrison, Toni. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. New York: Doubleday, 1984. 339-345.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H.A. *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in Social Logic of a Literary Form*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Spaulding, A. T. *Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2005.
- Weir-Soley, Donna A. *Eroticism, Spirituality, and Resistance in Black Women's Writings*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2009.
- Williams, Sherley A. "Encountering Zora Neale Hurston." *Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

ACADEMIC VITA of Lindley K. Homol

Lindley K. Homol
8585 Winchester Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15237
Lindley.Homol@gmail.com

Education: Bachelor of Arts Degree in English, Penn State University, Spring 2010
Honors in English
Thesis Title: Asserting a Self-Concept Through Resistance: *Beloved* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Thesis Supervisor: Lovalerie King

Awards:

Evan Pugh Award
Sparks Award
President's Freshman Award
Ann Good and Howard Moore Jr. Scholarship
Bolze Study Abroad Liberal Arts Scholarship
Cantwell Liberal Arts Scholarship
J. Moore Undergraduate Award in English
Neal R. and Linda Seligman Stoll Scholarship in the College of the Liberal Arts
Polin Cohan American Studies Scholarship
Regina and Leonard Stern Scholarship
Semmer Scholarship for Study Abroad
Dean's List
Phi Beta Kappa

Activities:

Fiction reader for *Kalliope*
Intern for the Pennsylvania Center for the Book