1999


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THE WOMEN ON/OF THE PORCH: PERFORMATIVE SPACE IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of English

by
LaJuan Evette Simpson
B.A., Fisk University, 1994
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December, 1999
For My Parents
Arnold and Faye
and
My Brothers
Troy and Allen
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Preface

As I worked on this project, many people related various porch stories to me, once they found out the topic of my dissertation. These stories showed me that my work is not just for academia, but it is a topic that can be discussed at an informal family/social gathering as well as a structured intellectual conversation. In each setting the discussion was rich and full of images, symbols, memories, and details. This adds flavor, fullness, and richness to my work and gives me the incentive to continue this discussion theoretically as well as practically.
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Abstract

Mediating structures in African-American literature are essential in the formation of identity in the lives of the characters. Contemporary theory has moved into a deeper layer of hermeneutics beyond self/other dichotomies to look at the space between binary opposites. Therefore, modern theorists look at sites of play, of exchange, and of transformation. The porch is such a space. A mediating structure is a space that allows the various characters to develop and define themselves.

Because of African-Americans' lack of freedom, it was important for them to find a space in which they were able to move and express their ideas, emotions, artistic ability, and thoughts. These spaces were both theoretical and literal. Spaces like gardens, and new theories like womanism, and performative actions like music, as well as countless others helped and help African-Americans to define themselves.

The porch in African-American women's literature becomes a space for transformation and self-definition. On the porch, Denver in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Celie in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, and Janie in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God define, redefine, and narrate themselves.
Chapter 1: Gardens, Music and Womanist Theory: Mediating Structures in African-American Literature

As a child I can remember going to Nashville, Tennessee, where both of my parents were born and reared, to visit my relatives every summer. The porch was always a significant place for our family. While at my paternal grandparents’ house, my grandfather would seem always to be sitting on the porch in his iron, black lawn chair. My father would stop and talk to him for awhile on the porch while we greeted him and passed quietly into the house (Figure 1).

When the family assembled there at the house—my dad’s ten siblings—the festivities would commence. My grandmother never let the grandchildren eat in the house. She would always give us a hot dog and say, “Go on out there on the porch and eat.” We sometimes would have watermelon which, of course, had to be eaten outside, and we would spit the small, black seeds into the green grass surrounding the porch, wondering if watermelon would sprout from our seeds (Figure 2). After our meal, we would be sent back outside to play, and my grandfather would sit on the porch with his wooden cane while being the grand authority of our play. When one of us got hurt or he decided it was time for a break, he would say, “Come on up here and rest yourself.”

When the evening came, the grown-ups often came outside to watch the children play or to seek relief for themselves from the heat of the house because my grandmother did not always have air conditioning. My dad’s
brothers and sister would come out one or two at a time. Often they would bring a newspaper to fan themselves or to swat at the mosquitoes while watching my cousins and me play hide-and-seek or tag or red rover, red rover or red light-green light. However, we often liked to catch the lighting bugs as they tried to escape our childlike motions and methods of capture. Although we always let the bugs free, we, nevertheless, enjoyed watching the bugs light up while being held captive in an old mayonnaise or applesauce jar.

At my maternal grandparents’ house, just a few miles away, the porch served a different purpose. At that house, there were two porches—the side porch and the front porch. The side porch was generally the porch used for base in hide-n-seek or any other game we grandchildren thought to play (Figure 3).

The front porch was generally used on cool summer nights (Figure 4). Mur Dear (my grandmother) and Grand daddy would suggest an evening on the porch. So we would take the phone on the porch, and all the grown-ups would have a chair on the porch, while the children sat on the steps. My grandfather would speak to every person that passed in the street. We would always ask if he knew those people, and sometimes he would say yes, but for the most part, his reply was no. I remember always asking myself why he was speaking to people he did not know.
Each time the grown-ups gathered on the porch, the local events had to be discussed. Each would provide information about who had died, who had gotten married, and whatever else might have transpired. Now, we kids, were not supposed to be listening to "grown-folk's talk," so we were sent to play in the yard.

When that segment ended and the Skin So Soft was wearing off, it would be time for the childhood stories from my grandparents, my great aunt, my mother and her sisters. My grandfather usually began with some story of how cool he was as a teen-ager. Each person had a chance to tell a story, whether true or not, while someone always chimed in the background, "I don't remember that" or "I remember that," while nodding in agreement.

As a child, I did not understand the importance of the porch. Looking back, I remember the tactics of re-telling a story and the form of unity and community that the porch provided. I thought that my family was the only family that gathered on the porch. I thought it was a concept unique to my family. I had no idea of its universal quality. I was unaware of its historical significance. The porch is a personal symbol to me as well as the African-American community at large. As my reminiscences suggest, it serves as a mediating structure between the house and the street. In other words, it provides a middle ground between the actions in the house and those in the street and a performative space where identity is articulated and formed. These functions are the subject of my dissertation. In this chapter, I will
discuss new theories of mediating spaces, using the work of Michel de Certeau, Homi Bhabha, and Karla Holloway. I will, then, turn to structures of performance for African American women. The first, womanism, is central to my work, which I characterize as womanist rather than feminist. The other performative structures are gardens and music. The garden is a central image in Walker’s definition of womanism and becomes important in African American women’s work. Here, I will examine the extended metaphor of the garden in Gloria Naylor’s *Bailey’s Cafe*.

Music has always been central in the African American experience. From the spirituals to rap and hip hop, Black Americans have transformed cultural expression, their own and America’s through innovative musical forms. Here, I will explore August Wilson’s *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, focusing on music and identity in the figure of Ma Rainey.

**Mediating and Performative Structures**

Mediating structures in African American literature are essential in the formation of identity in the lives of the characters. Contemporary theory has moved into a deeper layer of hermeneutics beyond self/other dichotomies to look at the space between binary opposites. Therefore, modern theorists look at sites of play, of exchange, and of transformation. The porch is such a space. A mediating structure is a space that allows self-development and self-definition. I use the term space instead of place in accordance with Michel de Certeau’s formulation in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:
A place is the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions... A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed in intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. (117)

Place is a fixed spot in which meanings are authoritative and roles defined and, therefore, that does not leave room for inventive or creative self-definition; whereas, space is fluid, an in-between in which one can move and in which cultural inheritance can be moved, punched, pulled, or gently molded into possibilities for growth and self-definition. Stephen Kern in The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918 adds, "Spaces are subject to changing perspectives, thoughts, and feelings and suffer the unceasing transformation of things in time" (149). Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space comments on space as producing an amount of solitude that remains forever in memory and that leads to solidarity and creativity:

And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and comprised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human beings wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with this solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic
This space, like Certeau's, calls for mobility, a free positionality in which one can explore creativity, to define one's creativity and define personal boundaries.

Yet, space is more personal. Homi Bhabha, building on the space/place distinction, explores in *The Location of Culture* this idea of an intermediate space as one in which to locate transformative discourses. Such discourses ameliorate the effects of diaspora and disruption. He explains that he "[has] lived in that moment [in which] the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering" (139). This gathering occurs for Bhabha in a liminal, performative space on the edge of language, culture, race, and country, that he calls "the nation." Bhabha adds, "From the liminal movement of the culture of the nation--at once opened and held together--minority discourse emerges" (155).

Such a notion of discourse necessitates a new notion of identity. Edward Said in his interview, "Criticism, Culture, and Performance" discusses his views on performance theory, focusing on music. He points out that music and literature as a culture are almost completely isolated. Said is concerned with "the role of music in the creation of social space" (22), and therefore, like Bhabha, with performance. Said's connection of literature,
music and performance signals this concern with layers and multiplicity in the construction of identities:

I think the one thing that I find, I guess, the most—I wouldn't say repellant, but I would say antagonistic—for me is identity. The notion of _single_ identity. And so multiple identity, the polyphony of many voices playing off against each other, without, as I say, the need to reconcile them, just to hold them together, is what my work is about. More than culture, more than one awareness, both in its negative and its positive modes. It's basic instinct. (26)

De Certeau, Bhabha, and Said all discuss identity and community formation through discourses and performances located at the intersections of cultures. All of these theorists demonstrate that one dominant culture is obsolete. Each author claims, in essence, that a single identity is an oxymoron.

This postmodern construction is also present in current African American theory. Karla Holloway calls for an examination of intersection in culture and the layers of identity implicit in African American women's works. Holloway, in _Moorings and Metaphors_, discusses the need for literary spaces which she defines through revision, (re)membrane, and recursion. Revision "represents a gathering of the ways a culture organizes language, the privilege given to particular speakers between language, voice and the physical presence of the speaker" (24). (Re)membrane taken from Toni Morrison's "rememory," "focuses on the ways that memory is culturally inscribed . . . These are works that claim the texts of spoken memory as their source and whose narrative strategy honors the cultural memories within the word" (25). Recursion "concerns address the concepts of complexity,
layering, and the multiplied text. Black writers’ textual voices are layered within the narrative and linguistic structures of both the text itself and the characterization within the text. This layering creates a ritualized, recursive structure that identifies imagery and language particular to the black woman’s literary tradition” (26). Holloway calls for a space where Black women’s language can be explored on its own terms. Such a space is characterized, for Holloway, by moorings and metaphors:

“Moorings” marks the starting places of my critical interpretations... Its center is where behavior, art, philosophy, and language unite as a cultural expression within an African-American literary tradition. A mooring place has been recovered at the point when an interpretation of literary style and substance, and its formal textures and cultural figurations, specifies certain styles of discourse. My primary argument is that black women’s literature reflects its community—the cultural ways of knowing as well as ways of framing knowledge in language. (1)

As Holloway discusses her use of the word “mooring,” we are called to experience a point of recovery of traditions—often “local” and discredited—that are considered historically lost and/or unimportant. Cultural expressions in the African-American community were not always factored into the theory of the literature. Holloway calls for a space in which these expressions are not only noted, but are valid as theory.

Mooring is a location. Holloway also defines the metaphor and its purpose; focusing on the importance of metaphors for African-American women’s writing. For her the ancestor is a central metaphor:
It is through the ancient spirituality of this [African and African-American] literature that the unity of soul and gender is not challenged but is recovered and celebrated. Within this spirituality, the recovered metaphor that articulates the relationship between soul and gender is the metaphor of the goddess/ancestor. (2)

Here Holloway notes the importance of the ancestor in African-American woman's literature because of that figure's historical and spiritual value to these writers. The ancestor provides the space between the living and the dead. She is an essential mediating structure in the African-American community as well as the literature. Although Holloway's is not a novel approach to African-American literature, it does provide an essential link in the historical significance of the tradition of African-American literature.

Geneva Smitherman in Talkin and Testifyin demonstrates, like Holloway, the importance of the ancestor: "Since the spiritual realm is the ultimate existence of humankind, those closest to the spiritual realm assume priority in social relationships. Thus, elders are of great importance, and the spiritually developed people serve as rulers and doctors" (76). The use of the ancestor will be seen later in this dissertation through the character Baby Suggs from the novel Beloved.

Building on de Certeau's notion of space as fluid, Homi Bhabha's idea of the "nation," in-between or performative space, and Karla Holloway's call for cultural moorings and spiritual metaphors, I want to explore the porch as a performative space--a mooring, in Holloway's terms--for African-American women--a space in which authoritative discourses and hegemonic structures

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are challenged by "local" and, here, women's knowledge and from which identity and new social configurations can be articulated and enacted.

Because of African American's lack of freedom, it was important for them to find spaces in which they were able to move and to express their ideas, emotions, artistic ability, and thoughts. These spaces were both theoretical and literal. Spaces like gardens, and new theories like womanism, and performative actions like music, as well as countless others helped and help African Americans to define themselves. Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space notes that "Space calls for action, and before action, the imagination is at work. It mows and ploughs" (12). Mediating structures are developed first in the mind with creativity and then call for a way to express this creativity which, although it may be initially stifled, eventually gives birth to action. In this chapter, I will discuss a variety of mediating and performative spaces in which African Americans, especially women, explore their creativity. Although mediating spaces were in most instances positive spaces of exploration and creativity, there are instances, which I will discuss, where these spaces turned into places.

**Womanism: Black Women's Theory**

Along with performative spaces, theoretical spaces are essential in the African American community. Womanism is a theory that mediates, is the bridge, between white feminism and black feminism. Alice Walker coined the term "womanist," in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*.
Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious. (xi)

These characteristics define the personality of a womanist. She is one who is both mature, independent and playful. She is also curious. Walker adds:

2. A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. (xi)

Here Walker defines the social and communal interests of a womanist. She gains her strength from her community and uses that strength to uplift her people, physically, spiritually, economically, and politically. Both of these definitions define the essence of a womanist. Walker’s love of context--it has a place within the space of African-American culture--within this definition directly contrasts feminism’s placeless theory. Womanism is a theoretical space in which Black women can assert themselves without dividing their homes and communities, which is what white feminism, according to Jacqueline Grant, does.

Barbara Smith’s article “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” is a foundational Black feminist piece. She was writing in a time when the Black
woman's voice was non-existent in the canon, and she did groundbreaking work. In this particular article, she concentrates on lesbian literature. She states that

although [Black women] pay the most attention to black women writers as a group [they] seldom use a consistent feminist analysis or write about lesbian literature. All segments of the literary world—whether establishment, progressive, black, female, or lesbian—do not know, at least act as if they do not know that black women writers and black lesbian writers exist. (410)

Although I recognize that Smith's position is valid in the criticism of black feminist theory, especially in the early stages of its development, I believe her approach lacks scope. At points, she seems to turn a non-lesbian text into a lesbian one to further the Black feminist movement. Smith's analysis of Sula in this article is controlled with lesbian discourse. She views Sula and Nel's relationship as a lesbian one. This view of the novel, a novel of women's friendship, seems to undercut Morrison's purpose: to explore two women who are "two sides of one extraordinary character" (Conversations 13), one "so-called good" and "so-called evil" (62).

Smith does, however, clearly demonstrate the need for Black feminism through the negative comments of both Whites, male and female, and Black men about Black women's literature. Throughout her article, she cites a variety of authors like Ishmael Reed and Darwin Turner, who, through their own work, disclose their ignorance and racist views about the Black women's experience, history, and literature. Smith's article makes a valid
claim for black feminist theory. She does include a space for lesbian
novelists and critics, but she does not include men. Although this is a
pioneer piece of work, I believe Smith's definition of feminism and the scope
of her argument are too narrow. She does as many other Black feminists do
when they discuss the parameters of their theory: they seem to react to
White feminism instead of acting within their own experience. She states "a
redefinition of the goals and strategies of the white feminist movement
would lead to much needed change in the focus and content of what is now
generally accepted as women's culture" (411). Here the focus needs to be
with creating a new theory, not expanding the parameters or focus on an
existing theory.

Deborah McDowell's article, "New Directions for Black Feminist
Criticism," published just three years after Smith's article gives a broader
scope of Black feminism. McDowell clarifies feminism and the need for a new
type:

These early theorists and practitioners of feminist literary
criticism were largely white females who, wittingly or not,
perpetuated against the Black woman writer the same exclusive
practices they so vehemently decried in white male scholars.
Seeing the experiences of white women, particularly white
middle-class women, as normative, white female scholars
proceeded blindly to exclude the work of Black women writers
from literary anthologies and critical studies. (428)

McDowell points out that not only does white feminism exclude Black
feminist female writers, but Black male scholars have excluded them from the
African-American literary tradition as well. In light of this erasure, McDowell
states "the recognition among Black female critics and writers that white
women, white men, and Black men consider their experiences as normative
and Black women's experience as deviant has given rise to Black feminist
criticism" (430).

McDowell also addresses the arguments in Smith's article. McDowell
argues that Smith's "definition of lesbianism is vague and imprecise; it
subsumes far more Black women writers, particularly contemporary ones,
than not into the canon of Lesbian writers" (432). McDowell calls for a more
precise definition of lesbianism and its literature. McDowell, like me, does
not agree with the lesbian analysis of Sula and the lesbian focus of Smith's
argument. What McDowell does in her article is to call for a clearer definition
of Black feminism that would give women a space to articulate their analysis
and that would give depth to the works written by Black women. She does,
however, warn against completely turning away from white male traditional
methodology and theory, but she adds that using their theory would enhance
the scope of this theory by applying what is useful and reworking or rejecting
what is not (436). She wants Black feminists to explore the works of Black
women who have not "received the critical attention Black male writers
have" (438), but she does not want to exclude men. Like womanists,
McDowell challenges Black feminists to examine Black male writers. She
points out that many feminists discuss the negative images of women in
Black men's works, but she explains that "feminist critics run the risk of
plunging their work into cliche' and triviality if they continue to focus on how 
Black men treat Black women in literature" (438).

Although Sherley Williams in her article, "Some Implications of 
Womanist Theory," agrees with McDowell in that there is a need to revise 
the separatist critique in Black feminism and include Black male writers 
when analyzing literature and when talking about feminism, Williams calls 
for a clearer and better analysis of literature by African Americans. She 
says that McDowell "impl[ies] that feminist inquiry can only illuminate works 
by women and works that include female portraiture, that our re-readings of 
female image will not also change our readings of men" (517). In response to 
McDowell, Williams posits, "Womanist inquiry, on the other hand, assumes 
that it can talk effectively and productively about men. This is a necessary 
assumption because the negative, stereotyped images of black women are 
only part of the problem of phallocentric writings by black males" (517). Here 
Williams praises womanism, while providing examples of deficiencies in 
feminist theory.

Williams points out that Black men, the other part of the problem, is 
the way Black men have viewed themselves in their literature. She notes that 
this image changed several times. In the nineteenth century, there was a 
"pattern of self-restraint, of physical self-control as an avenue to moral 
superiority and intellectual equality vis-a-vis society" and the "heroic stature 
was most often achieved within the context of marriage, family and black
community, whereas in the twentieth century, with Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the "black heroic quest was increasingly externalized" (519). Since the Black male sought to emulate and desired recognition from the "white power structure" (519), which includes marrying white women and dominating Black men, the "black community, once the object of heroic quest, was, in these works, an impediment to its success; black female portraiture, when present, was often no more than demeaning stereotypes used to justify what even the hero sometimes recognized as a pathological obsession with the white woman" (519). Williams notes another change in the late nineteen-seventies. She says that these portraiture included themes such as male bonding, patriarchal responsibility, and sibling relations, moving from a self-glorifying image to a personal examination of one's self (519-520). She views this change as positive for black feminism, but these images are not mentioned in the canon. By examining what black men have written about black women, Williams desires to confront what black men have said about themselves.

Karla Holloway, shares with Williams the insight that Black women and men concentrate on different ideas in their literature: "Black women writers seem to concentrate on shared ways of saying, black males concentrate on individual ways of behaving" (7). Williams calls for an examination of Black and male writers' works to break down the walls of separatism used by black feminist and to refocus the discourse--for "to focus
on ourselves is to fall into the same hole The Brother has dug for himself—
narcissism, isolation, inarticulation, obscurity" (520). She adds, "we must
keep talking to and about ourselves, but literature, as Chinweizu and Walker
remind us, is about community and dialogue; theories or ways of reading
ought actively to promote the enlargement of both" (520). Williams
throughout this article acknowledges the groundbreaking work of Black
feminists in their quest to develop a theory that is unique to African
American women; however, she points to issues that can be clarified through
the quest for inclusion in Alice Walker’s definition of womanism.

Jacquelyn Grant, in White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus,
explains the aspects of white feminism that Black women oppose. She
explains that white feminism excludes Black women on the basis of
sexism/racism/classism. Black women diametrically oppose feminism on five
accounts according to Grant:

1) Class differences mean that while Black women are dealing
with “survival” issues, White women are dealing with
“fulfillment” issues. 2) Negative imagery of Black women
derived from physical and cultural stereotypes has resulted in
the debased treatment of Black women. 3) The naivete, or basic
lack of knowledge of Black women about the women’s
movement results in their inability to see the relationship
between feminist issues and the Black struggle. 4) Black women
perceive White feminists to be racists who are interested in
them only to accomplish the White women’s agenda. 5) There is
a concern that an alliance of Black women with White women in
a feminist agenda may be “detrimental to black men” and
therefore divisive of the Black community. (200)
Jacquelyn Grant explains that womanism according to Walker is more appropriate for Black women given the manner in which they act and interact within African American communities. Womanists were, according to Grant, “Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, Amanda Berry Smith, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Lou Hammer and countless others not remembered in any historical study. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies in spite of the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people” (205).

Grant also discusses the difference between Christ and Jesus, which provides a clearer view of feminism in relation to womanism. Christ is for white women a symbol of the patriarchal system that they are subjected to. They see Christ as male, and as a result, are unable to identify with Him. On the other hand, Black women see Jesus as Savior. Jesus suffered just as the slaves suffered. Jesus rose again, so Blacks see themselves as rising again in death. They see Heaven as their ultimate goal. Theoretically, the division of feminism and womanism originates in the Bible.

Katie Cannon’s Black Womanist Ethics explores the history of womanism. The threads of womanism, she argues, are found in slavery where the Black woman was seen as breeder. She was mistress to her slave master, and therefore, hated by the slave master’s wife. Also, the children of miscegenation caught the wrath of the slave holder’s wife. After slavery, the Black woman was despised by white women who could never get away from
the image of her as sex object and home wrecker. Womanism responded to and corrected this image. Acting in the community, women formed women’s clubs, wrote literature, produced plays, established the women’s place in the upliftment of the community and the family, and participated in the struggle for equality.

The Garden: Bailey’s Cafe

Though many Black women were socially and politically active, others lived in oppressive conditions with little possibility of self-expression. What could these women do? In “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” Alice Walker discusses the situation of her maternal ancestors, one that limited their expression and drove them mad:

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. (234)

One answer to this unused spirituality is the garden. Walker discusses her own mother’s ability to release this spring of creativity through gardening:

“I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of beauty” (241). This garden is her art.
Working extensively with Walker's image of garden as trope for women's creativity and identity, Gloria Naylor uses the garden as a space for healing. In Bailey's Cafe the garden is the site of recovery. Naylor presents us with Eve, mother of civilization, like her namesake in Genesis. She establishes the garden and is the gardener. She is also the woman who creates the boarding house, which will allow her to cultivate the girls who come to her into women. The garden is an essential part of this cultivation, an external symbol of what happens internally.

When asked how to get to Eve's house, Bailey answers, "Go out the door, make a right, and when you see a garden--if you see the garden you're there" (Naylor 81). The garden is a landmark of the physical house and a landmark for the state of mind that allows a women to find Eve's house; however, she must also possess the courage to heal her wound in order to become a woman able to shape and maintain her own self-identity.

Represented by lilies which mean "majesty" (Powell 90), Eve is the gardener. She is the director of the boarding house, and no one enters without her exclusive approval. Powell says that "the lily has always seemed an extremely formal flower--ice-cold when alone, demanding the company and contrast of other flowers to make its majestic impression" (92). Guiding a varied group of women, Eve demands certain changes from her boarders which make her "majestic impression" evident. Like the lily, which is the sacred flower of Juno, Eve is the most powerful female "goddess" at the
boarding house. Without her, the women would neither have a place to heal nor would they have the chance to be recreated as women who possess their own self-confidence. The lily is the “cup” holding the divine essence of her life (Powell 428). Likewise, Eve holds the life of each of her boarders by allowing them into her boarding house order to give them the space to redefine themselves.

When Eve establishes her place of residence, she establishes her garden. The flowers on the wall of her brownstone are wildflowers. This flower suggests the way those outside the boundary see the boarding house—as full of wild women. Outsiders call it a whorehouse. The wildflowers indicate the “wild” state of mind her potential borders possess before finding her. Her boarders are from the borders, the outside of society, and they go to Bailey’s Cafe, which is also on the edge of the world. In other words, both the people and the place are at the extremes of experience.

Outside, however, becomes inside under Eve’s protection. Inside the perimeter of her yard, many beautiful flowers are blossoming. These flowers represent each boarder that resides there; like the flowers outside, her boarders make up the garden inside the house. Each of these women finds her inner beauty with Eve and allows it to glow on the outside. They go to Eve as wounded girls, but once cultivated by Eve they become whole, independent women. She “insists that her boarders only entertain men who are willing to bring them flowers. If he can’t do that much for you, he doesn’t
need to waste your time” (93). This implies that each woman is special and needs to acknowledge that fact and to be treated like a lady. Esther, Peaches, and Jesse Bell are each represented by a flower and each become a flower in Eve’s garden.

Esther is an odd white flower in Eve’s otherwise colorful garden.

White roses mean silence and signify Esther’s oppression and attitude:

I like the white roses because they show up in the dark.
I don’t.
We won’t speak about this, Esther. (Naylor 95)

Like the white rose, Esther is silenced. Unlike the white rose, she is invisible. The abuse to her done in the dark, by her sadistic husband, is so horrid that it cannot be narrated. According to Powell, “A white rose used to be sculptured over the door of banqueting rooms to remind guests that they should never repeat outside the things they had heard in their festive moments” (118). Similarly, Esther is silenced by her “husband” in the basement.

Because of the pain that manifests on her face, Esther entertains men in the basement and only in the dark. Eve tells her, “What they’ll need from you, they’ll need in the dark if they know it or not . . . Even that type could not bring themselves to return if they saw your eyes. You have the most honest face of any woman I know, sweet Esther” (99). Esther and her gentlemen callers do not meet face-to-face; however, Esther does insist that her
gentlemen callers bring her white roses. The white rose symbolizes Esther's true purity which remains despite the abuse she has endured, her innocence, and her inability to speak about the sexual abuse she has endured in the basement by her husband.

Mary's (Peaches) scars, unlike Esther's, are on the surface. She identifies herself with daffodils which symbolize regard. Mary plays a dual role that encompasses the way her father sees her and the way she views herself. This internal split in the self, denies Mary inner peace and balance. Struggling with her sexuality, Mary cuts her face with a beer opener. She commits this horrible act to control her own life. Without beauty dictating the response others have to her and with a scarred face, Mary becomes more confident and in touch with her sexuality.

From the “warrior marks” comes her identification with daffodils. The choice of the daffodils as her flower ultimately shapes her life. This is the first choice, apart from scarring her face, that Mary ever makes. That choice reflects her beauty: “the girl choose[s] the flower, Eve said. And you try growing daffodils in the fall” (Naylor 113). Like the other boarders, Mary chooses a flower that is difficult to obtain in a certain season and will except nothing else, no matter what season. Moreover, “if they go upstairs with a bouquet that's less than perfect, Eve's taught her to send them back down again. Look in that mirror good, and accept no less than what you deserve” (113). The flower becomes as much a reflection of Mary/Peaches as the
reflection in the mirror. Indeed, the flowers become the symbol that allows Mary/Peaches to regard herself as she makes others regard her. They change the way in which she interprets the image of herself. Like Mary, her outward appearance is scarred, but her inner strength and confidence come forth in the symbol of the rare and perfect daffodils. Eve is the gardener that cultivates her flower, Mary, from a seed to a flower, demanding that she recognize her own worth and making her a whole person with the ability to deal with her sexuality in an uninhibited matter.

"One man's weed is another man's flower" (Naylor 115) is how Bailey refers to Jesse Bell. Jesse requests dandelions as her flower. Ironically, "those are the kinds of plants Eve usually pulls up as weeds" (117). According to Powell, dandelion means love's oracle (67). Jesse's "room is a mess to clean because she litters the carpet with crushed dandelions. The men who try to visit her get their flowers smashed right in their faces at the door" (Naylor 116).

The dandelion "opens its petals to the first rays of the sun and closes when the sunlight fades or is intercepted" (Powell 68). Like the dandelion, Jesse is full of life and opens her "petals" to her sun (her husband, son and lesbian lover), but when her "sunlight" fades she closes herself emotionally to those gentlemen callers who bring false rays of sunlight.

Bailey's Cafe's is not a permanent home; it is a mediating space between the past the future. Bailey, the narrator, says, "All these folks are in
transition; they come midway in their stories and go on” (Naylor 219). Here we see that the midpoint in their stories is where they know it is time to make a change. They, however, must work to make this mediating structure function as it should, as a place of healing. It also explains how this garden serves as a mediating structure in this African-American community of women. Each flower in the garden is vibrant and colorful and each has its own distinct smell just as each boarder in the boarding house has his/her own story to tell. With Eve as the gardener each boarder is allowed her own space to grow and blossom. The boarder leaves the border to define the boundaries of the self as she learns to cultivate herself. Without this space each boarder (flower) would wither and die under the pain of her-story never to find either a sense of self or her rightful place in the community.

This image of the garden as a place of healing transcends into popular culture in the African-American community. Aretha Franklin in her video for the song “A Rose is Still a Rose,” directed by Lauryn Hill, follows a young girl who was once a “pretty, sweet thing, not the least bit insecure,” but is hurt by a man “with [a] sticky game who played with her view” by “steal[ing] her honey and then forget[ting] her” (Franklin). After the main character of the video is hurt by her boyfriend, she begins to live a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity. When she realizes that her lifestyle is a mask for the pain that she feels from the broken relationship, she finds Aretha Franklin’s garden, just as the characters in Bailey’s Cafe find Eve’s garden when they are ready
to be healed. Aretha Franklin explains to this young woman in the introduction that she is still a rose:

Listen dear, I realize that you've been hurt, deeply, because I've been there.
But regardless to who, what, why, when, and where, we're all precious in His sight.
And a rose is still and always will be a rose.

Furthermore, in this the chorus of this song Aretha Franklin proclaims:

'Cause a rose is still a rose
Baby girl, you're still a flower.
He can't leave you and then take you;
Make you and then break you.
Darling, you hold the power.

The lyrics of this song encourage self-confidence and the ability to define oneself on one’s own abilities despite the way others treat you. Franklin discovers a wounded young girl and expresses to her her worth as an independent woman. Franklin takes the power away from the hurt and gives it back to the young women. The individual flower (woman) helps to compose the garden (community of women) seen in the image at the end of the video. The garden as a transformative space has captured both the literary and popular imagination and is expressed in both cultures.

**Music: The Blues Woman**

In “Justified, Sanctified, and Redeemed,” womanist musicologist Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan argues that blues songs, as James H. Cone argues, are "'secular spirituals'--functional worldly songs that express the core of daily African-American experience” (142). Sung by Black women, they
represent a signifying tradition, on Black male constructions, on White patriarchal oppression and on Christianity (144). The blues “offer a rich vehicle to explore the possibilities of hope, salvation, and transformation toward somebodiness “ (144). That is, the blues suggest an imaginative vision (hope), liberation (salvation), and self-actualization. And the embrace of one’s inner beauty (transformation). As such, blues music is a mediating and performative structure in the African-American community. Leroi Jones in Blues People takes a theoretical view of music, looking at its developments from the mid-1800s through the late 1950s. Jones believes that blues started in slavery in the spirituals. Music for slaves soothed the soul. Many slaves sang of heaven which is synonymous with freedom. Songs also chronicle the hardships of slavery but also signal the plan of escape to freedom or the time when the plan was to be executed. For example in this song, the theme is heaven and leaving the burdens of slavery behind:

I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow.
I'm in this wide world alone.
No hope in this world for tomorrow.
I'm tryin' to make heaven my home.
Sometimes I am tossed and driven.
Sometimes I don't know where to roam.
I've heard of a city called heaven.
I've started to make it my home.
My mother's gone on to pure glory.
My father's still walkin' in sin.
My sisters and brothers won't own me
Because I'm tryin' to get in.
Sometimes I am tossed and driven.
Sometimes I don't know where to roam,
But I've heard of a city called heaven
And I've started to make it my home.
(Norton Anthology of African American Literature 8)

This song speaks of a better place. It speaks of a space where slavery
(bondage) is no longer an issue. Music, such as this song, emerged from
slaves' inner spirits. It became a space for them to express themselves
without being condemned by the slavemaster. It was also a way to escape
the psychological constraints of the body through the mind and the spirit.
For many of the slaves and the ex-slaves, this art helped them to survive.
Jones explains how music reflects the changes in thought of the African-
American community:

Music . . . is the result of thought. It is the result of thought
perfected at its most empirical, i.e. as attitude, or stance . . . If
Negro music can be seen to be the result of certain attitudes,
certain specific ways of thinking about the world, then the basic
hypothesis of this book is understood. The Negro's music
changed as he changed, reflecting shifting attitudes or
consistent attitudes within changed contexts. And it is why
the music changed, that seems most important to me. (152-153)

Music was the expression open to African Americans in slavery, Paul Gilroy
argues in The Black Atlantic, as such, it is the “backbone” of black political
and cultural history. Art and life, therefore, are a continuity in the black
experience (56).

This continuity of music and life is seen in August Wilson's play Ma
Rainey's Black Bottom. The historical Ma Rainey was the "Mother of the
Blues" (Kirk-Duggan 144) who focused not on the “traditional key elements in
women's lives like children, family relations, and motherhood [but on]
essential truths about African American life experiences of oppression, pain, poverty, humor, survival and love—notably violence and sexuality” (Kirk-Duggan 146). Wilson’s Ma Rainey is the vocalist of a band that includes a pianist, Toledo, a drummer, Levee, a bass guitar player, Slow Drag, and Cutler, the leader and the guitar and trombone player. Although the title suggests that the drama focuses on Ma Rainey, it essentially centers around the members of the band through discussions of racial, economic, and social issues in the band room. The band explores issues of race such as the color line, education, and financial and employment opportunities. With music as the backdrop, the four men engage in racial talk in the space in which they are most comfortable. Although they are in a white-owned studio, the band room in which they rehearse becomes their space. Only then, after claiming that space as their own, are they able to discuss the white man, music, women, and politics freely.

Sturdyvant is the owner of the a record label. He is “insensitive to black performers and prefers to deal with them at arm’s length” (17). Irvin, Ma Rainey’s manager, “prides himself on his knowledge of blacks and his ability to deal with them” (17). Both of these characters represent the oppressive attitude towards blacks, especially musicians, during this period, the 1920s. Throughout the play, the attitude of these men resurface as Ma Rainey’s band records their music.
Levee, from the beginning of this work desires to have his own band. He is the rebel, trying to force his musical influence on the band. He tries to rewrite Ma Rainey’s songs, but she quickly dismisses that idea when she arrives. After hearing the band rehearse Levee’s version of “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” Ma Rainey says to Irvin: “I’m singing Ma Rainey’s song. I ain’t singing Levee’s song. Now that’s all to it” (62). As portrayed here, Ma Rainey’s voice overpowers both Levee’s voice and Irvin’s voice. She is asserting her power over men, and therefore, defining her space through her music, thus making herself the subject versus the object. Levee, however, still desires ownership. As a result, he submits his music to Sturdyvant for approval. Although Sturdyvant initially seems interested in Levee’s idea, Sturdyvant reveals his own selfish capitalist motives by the end of the play.

Sturdyvant offers Levee five dollars for his songs:

Sturdyvant: “About them songs you gave me. I’ve thought about it and I just don’t think the people will buy them. They’re not the type of songs we’re looking for... I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you five dollars a piece for them. Now that is the best I can do... I had my fellows play your songs, and when I heard them, they just didn’t sound like the kind of songs I’m looking for right now.”

Levee: “You got to hear me play them, Mr. Sturdyvant! You ain’t heard me play them. That’s what’s gonna make them sound right.” (107-108)

Sturdyvant wins and only pays Levee five dollars per song. Here although he desires to play his own music, Levee becomes object to his music. The one holding the economic power overpowers the one with the talent, making himself subject. According to Sandra Shannon, for many musicians, “the
fruits of their talents and ambitions merely lined the pockets of those who controlled the music industry. Thus, their only means of breaking the cycle of poverty from which they fled too often became someone else's financial gain (88). Clearly, if the music was not good enough to be played and sold, Sturdyvant would not have paid Levee anything. Leroi Jones states that white bands often bought music from Blacks in an attempt to make the music their own and in the process make a profit. Here the power of music, once owned by Levee, is being co-opted or stolen by an oppressor. He steals the songs, but not the performance. Levee asserts that the songs are “right” in performance (108). Levee cannot maintain this distinction; therefore, art is unable to function properly as a liberating space.

Immediately after Levee's confrontation with Irvin, Toledo accidentally steps on Levee's Florshiem shoes which gives Levee an opportunity to transfer his loss of power to Toledo. In the middle of this argument the audience foresees Levee's forthcoming explosion through the narrator:

"[Levee] is trying to get a grip on himself, as even he senses, or perhaps only he senses, he is about to lose control" (110). With all the frustration and the feeling of not controlling his own destiny, Levee lunges at Toledo with a knife and kills him. Through this action, he breaks the bonds of brotherhood because the medium in which he previously moved freely and expressed himself is taken. Therefore, in the end, music does not work for Levee as a mediating structure, but only because of interference from oppressive places.
where hierarchies of race and economics exist. Levee's space thus becomes a place.

Ma Rainey, on the other hand, handles both Irvin and Sturdyvant differently. Sturdyvant from the beginning of the play, does not know how to deal with Ma Rainey, so he tells Irvin to handle her.

Sturdyvant: "I don't care what she calls herself. I'm not putting up with it. I just want to get her in here... record those songs on that list... and get her out. Just like clockwork, huh?" (18)

Ma Rainey takes the title "mama," suggesting one who caretakes and, through that role, may be oppressed. She makes that role "generative" (Kirk-Duggan 147), which makes her powerful. Sturdyvant realizes the potential profit in using Ma Rainey's voice. As a matter of fact, that seems to be the only reason he is able to stand her company in the same room or building for that matter. His desire to exploit her is another form of slavery--economic slavery. Furthermore, Sturdyvant wishes to get out of this music business and "get into something respectable" (19), insinuating that music is not an acceptable business in the white community because it means dealing with Black bands.

Ma Rainey undercuts Sturdyvant's power. When she arrives, Ma Rainey has the police with her questioning her about an accident. Although Ma Rainey is the one the police has a problem with, she instructs Irvin to handle it. Ma Rainey enters the play demanding and exercising power: she demands Irvin to turn up the heat, to allow her nephew, Sylvester, to do the
introduction to “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” even though he stutters, and to change the list of songs Sturdyvant has already chosen. Finally, she demands a Coke before singing. Although this may seem like an insignificant request, it emerges as important. In Black cultural understanding, Coke, which contained cocaine was a leisure drink for White people. African Americans drank fruit drink, like Nehi or Orange. To demand a Coke is to make a gesture of power.1 Ma is expressing that she understands how managers and record labels exploit Black musicians. Sturdyvant and Irvin may find her hard to deal with, but both continue to do so. By asking for a Coke, Ma Rainey places herself as subject of her space, her voice, because she comprehends the politics of the music business:

Ma Rainey: They don’t care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. They back there now calling me all kinds of names . . . nothing else. They ain’t got what they needed yet. As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it’s just like if I’d be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain’t got no use for me then. I know what I’m talking about. You watch. Irvin right there with the rest of them. He don’t care nothing about me either. He’s been my manager for six years, always talking about sticking together, and the only time he had me in his house was to sing for some of his friends . . . If you colored and can make them some money, then you all right with them. Otherwise, you just a dog in the alley. (79)

Through this monologue, it is clear that Ma Rainey has a keen understanding of the music world in the capitalist society where the majority culture has the

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control. She understands the politics of the business and with that acquired knowledge, she is able to negotiate her own space through her music. She defines the parameters of her space. She negotiates between the places of the male-dominated music world and white-dominated society in which she has virtually no power through the power of her voice which she, unlike Levee, keeps performative and free. She will not let it be recorded—that is, set and exploited by others. I believe this knowledge, her voice, allows her to negotiate effectively her space, while this lack of knowledge allows Levee's space to be invaded and destroyed.

However, even with the power that she controls within the realm of her space, the white community still possess power over things outside this space. For example, similar to authenticating documents in the slave narratives, Irvin must speak for Ma Rainey in the situation concerning the police:

Irvin: (Slides bill from his pocket.) Look, Officer . . . I'm Madame Rainey's manager . . . It's good to meet you. (He shakes the Policeman's hand and passes him the bill.) As soon as we're finished with the recording session, I'll personally stop by the precinct house and straighten up this misunderstanding.

Policeman: Well . . . I guess that's all right. As long as someone is responsible for them. (52) (italics here is mine)

Here we see that money prevails. Also, note that Ma Rainey cannot be responsible for herself, but Irvin can. In this situation, he is "someone," and she is not. The patriarchal views continue to dominate the places outside of and around mediating structures.
The Porch

This truth—that White patriarchal power dominates American culture—is one Black women writers face. They seek other avenues of power, different from those of White society. It can argued that Black women turn inward—with the Black community and its configuration and into the Black female self and that self's unique expression of power, which may or may not affect the dominant structure. The porch, as a structure of mediation and a place of performance becomes a Black female space in the hands of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Zora Neal Hurston.

In this dissertation, I will focus on the porch as a mediating structure. For Celie in The Color Purple, Denver in Beloved, and Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God, the porch provides a place of storytelling, and a gathering place, and it serves as the interim space between "the house" and "the street." The "'street' indicates the world with its unpredictable events, its actions and passions" (Da Matta 209) and the "'house' pertains to a controlled universe, where things are in their proper places" (209). The house, according to Bachelard, "constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). The porch, that performative and transitional space, allows in a controlled way, the house and the street to interact and is the space where identity is articulated and acted. The porch serves as a space from which Denver, Janie and Celie transform the house and the street into structures that can interact with one another without
conflict, healing their worlds, and the porch serves as a platform from which they articulate that transformation and interaction, healing themselves. On the porch, they recreate themselves in relation to the independence of the strict structure of the house and the active, but often undefined street.

The porch as such can be seen as a border. To use Victor Turner’s term from *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, it is a liminal space—that is, a midpoint of transition between two positions. Each character who occupies the porch in the three novels is a liminal character, operating or trying to forge a connection between the house and the street. That is, all the characters metaphorically used as “porch figures” are in transition, at personal midpoints, both in their own constructions of identity and symbols of community between the house and the street.

On the porch, Denver in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Janie in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Celie in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, define, redefine, and narrate themselves. Our structure of womanism, gardens and music resurface and interplay in these discoveries and statements of identity. In each of these works, major characters occupy and articulate the values of the house, the street, and the porch. The house serves as a sometimes stable and sometimes unstable, structure that illustrates hierarchical and often patriarchal traditions. The street gives the view of creation, the world, and both good and evil. It offers choice and
radical freedom that is balanced, with the conventions of the house, as we shall see, by the women on the porch.

The porch is a space traditionally noted for its place in the community. However, its structural origins add depth to its importance in the African-American community. Here, I will examine the validity of the arguments for the African origins of the porch.

African Origins and Influence on American Architecture

Various authors, such as Jay Edwards in "The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza-Veranda-Gallery," Davida Rochlin in "The Front Porch," and John Vlach in both Back of the Big House and The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts, examine the origins of the porch as well as its architecture. They, in different ways, attempt to trace the actual structure and its function in the societies in which it was used. Jay Edwards traces the influence of the porch to Africa. He notes the similarities in the porches of the slaves and those of their masters. Although he focuses on the African influence, Edwards credits Greece as the originator of the porch in its primitive form, the portico, which Jessica Hirschman in For Your Home Porches and Sunrooms describes as “long, formal, symmetrical porches derived from classical Greek architecture. The portico is protected overhead by a triangular gable or pediment rootline that is supported by columns. Porticos traditionally were designed to shelter main entrances but overtime were moved to the sides of buildings, especially churches, to protect secondary entrances and egresses” (9).
Davida Rochlin discusses the various types of porches and the influences brought to America from other countries. He describes the types in this way: “the Dutch stoop was a small covered entrance platform with a bench at each side of the door; the English vestibule was a fully enclosed entrance room; the Indian veranda, associated with the decorative Victorian era, was more spacious than the ordinary porch; the Roman colonade, not necessarily attached to the main structure, was a roof with a series of columns set at regular intervals; and the Greek loggia often overlooked an open court” (25). The dog-trot, according to Rochlin, is one of the few porches with origins in the United States. The dog-trot is formed when “two portions of the house were separated by a covered passageway, open at the front and back with access to the rooms on each side” (25). Rochlin notes that the breezeway was the main living space where “many household chores were performed while the dogs trotted back and forth, and so the name” (25). The author notes that the porch was most prevalent in the South because of the climate.

John Vlach, like Jay Edwards, traces the influence of the porch to Africa. He argues that the first of the slaves were allowed to construct their homes and, without any prior knowledge of American architecture, made their dwellings with porches. According to Edwards, “Few porches were employed on North American homes before the year 1700.² By the year 1850, 

² These porches were added to these North American houses. p.9

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an extended porch had become a standard feature of rural domestic architecture in almost every American community from the Mississippi delta to the St. Lawrence River Valley" (3). There were various types. For example, "the side galleries that provided much needed relief from the semitropical summer suggest that the piazza can best be analyzed as a South Carolinian adaptation of a West Indian architectural feature" (137). Edwards explains that it is difficult to trace the roots of the porch because 1) many were added to houses after they were constructed; 2) many may have been replaced or have deteriorated; and, 3) many porches seem to have appeared everywhere at once making it difficult to locate the first. However, he clarifies the time of its origins: "The veranda entered the New World in the middle of the seventeenth century or earlier. Some forms of open porch go back to the early decades of the sixteenth" (7).

Edwards, along with Joyner and Vlach, traces the origins of the porch to Africa, and, indeed, the introduction of the structure parallels the introduction of slaves to America. Before the enslavement of Africans by Europeans, the Africans living along the coast built their houses on posts to catch the breeze and in order for it to circulate effectively throughout the house (Figure 5). In addition, the house usually contained a veranda (Figure 6). A veranda is defined as being equal to that of a gallery and piazza, and all refer to full-facade-width extensions of the roof supported by pillars or
poles. The veranda is a precursor to the porch, a narrow projection of the roof, seen in European architecture today.

That the porch is derived from African as well as Roman sources can be supported by Jamaican architecture of the Maroons. In the 1500's, while in route to slavery, many slaves escaped from the ships. These slaves called Maroons settled in the mountains of Jamaica. When we look at their architecture, we see that when the escaped slaves built their own houses, the influence of Africa was present in their ideas and building style.³

Africans who did not escape the chains of slavery, as well we have noted, were allowed to construct their own dwelling places. Their homes "were actually African-style dwellings, small rectangular huts constructed with mud walls and thatched roofs" (Vlach, Back 155). The houses contained, in most cases, porches. The style of the porch varied from plantation to plantation, but the veranda was the most prevalent.

Charles Joyner in Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community claims that "the floor plan [of the slave quarters in North Carolina] is identical to that of the Yoruba two-room houses of Nigeria" (118). He also acknowledges the African roots of the double-pen cabin to Africa.⁴ Joyner does add that the hall-and-parlor type, a hall and two sleeping rooms, has British origins, but claims that the outward appearance is just a facade

³ For a sketch of this community, see Edwards p. 26.

⁴A common folk house-type in the South, in which a one-room (or single pen) had another room added. These cabins housed two slave families. See Joyner p. 119.
for “the floor plan of the double-pen house is similar to an African proxemic environment” (119). Joyner gives credit to both European and African influence on the structure of the houses in slave quarters:

Outwardly the cabins were marked by European notions of symmetry and control, but inwardly they concealed interiors marked by African spatial orientations. The two-room house was crucial to the Yoruba architectural tradition, and its continuity in . . . slave cabins was not accidental. That continuity is eloquent testimony that West African architecture was not forgotten in the crucible of slavery. (119)

As seen here, all three authors, Edwards, Joyner, and Vlach, acknowledge the African architecture influences on the house. Vlach in The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts comments on the porch’s place in African architecture:

The architecture which developed in Haiti provides a clear example of the contribution of African building concepts in the New World. Haitian slaves were, in the first half of the eighteenth century, largely from two sources. In any given decade between 1760 and 1790, from twenty-eight to forty-two per cent came from areas dominated culturally by the Yoruba; slaves of Angola-Zaire origins, the next largest group, made up between thirty-two and thirty-seven percent of the total imports. . . . The importance of African proxemic tendencies is also encountered in a building type that developed in Haiti as the result of a three-way interaction among Arawak Indians, French colonials, and African slaves. This house is the prototype of the American shotgun. It contains the gable door and porch of the Arawak bohio, the construction techniques of French peasant cottages, and the spatial volume of a Yoruba two-room house. This building called a caille, is found primarily in southern Haiti. It was apparently firmly established as a common dwelling form by the late seventeenth century, and its dimensions have not varied appreciably from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. The contemporary caille contains two rooms and a porch. (125, 128)
The dimensions of the caille (10 x 21 feet for the house and 10 x 8 feet for each room and 4-5 feet deep for the porch) are similar to the interior dimensions of Yoruba rooms (close to 9 x 9 feet) thus showing the African influence of the house (Vlach 128). This house survived in Haiti and took on larger dimensions. As a result, the porch size increased:

the interior sense of closeness declined, but the exterior sign of hospitality grew. The porch can be seen as a piece of the house that is part of the street—or a piece of the street incorporated into the house. From either perspective it is certainly a zone of transition, which draws the resident and the passer-by together. The impact of African communal architectural may thus have been felt beyond the slave society and may have been felt beyond the slave society and may have been its mark on the houses of free Blacks. (129)

Here Vlach too makes the connection of the architecture of the house with Africa, which leads him to examine the influence, through architecture, that Africa has had on the American porch. Under the African influence, when Europeans began to build their houses, a remarkable resemblance to the veranda began to surface in the style of the modern porch (Edwards 27). Critics argue that this structure comes from the slaves themselves because before then “European houses [did] not have structures equivalent to the broad, open front porches of American houses” (Vlach, Decorative Arts 137).

Vlach, through his research, is adamant about acknowledging the African origins of the porch:

The front porch may be another manifestation of the common wisdom of black folk. Slaves might have added porches to their cabins as a matter of traditional architecture practice, but this was apparently a strange innovation to “Ole Massa,” who was
slow to see the advantage of it. He was, however, eventually forced to either build a front porch or swelter through the summer. Eventually a wide veranda became the height of the architectural elegance, but this was only after two centuries of experimentation during which its origins were apparently forgotten. When we rightfully credit the front porch to African genius, we must acknowledge that millions have benefitted from the impact of African custom. (*Decorative Arts* 138)

Charles Joyner concludes:

> The broad front porches of the slave cabins helped to modify the steamy...summers by providing both shade for the house and a shady place where one might catch the faintest stirrings of a late afternoon breeze. The absence of such porches in Europe suggest that the African slaves and their descendants may have taught their masters more about tropical architecture than has been generally credited. (120)

Vlach, Joyner and Edwards are in accord in their research in documenting the evidence that the porch's origins lie in African architecture.

**The Function of the Porch in the South**

The porch is, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that space between the house and the street: it is, as John Vlach suggests (129), a mediating structure. The house is a space for the learning of traditions and rules; it represents order and structure. Vlach explains, "The essence of architecture is the form it gives to space, the order it imposes on humans and their surroundings. A house thus serves as a cradle for cultural acquisition by providing a specific volumetric context in which most aspects of culture are learned" (*Decorative Arts* 122). The street, in contrast, offers no shield from or form for cultural exposure. Most experiences that occur in the street are
spontaneous and without order; one sometimes needs a filter to sort out such experiences.

Porches, in Southern ante-bellum and post-Civil War architecture, are structures that connect the house with the street: “architectural analysts refer to the front porch as a transitional zone between the house and the street” (Perry 14). Despite its African origins and African American uses in the ante-bellum South, the porch gradually became the property of the slave holder, an extension of the plantation home and, therefore, of power. It was also a social space.

As a place of power, the porch was often dominated by the slave master. The position of the porch allowed slave owners to supervise, speak, punish, and sell from it. The porch served as a structure from which to give instruction as seen in scenes from movies like *Roots*. Also, the porch functioned at times as a selling block. This male-dominated structure had, first, to be reclaimed by the slaves as space from which they could socialize within their own community and second transformed by the women who used the porch to sew, instruct, and share stories, adding to the oral tradition of the slave community.

One mode of reclaiming the porch was in its use as a social space. During the era of slavery, as Richard Perry explains in “The Porch as Stage and Symbol in the Deep South,” the porch was a practical architectural response and “a cultural response to the humid subtropical climate of the
region" (13). Hirschman adds, "in warm climates . . . homes often featured a second-story porch to allow the circulation of breezes. Extensive roof overhangs also helped cool interior rooms by shading the porch. And on very hot nights, the porch often doubled as a makeshift bedroom" (8). Historically, slave masters and slaves found relief on their porches from, respectively, their mansions and their cramped, humid one-room living quarters. Beyond its practical function, the porch served as a place of conversation because "streets are often closer to the houses, and conversations between porch and street can be carried on easily" (Perry 15). Later, after slavery was abolished, the porch continued to serve as a place of community. Richard Perry in "The Porch as Stage and Symbol in the Deep South," explains that the porch:

> extends the sphere of control from the house into the public arena, offering a seat for the consideration of others who may briefly intrude into one's space. At the same time it gently bounds the public space, offering an approved path of access for the world to make requests of the resident within. (15)

Toni Morrison in *Beloved* mentions the porch as gathering place: "At the front of the church was a sturdy porch where customers used to sit, and children laugh at the boy who got his head stuck between the railings" (218). As Morrison's quotation indicates, even in churches and stores, which were also important in the African-American community, the porch played an important role. It served as a place to escape the heat of the structure, to engage in "porch talk," and, as an extension of the house, from which to watch the children play.
Black women writers have adopted the structure and function of the porch to make statements about the formation of the black woman's identity. In this discussion, I will connect the historical value of the porch in the African-American community to the significance it has in African-American women's fiction. This connection will show how the porch functions as a physical space as well as a space for transformation. Evident in Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is the need for each of the characters who occupy the porch—Denver, Janie, and Celie, respectively—to transform, to become new creations. On the porch, they recreate themselves independent of the strict structure of the house and the undefined street.

The expression of that intersection is often oral. Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin and Testifyin* argues that, "Through song, story, folk sayings and rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and precepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation" (73). Also, Daryl Cumber Dance in *Honey Hush: An Anthology of African American Women's Humor* explores the oral tradition of humor through folk sayings, proverbs, jokes, comic tales, and dozens:

We use our humor to speak the unspeakable, to mask the attack, to get a tricky subject on the table, to warn of lines not to be crossed, to strike out at enemies and the hateful acts of friends and family, to camouflage sensitivity, to tease, to compliment, to berate, to brag, to flirt, to speculate, to gossip, to educate, to correct the lines people tell on us, to bring about change (xxii).
This oral tradition originated in Africa. Genealogies were kept by the griot. Also, stories and other histories were passed down orally. This tradition persisted during times of slavery when spirituals and other stories, tales, and histories were passed down from generation to generation orally. According to John Blassingame in *The Slave Community*, "One of the most important cultural forms in West Africa was the folktale. Throughout the region storytelling was an art form including acting, singing, and gestures that serves as the favorite evening entertainment" (20). Thomas Webber in *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community 1831-1865* adds,

It was during evenings, Sundays, and holidays that the children of the quarters became acquainted with the structure, the style, and the leading personalities of their quarter community. Through their common experiences they learned the ways in which their community operated, how it made common decisions, planned secretive events, provided for common physical and recreational needs, and generally organized itself to be as independent as possible from the whims of the white personalities and the strictures of plantation rule and regulation. (19)

Music was an important form of entertainment and cultural retention. The banza or banjo was brought into the United States by Africans sold into slavery. Consequently, later many African-Americans danced and sang to the music of the banjo (Campbell and Rice 69). The gathering of the community for dances and folktales also originated in Africa. Because "singing, dancing and making music were especially significant folk performance on the slave plantations" (82), the gathering was an opportune time to tell folktales. These times also served as a time of exchange within
the slave community. As a result, the slave community was close. The community shared food, clothes, and the challenges of rearing children.

According to Nathan Huggins in Black Odyssey, in the evening, many slave communities gathered outside:

Fires glowed into the night as men and women sat and smoked their pipes and told stories. The children heard of rabbits, bears, and foxes; stories of time before they were born, of where the folk were before coming to this place, of strange black men who hid in the forests and swamps raiding white people's storehouses for their food; and they heard of old men and women who spoke in another tongue and who come from Africa, where all their folks before them had been where one could do as he pleased. The fires and the stories drew the quarters together in the night. (172)

As seen in many photographs,\(^5\) many slave cabins had steps resembling porches or chairs or benches directly outside their front doors. The area for fires can be seen as close to these pre-modern porches.\(^6\) In John Vlach's Back of the Big House, there is further evidence of the porch as a marker of space.\(^7\)

This tradition appears in African literature and is prevalent in African-American literature. Kofi Owusu in “Interpreting and Interpreting: African Roots, Black Fruits, and the Colored Tree (of “Knowledge”) states, “In writing about African literature one finds oneself almost inevitably making references to oral sources for the simple reason that the vibrant oral tradition

\(^{5}\) See photographs in Campbell and Rice and in Vlach.

\(^{6}\) These area can also be seen in the references noted in the previous footnote.

\(^{7}\) See especially chapters one and eleven.
feeds the literature" (748). He refers to this tradition in America using Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s research on the speakerly text in African-American literature, which gives credit to oral sources in African-American literature.

Martha K. Cobb in her article, "From Oral to Written: Origins of Black Literary Tradition," notes that when Africans arrived in America, they were prohibited from learning to read or to write. They were, therefore, forced to depend on passed-down stories, and on their ears, as they learned English. From these skills, the call-and-response tradition developed and is evident in many of the work songs, spirituals, and road songs. This oral pattern translated into some of the poetry written by African Americans.

In Beloved, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and The Color Purple, oral tradition is prevalent. Particularly, in Beloved and Their Eyes Were Watching God, as Walter Ong puts it in Orality and Literacy, "Knowledge is hard to come by and precious, and society regards highly those wise old men and women who specialize in conserving it, who know and can tell the stories of the days of old" (41). These people are represented by Baby Suggs and Nanny, for their stories are respected just as is their advice within the stories. Janie enters the oral tradition when she tells her story to Pheoby on the porch. Baby Suggs' voice urges Denver off the porch, and, Celie, Mr.____, and Shug narrate and understand their relationships and histories on the porch. Oral tradition is evident in all the novels; it is the way that history is passed down from generation to generation. Although Paule Marshall in her
The interview “Talk as a Form of Action” refers to women’s talk as kitchen talk. We can call discussions on the porch by men and women “porch talk.” She explains that African-American women did not have authorized means of expression:

...so it was done through talk, and it was talk that even though it was spontaneous on one hand was on the other hand finely tuned. So it was an artistic expression. I mean they just don’t sit around the kitchen table and tell a story ‘in any ole kinda way’; a story was told with an eye to its structure, with an eye to the people they were talking about in the story-characterization, it was told with a sense of drama in mind. (Brock 196)

Like kitchen talk, porch talk has a moral message that is mixed with a little drama to make it interesting.

The Loss of the Porch

After acknowledging the architectural origins of the porch, authors like Don Barker in “Facing South: The Demise of the Front Porch,” and Richard Perry in “The Porch as Stage and Symbol in the Deep South” discuss the social function and diminished use of the porch. These authors examine the importance of the porch in the times before air-conditioning, when socializing with the community was an essential part of society. Richard Perry blames the decline of the porch on technology: “The introduction of air conditioning and television transformed domestic architecture in the 1950’s and reshaped the social and cultural ecology surrounding the home” (13). Don Barker, however, discusses the diminished use of the porch differently. He blames the disintegration of society and its inability to function properly on the
absence of the porch: "The reason there is a hanging pot craze is because there is not bannister to put pots on. Kids never bring their dates home because there's no porch to sit on. Neighbors can't settle arguments because there is no porch to yell across . . . Television became so popular because there was no porch" (10). Although both authors argue the reasons for the lessening of the use of the porch differently, both admit that it is passing as a structure of architecture and society. According to Jocelyn Donlon in "Two Women and a Porch,"

The house porch served not only to deliver Southerners from a home's sweltering heat; ever since the appearance of the porch in North America in the mid-seventeenth century, through its widespread popularity in the nineteenth century, and until the beginning of its demise in the 1960s following the ascendance of air-conditioning the porch has, for Southerners, functioned as a complicated social space. (29)

The porch in the middle of the century was a "vehicle for conversation, that most important resource of the southern writer, whereby the region's peculiar language is validated, reinvigorated, and ultimately, preserved" (Daniel 63).

Barrie Greenbie in his book, *Spaces: Dimensions of the Human Landscape* discusses the porch in terms of proximity to the house and street and the communal aspects the porch represents. He states:

The "piazza" usually had a hammock and several chairs and relaxing there, with or without visitors, permitted a pleasant relation to the life of the community which was not as private as being indoors and not as public as being on the street. One could enjoy the presence and casual company of neighbors and even strangers without any more involvement than one wished.
For children, particularly, porches were fine play areas, and much visiting took place in rain or shine, with considerably less strain on adults inside . . . At present, some veranda socializing continues in older towns and the more stable older neighborhoods of cities, but the automobile has certainly changed things to a great extent. (17)

Greenbie credits the demise of the porch to industry and technology, although equally important in his argument is his mention of the porch still functioning in smaller cities where communities value a sense of family. Also, smaller towns are not generally bombarded with the pollution and hustle and bustle of larger cities or with the long commutes to the city that characterizes suburban areas. Such commutes leave less time to socialize with the community.

James Howard Kunstler in “Home from Nowhere,” discusses this movement to create communities that simulate traditional neighborhoods, but do not share in the level of socialization in those neighborhoods. Articulating a phenomenon created by Peter Katz in The New Urbanism, Kunstler, gives a point-by-point definition of new urbanism. Names such as neo-traditional planning, traditional neighborhood development, low-density urbanism, transit-oriented development are all names synonymous with new urbanism. This type of development begins with the planning of the basic unit, the neighborhood. The size of the neighborhood is limited and has well-defined edges all focused around a center. Once the neighborhoods are established, corridors that form the boundaries around the neighborhoods are constructed. These corridors may consist of parks, railroad lines or a
district like a shopping center. Ideally, the neighborhood is “emphatically mixed-use and provides housing for people with different incomes” (9); however, this economic mix is not the case in communities such as the one in Celebration, Florida. Space is defined: “The street is understood to be the pre- eminent form of public space, and the buildings that define it are expected to honor and embellish it” (9). The streets are also expected to be a network to create many alternative routes around the town. And finally, civic buildings are “placed on preferential building sites . . . in order to serve as landmarks and reinforce their symbolic importance. As a finishing touch all the buildings should be embellished according to an architectural code” (10). This “new urbanism” emulates but ultimately cannot create a sense of community.

Philip Langdon in “A Good Place to Live” comments on this problem in the planned community in Seaside, Florida, a place with houses with “deep front porches” people do not use:

In walking around Seaside, I came to the conclusion that the hope of reestablishing a front-porch society had largely failed. Few people occupied the porches during the hot afternoons, and after sunset the shimmering light from TV sets and the hum of air conditioners testifies to the irresistible appeal of climate-controlled, electronically equipped interiors, even in a town where most of the porches are screened to provide protection from insects. Of the people I did see sitting on the porches, half were occupying side rather than front porches, a little farther removed from the public domain. ‘Lately people have been requesting of me that I give them rear porches,’ Tom Christ, who has designed more houses at Seaside than any other architect, told me . . . American family life has looked toward the
back yard for several decades now, and Seaside has the power to shift its gaze. (www.theatlantic.com)

Kunstler in a more forceful argument, says that new urban planning trivializes and degrades once traditional structures:

The porch is an important and desirable element in some neighborhoods. A porch less than six feet deep is useless except for storage, because it provides too little room for furniture and the circulation of human bodies. Builders tack on inadequate porches as a sales gimmick to enhance 'curb appeal,' so that the real-estate agent can drive up with the customer and say, 'Look, a front porch!' The porch becomes a cartoon feature of the house, like the little fake cupola on the garage. This saves the builders money in time and materials. Perhaps they assume that the street will be too repulsive to sit next to. Why do builders even bother with pathetic-looking cartoon porches? Apparently Americans need at least the idea of a porch to be reassured, symbolically, that they're decent people living in a decent place. But the cartoon porch only compounds the degradation of the public realm. (www.theatlantic.com)

Although there is a push towards establishing communities with defined spaces and porches, therefore, the true sense of neighborhood and community is lost, remaining only in aesthetics.

The New Porch

Even though some builders use the porch as a "sales gimmick," many planners have discovered the need for the porch. New communities are beginning to emerge with houses with porches, and some families are building porches onto their existing houses. For example, Jessica McCuan in her article, "Sitting Pretty," discusses the rise in the number of porches in Palo Alto. Monty Anderson, an architect, notes that "from a building
perspective this is one of the best times he’s seen for front porches” (3). Anderson adds that he has “seen a revival of front porches,” (3) recently.

The community’s consensus is that the porch makes its residents know one another, and thereby, creating a greater sense of community. Joan MacDaniels says, “You get to know your neighbors better, and it lets you form some kind of camaraderie with them” (1). She mentions that she would not purchase a house without a front porch because they “force people to get to know their neighbors” (2).

Whereas in the last few decades the porch has been seen as a structure of the past, “today, a change is beginning to take place . . . People want to be a part of a neighborhood again. People search for old houses with the perfect porch. They seek out new houses that incorporate a porch. And builders are beginning to respond,” says Beverly Fortune, “A Sense of Neighborhood” (1). She, like McCuan, explains that the community welcomes the closeness and family atmosphere that the porch helps to foster. While Jessica Hirschman calls attention to the fact that many porches are only decorative and that most people desire a back porch, sunroom, or conservatory (9), she nevertheless states that “residential design is witnessing a revival of the porch. A growing fondness for homes that strike a nostalgic chord is causing many people to return to architecture reminiscent of their parents’ or grandparents’ homes” (9).
The rise in the popularity of the porch is especially evident in new controlled communities. Walt Disney Company has built a new controlled community in Celebration, Florida. Katherine Salant in “Celebrating the Past in Style,” states that “Celebration’s homes are fitted into a ‘traditional neighborhood design’ layout. It’s a plan that’s sometimes referred to as the New Urbanism” (disney@xone.network). Orjan Wetterqvist, a professor of urban design at the University of Florida adds, “In a TND plan, houses are set close to one another and to the street, which is seen as ‘a communal living room,’ and not merely a conduit of traffic” (disney@xone.network). This “‘purposeful proximity’ of the houses,” says Salant, “has led to what some Celebration residents refer to as their ‘porch culture'” (disney@xone.network). This community celebrates interaction. Paul Ostergaard, whose firm, Urban Design Associates designed the six housing plans, states, “Most of those houses do have a front porch” (Fortune 2). With new controlled communities recognizing the importance of community, the porch’s importance seems to be revived. Ostergaard adds, “We’ve come to realize what a tremendous loss it has been not to create neighborhoods with porches because we lost track of our neighbors. A lot of people love to sit out on their porches and watch people go by on the street. And porches [provide] the setting for that” (3). When describing their town, “Celebration residents talk about a community and lifestyle and next-door neighbors. And they talk about a school and a town center within walking and biking
distance, things that give a degree of independence that any child would envy” (disney@xone.network). Although not all new urbanism communities foster a real sense of community, Celebration, Florida, despite the fact that it is solely upper middle class and, some would argue, overly ideal has utilized the porch, effectively as a mode for restructuring modern life.

There is, in current discourse, a desire for the freedom and quality of self-expression and interaction the porch represents. The idea of porch as a place where neighbors talk to one another and look out for each other has become common on the world-wide web. Web sites such as the Virtual Front Porch (jabi.com) use the idea of the porch, but as a site of exchange without the cultural depth of the porch I want to convey here. This particular web site, for example, does give a definition of how the porch used to function, but uses it as a place for chat rooms on various subjects like Christianity. With this push towards the erasure of the traditional porch, it is important to note that the idea porch is still a significant one in American cultural understanding.

Critical Sources

Very little critical literature has focused directly on the porch, particularly as it functions in literature. Two articles, “Porches: Stories: Power: Spatial and Racial Intersections in Faulkner and Hurston,” by Joycelyn Donlon (1996) and “The American Front Porch: Women’s Liminal Space,” by Sue Bridwell Beckham (1988) discuss the porch in women’s
fiction. Donlon discusses the contrasting significance of the porch in the African-American community and the White community, using William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In Faulkner, Donlon sees the porch as place where Quentin's voice is stifled: it is a "place for generating narratives that exclude authentic stories" (95). In contrast, in Hurston, Donlon sees the porch as a space where Janie tells her own story and "forges [her] individuality within a community" (96). Whereas Donlon discusses the differences between the cultures of White and Blacks, Beckham constructs the porch as the women's domain.

Although both of these articles do note that the porch is a transitional space between interior and exterior, each discusses the porch in different terms. The porch in Donlon's article is occupied by both male and female, while the porch in Beckham's article is basically female.

Trudier Harris in *The Power of the Porch*, the only full-length, literary critical examination of the porch, discusses three works in which the porch is prominent. Picking up on the idea that the porch is an important structure in the South to escape from the heat, she focuses on the storytelling that occurs there. Harris examines the porch in three different works--Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, and Randall Kenan's "Clarence and the Dead." Harris focuses on the tactics of telling a story and the audience's ability to interact with the story by reading it. She also sees the narrators of the stories as mediators between the informants and the
readers. In Hurston's work, Harris focuses on authorial control; Zora Neale Hurston herself is that mediator who is sometimes center stage and who, in other places, erases herself so that the audience can experience that tale without a narrator. In *Mama Day* the porch is used for storytelling. As in *Mules and Men*, Harris notes the importance of the teller and the listener in *Mama Day*: "The link between narrative voice and audience, therefore, is one that cannot be broken by the physicality of the text itself, for the voice enters into the minds of the readers, finds fertile ground in a commonality of philosophies, characters, activities, and approaches the world" (58). Finally, in a "Clarence and the Dead," Clarence serves as the storyteller. Because Clarence is clairvoyant, he is the mediator between the dead and the future and the community in which he lives. The audience, therefore, because of inconsistencies in the stories that he tells, has the job of figuring out what to believe or what not to.

Harris, for the most part, focuses on the porch as a place of performance and storytelling. She talks of the mediator as the narrator of the stories. The mediator may at times position him/herself as the an observer while giving commentary. Although I do agree that the porch is a gathering place, a performative space, and place of storytelling, I will also examine the porch as a space for transformation. The porch in my work will encompass more than just the performative: it will serve as a metaphor for Celie's, Janie's, and Denver's consciousness and subjectivity, and it will serve as a
space for learning, self-declared independence, and love, as well as function
as both a structure and a liminal space—a space where they transcend the
roles in which they find themselves as Black women.

Perhaps created, then re-appropriated and transformed by African-
Americans, the porch offers a gathering place as well as a place of
storytelling, serving as the interim space between “the house” and “the
street.” Whereas the “street’ indicates the world with its unpredictable
events, its actions and passions” (Da Matta 209) and the “house’ pertains to
a controlled universe, where things are in their proper places” (209), the
porch allows, in a controlled way, the house and the street to intersect and
for human beings to interact.

This controlled interaction is indicative of the porch as a place of the
influence of different ideas and characters and as a place of transformation.
It can be termed as a liminal space to use Victor Turner’s term from The
Ritual Process:

Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or “transition”
are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen,
signifying “threshold” in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase
(of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the
detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed
point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a
“state”), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period,
the characteristics of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are
ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has fewer or
none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third
phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is
consummated. (94-95)
Each character representing the porch in the three novels is a character in the limen, operating between the house and the street. All the characters, use the porch, as a midpoints between their experiences of the house and the street. In these novels, however, the limen is not only a formative moment in a passage or pilgrimage. It is home: each character leaves the midpoint in order to return to it and transform it into a place to call her own. The porch then takes on various values. First, it is a physical marker, a place of community, gathering, and work space. Second, it is the initial midpoint from each of these characters both physically and literally sees the street, finds a desire to leave the house, and goes to experience the street. Finally, it is a place of transformation. That is the porch facilitates the psychological and spiritual conversion of the characters.

Zora Neale Hurston's ethnography reveals the porch as a masculine space.8 Black women writers claim it. In In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, Alice Walker discusses, like Paule Marshall, the idea of creativity in terms of her female ancestors, who were not allowed to express their creativity openly. The problem of the stifled creative mind, discussed in chapter one, is central to understanding the function and in the idea of the porch. For, in the novels I discuss, each character must leave the porch and return to it in order to transform it and creatively express her own being there. We see this in Denver's ability to communicate effectively and her becoming an adult, in

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8See Hurston's Mules and Men.

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Celie's creation of her pants, and in Janie's ability to express herself freely through wearing overalls and allowing her hair to swing freely without the presence of the scarf.

The porch in African-American women's literature, becomes an important structure, symbol, and site of self-definition. On the porch, Denver in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Janie in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Celie in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, define, redefine and narrate themselves. In each of these works there are major characters representing "the house," "the street," and "the porch." The house serves as a stable structure that presents and perpetuates the patriarchal traditions, and whether good or bad; the street supplies the aspects of the real world, of the creation as Walker calls it. The porch serves as a space that transforms the house and the street into structures that can interact with one another without conflict and as a platform for articulating that transformation and interaction.
Chapter 3: “The World Beyond the Edge of the Porch”: The Role of Denver in Toni Morrison’s Beloved

For the most part, the criticism about Beloved focuses on motherhood, the ghost/spiritual presence of Beloved, and/or slavery. Very few critics explore the role of Denver in the novel. In this chapter I will explore the role of Denver as a pivotal character. She transforms herself, rescues Sethe, and brings the community back in communication with 124. Even though she is discussed rarely, Denver is the mediating structure between the past and the future, the community and Sethe, and slavery and emancipation. I will explore, first, the critical material on Denver; second, the various functions of the porch in the novel, and finally, Denver’s transition to adulthood and the importance of the porch in that movement. I will also use Oprah Winfrey’s film, “Beloved” to illuminate the text. Her film version of Toni Morrison’s novel Beloved premiered in September of 1998. The movie features Oprah Winfrey as Sethe, Danny Glover as Paul D, Kimberly Elise as Denver and Thandie Newton as Beloved. Although the film is a careful translation of Morrison’s extraordinary novel and received positive reviews, it was a box office failure. Still its attention to the detail of Morrison’s novel provides us with important visual images.

Winfrey took eleven years to create this film. In a 1998 interview with Pearl Cleage in Essence Winfrey says, “I believe that intention becomes experience, and it was always my intention to bring Beloved to the screen from the moment I read it in 1987. I called Toni Morrison immediately” (81).
Winfrey wanted to bring the story of slavery to a wide audience. Throughout the process of making this film, Winfrey acknowledges the presence of the ancestor as she played the part of Sethe. She had slave memorabilia at home and carried some of those items with her in her trailer on the set. She says she would say the names of some of the slaves and would “call them up, literally” (143). She recalls saying a few times at difficult moments, “‘Where are y’all? I need you’--and [she] could feel their presence all around [her]” (143). Playing a slave, we might argue, she wants her audience to experience this presence as powerfully as it is rendered in the novel.

While Denver is a central character in the film, she is seldom discussed in Morrison criticism. Leila Silvana May in her article, “‘Eat me, drink me, love me’: Orality, Sexuality, and the Fruits of Sororal Desire in ‘Gob(b)lin(g) Market’ and Beloved” discusses the relationships of Laura and Lizzie in the “Goblin Market” and Denver and Beloved in Beloved. May uses sexual desire to explain the relationship between Laura and Lizzie, and although it seems to work in an examination of the “Goblin Market,” it does not appear to explain the relationship between Denver and Beloved. The relationship between Beloved and Denver is one of desire, on the part of Denver, but not sexually. Desire initially drives Denver, but as May points out, Beloved’s desire for Sethe prevails. Because of this insight about Beloved, May tends not to focus as much time on Denver and Beloved, but turns to the relationship of Sethe and Beloved. Likewise, in her article
"Escaping Slavery but not Images," Trudier Harris mainly focuses on another character, Stamp Paid, considering Stamp Paid’s debt paid to slavery and his willingness to offer that same zero balance to other slaves who have suffered through slavery and escaped, or attempted to do so. Harris, however, mentions Denver in relation to her ability to decide not to become a servant willing and eager to serve others like the image of the Sambo figure in the Bodwin’s house (Morrison 255). Although the treatment of Denver is brief, it does allow a glimpse of the power that Denver exercises so that she does not become subject to what so many ex-slaves do during and after Reconstruction.

Unlike May and Harris, Bonnie Winsboro in Supernatural Forces has a chapter on Beloved in which she focuses on Denver. Winsboro argues that Denver’s role in Beloved is essential for the reconciliation of the community and Sethe, and for Sethe’s union with Paul D. Winsboro discusses what most critics do not, and that is the impact of Denver on the relationships in the novel. Winsboro’s discussion of Denver is also brief, but I will discuss at the length the role this remarkable, but hardly noticed, character plays in mending the broken relationship bonds in this novel.

After the departure of her brothers and the death of Baby Suggs, Denver, isolated in 124 Bluestone, becomes lonely. The porch, usually a space for play, initially, for Denver, is an empty place. There were “no children willing to circle her in a game or hang by their knees from her porch

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railin g”(12). W hen Beloved is “reborn,” therefore, Denver rejoices and begins to attend to her new sister. Although she treasures Beloved’s sisterhood, Denver, by the end of the novel, must take the role of a leader and rescue Sethe from Beloved. Denver does this with the help of Baby Suggs, the ancestor of the community. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* three main characters represent the house, the street, and the porch. Sethe, with her ties to the plantation house and slavery, represents the house. Essential to Sethe’s survival, the community represents the outside world which she abandons, the street. The porch, on which I will focus, is symbolized by Denver.

The porch is the portion of the house that reaches from the inside out, providing the platform between the house and the street. Denver is that figure who does the reaching out. The porch becomes the mediating space and Denver the mediating person between Sethe and the world, between slavery and freedom, and between the antebellum world and the Reconstruction world. After Denver realizes that she must take the responsibility for Sethe’s, Beloved’s, and her own survival, Denver “in the brightest of the carnival dresses and wearing a stranger’s shoes . . . stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch” (Morrison 243). With the help of the spirit of Baby Suggs, Denver leaves the porch in order to enter the world beyond the porch. It is Baby Suggs who speaks to Denver as her wise ancestor. Baby Suggs guides
Denver to understand her past so that she can go into the world and create her own future.

The porch functions in various ways in the novel and is essential to understanding the film. In several scenes, the film utilizes the porch to illustrate the psychological state of inclusion and exclusion. First, the place of loneliness and isolation for Denver and one of communication for Beloved and Denver. After Sethe and Paul D, move to Sethe's bedroom early in the novel, Denver feels all alone. She takes some bread and jam and eats on the porch as the community looks at her as they pass. She, on the porch, is in an in-between space, separated from her mother but not part of the world outside her gate. This scene on the porch illustrates isolation and Denver's loneliness. Denver at the beginning of the movie is aloof and reserved, but very quickly we catch a glimpse of Denver's emotional instability. She explains, through sobs, that she cannot take the isolation anymore, but more importantly she states, "Nobody knows our lives." The audience is able to experience the psychological effect this isolation has on Denver. This loneliness seems to be erased with Beloved's return. For example, while Paul D is fighting the ghost in the kitchen, Denver is behind the chair smiling, excited by the baby's presence. Its rage confirms for her that she, her mother, and the ghost, despite their isolation, are true family. Later, Sethe, Beloved, Denver and Paul D are on the porch, perhaps the only space in which they can exist in tentative harmony. Paul D is in the rocking chair.
drinking water; Sethe is in a chair sewing. Denver and Beloved are eating sugar cane. Denver is singing and Beloved is staring at Sethe, smiling. Paul D is obviously uncomfortable and walks back into the house. The women own the porch at this time, foreshadowing their isolation in the house. They are isolated from the community, and they isolate Paul D from their play. His exclusion is symbolized as, Paul D, after a day of work, comes home and stands on the porch listening to the laughter of the women inside. Again, the porch is part of loneliness and isolation for a central figure. Paul D is not a part of the house, which is comprised of mother and children. Morrison's novel says that Beloved and Denver communicate even while “Not talking” when sitting “on the porch” (206). This example of not talking as a form of communication on the porch will resurface in a more positive mode in our discussion of Alice Walker's The Color Purple.

In the novel, the porch functions in a variety of ways. It is a space of healing, between Stamp Paid and Paul D; of reunion and refuge for Paul D; of negotiation and transition for Paul D and Sethe, and a place for contemplation for both Stamp Paid and Paul D. The porch is also Stamp Paid's space, one that fails when Beloved returns. The porch is also a space for conversation between Stamp Paid and Paul D. When Stamp Paid finds Paul D on the porch of Holy Redeemer Church, he “sat down on the steps” (230). Stamp Paid calls for forgiveness as he and Paul D talk on the porch. Also, Stamp Paid uses the porch as a space to think after finding a “red ribbon knotted around
a curl of wet woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp" (180). The ribbon for
him represents slavery and the many atrocities associated with it, and he
“sat on the porch in the cold till way past dark” (181). The ribbon symbolizes
the innocent lives that are lost due to slavery. Stamp Paid fingers this ribbon
to remember his pain about Sethe and to avoid allowing the behavior of
punishment and displacement by whites to carry over into the Black
community. Specifically Stamp Paid does not want violence to end his
relationship to Paul D. He apologizes because the Black community has
displaced and, therefore, done violence to Paul D:

“This is hard for me,” said Stamp. “But I got to do it. Two
things I got to say to you. I’m a take the easy one first.”
Paul D chuckled. “If it’s hard for you, might kill me dead.”
“No, no. Nothing like that. I come looking for you to ask your
pardon. Apologize.”
“For what?” Paul D reached in his coat pocket for his bottle.
“You pick any house, any house where colored live. In all of
Cincinnati. Pick any one and you welcome to stay there. I’m
apologizing because they didn’t offer or tell you. But you welcome
anywhere you want to be. My house is your house too . . . You ain’t got
to sleep in no cellar, and I apologize for each and every night you did.
(230)

This conversation also brings healing from the news that Stamp Paid delivers
to Paul D. Here on the steps these two men discuss Sethe and the arrival of
Beloved. They are able to form a bond in the midst of the difficult
circumstances.

When Paul D re-enters Sethe’s life, he is on the porch: “sitting on the
porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men” (6).
Sethe invites him into the house; however, he replies, “Porch is fine, Sethe.
Cool out here" (7). Here the porch is used for a practical structure to escape the heat as I discussed in chapter two. Because Paul D does not want to rush into Sethe's house and life, he uses the porch as a transitional space for their new relationship. As a result, it becomes a space for reunion for Sethe and Paul D as it does for Celie and Nettie.

Eighteen years have passed since the last time Paul D and Sethe have seen one another. After recuperating from his journey and doing a bit of catching up on the important events of the last eighteen years, Paul D accepts Sethe's invitation to enter the house. Once he enters the house, he walks straight “into a pool of red and undulating light that lock[s] him where he [stands],” and he “back[s] out the door onto the porch” (8). The porch then becomes a place of refuge from the unknown.

The porch can also serve as a space of healing and comfort. Sethe, after finding out that Halle, her husband, sees the boys steal her milk, is furious: “He watched them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?” (69) is the reaction she gives. In order to calm down, “Sethe opened the front door and sat down on the porch steps” (69). This action is important in the development of the function of the porch. For in the house, that controlled space, Sethe is unable to think clearly. However, on the steps of the porch, she is able to think freely. It becomes a place of expression and narration. After her immediate frustration, Paul D is able to tell his story, holding back that which would
“push them both to a place they couldn’t get back from” (72). As a structure, the porch provides an escape from the house and a place of negotiation.

Paul D uses the porch of the church for heat because on a “sunny and windless day in January it was actually warmer out there than inside, if the iron stove was cold” and in the cellar “there was no light lighting the pallet or the washbasin or the nail from which a man’s clothes could be hung” (218). Consequently, Paul D “sat on the porch steps and got additional warmth from a bottle of liquor jammed in his coat pocket” (218). The porch is used practically for warmth in the winter and also light. Here, Paul D is trying to deal with the newspaper clipping and is attempting to understand his own past, so that he too can move on into the future; therefore, he also uses the porch as a space to think clearly: “sitting on the porch of a dry-goods church, a little bit drunk and nothing much to do, he could have these thoughts. Slow, what-if thoughts that cut deep but struck nothing solid a man could hold on to” (221).

Stamp Paid also utilizes the porch. Indeed, he claims that space:

“Once Stamp Paid brought you a coat, got the message to you, saved your life, or fixed the cistern he took the liberty of walking in your door as though it were his own” (172). After Stamp Paid surreptitiously tells Paul D about Sethe, however, the porch becomes a place that fails to function in the capacity it once did for him: he must now knock on the door in order to gain entrance into the house. So, when he goes to Sethe’s house, “rather than
forfeit the one privilege he claimed for himself, he lowered his hand and left the porch” (172). Stamp Paid, who is himself a figure who provides transition, from slavery to freedom, is unable to provide this for Sethe, once Beloved comes back.

Most important, the porch functions as a place of waiting. On the porch, Denver awaits the arrival of Mr. Bodwin for her first night of work: she “sat on the porch steps with a bundle in her lap, her carnival dress sun-faded to a quieter rainbow” (257). This waiting also indicates the woman Denver will become by the end of the novel, a transformation to which I now turn.

Although the porch functions in Denver’s transformation, she is not changed until near the end of the novel. At first, Denver is very much a part of the house. Because of her fear that Sethe will kill her as she has killed Beloved, Denver states, “I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can’t happen again and my mother won’t have to kill me too. Not since Miss Lady Jones’s house have I left 124 by myself” (205). This isolation from the community, along with her brothers’ flight from 124 Bluestone, hinders her growth and prohibits her self-definition. In her silence, and, particularly after the arrival of Paul D, Denver hopes for Beloved, the baby ghost, to reappear. To Denver, Paul D occupies the space that is her own and Beloved’s. For years, all Denver has is her mother—no brothers, no father, and no community. Now, suddenly, this man walks into her life, leaving her thinking that “everybody had somebody but her; thinking even a ghost’s
company was denied her” (104). Beloved appears to be an extension of both Denver and Sethe. Beloved, for Sethe, represents memory, the missing link that Sethe has with the past. However, for Denver she seems to represent the love that Denver lacks because of the absence, not only of her other siblings, but the community as well.

When Beloved appears at 124, Denver realizes who she is. Denver, on the one hand, desires Beloved and wants to be the object of Beloved’s desire. On the other hand, Denver worries about Beloved and wants to protect her from Sethe, so she “worried herself sick trying to think of a way to get Beloved to share her room. It was hard sleeping above her, wondering if she was going to be sick again, fall asleep and not wake, or (God please don’t) get up and wander out of the yard just the way she wandered in” (67). This fixation on losing Beloved once again blinds Denver to the potential damage that Beloved may cause. Because she is afraid to lose her, Denver loses her identity and assumes that of Beloved’s: “I am Beloved and she is mine” (210).

No matter how much Beloved dominates the household and how little attention she receives, Denver, initially, loves the company of Beloved for only when Beloved’s gaze is on her is she, she thinks, real: “It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other. . . Denver’s skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright like the lisle dress that had its arm around her mother’s waist” (118). Leila May in “‘Eat me, drink me, love me’: Orality,
Sexuality, and the Fruits of Sororal Desire in Gob(b)lin(g) Market and

_Beloved_" adds, "when Beloved gazes at Denver, in her own mind Denver
becomes Beloved" (142). Through Beloved, Denver narrates herself as
provider and protective sister.

Foreshadowing the end of the novel, Denver, very quickly, realizes the
trouble with rememory. Karla F.C. Holloway in _Moorings and Metaphors_
defines rememory in three parts: first, memory can appear in the process of
association; second, it is not a primary memory; it is more a specific fragment
of an important event; third, it is the retelling of a story (66-70, 102). The
problem with rememory is its ability to destroy the present. Rememories
become destructive when they cease to be pictures, and become real, like
Beloved.

Gradually, Beloved becomes a threat to Sethe, excluding Denver.
When Beloved's desire turns fully on Sethe, Denver, initially "felt a little hurt,
slighted that she was not the main reason for Beloved's return" (75). Denver,
eventually, "was alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for
Sethe, but felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love
another" (104). Beloved almost drains Sethe through Sethe's obsession with
atonement, and she, potentially, may destroy Denver through Denver's need
for love. A deadly triangle, therefore, exists in 124 Bluestone, as Denver,
Sethe and Beloved abandon the world and shut themselves in the house only
to each other. This triangle deteriorates into a deadly and unresolvable

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duality as Sethe and Beloved focus on each other and exclude Denver. Denver rememories Beloved for self-fulfillment, while Sethe takes this flesh and turns it into a human memorial for her dead daughter. Gradually, Denver, is driven out like Paul D. Beloved “is driven solely by the need to merge with her mother. She does not remember her father at all, and her interest in both Denver and Paul D is minimal. They exist only as they help or hinder her efforts to regain her identity, her life, through merger with Sethe” (Winsboro 143).

Beloved provides an opportunity for Denver to leave her role as watcher and become active, but that role is limited. With Beloved's presence, Denver gets to return to childhood and play, like Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God; she gets to be a sister. At first, Denver, Beloved and Sethe play together, but eventually “it became clear that they [Beloved and Sethe] were only interested in each other” and, consequently, “Denver began to drift away from the play” (240). Beloved threatens to absorb, symbolized by her pregnancy, everyone around her. Denver, seeing the danger and becoming more and more marginal as Beloved focuses on Sethe, therefore, becomes the transitional person that breaks down the ideals of the house in order to reintegrate the house and Sethe into the community, the street, making a place for redefinition for not only herself, but for Sethe and the community as well. In the beginning Denver wants Sethe. Then she wants Beloved. Later, both Sethe and Denver desire the gaze of Beloved; and
finally, wanting to rescue Sethe from Beloved, Denver desires the full attention of her mother. Denver, therefore, steps away from the destructive gaze of Sethe and Beloved and world of 124. Ultimately, it is “Denver who must play the role of mother to both Sethe and Beloved” (Winsboro 142).

Denver eventually resents and fears Beloved’s presence and desires her removal from 124 Bluestone. When she sees that Sethe and Beloved cannot let each other go, Denver realizes that she must “step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn’t, they all would” (239). This occurs in various stages.

Denver becomes concerned with the way in which Beloved is draining the life out of Sethe. It happens slowly at first “a complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe” (241). Denver then begins to notice that Beloved assumes the role of the mother and Sethe that of the child. She realizes that Beloved is different, “wild game” (242). No one said to her, “Get on out of here, girl, and come back when you get some sense” or “You raise your hand to me and I will knock you in the middle of next week” or “I will wrap you round that door knob, don’t nobody work for you and God don’t love ugly ways” (242). For Denver these statements represent parental and adult authority, but for Beloved they are meaningless. Denver then realizes that “she started out . . . protecting Beloved from Sethe, [but] changed to protecting Sethe from Beloved” (243). After this revelation, “Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world,
leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (243). Denver realizes that the strict structure of the house confines the mind and spirit and that to save her mother and herself, she must leave the house.

Baby Suggs opens the avenue so that Denver can leave the house. In the days “before 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed” (86-87). Denver loves her grandmother deeply. After her death, Baby Suggs becomes that essential ancestor presence that is important to the development of Denver. Baby Suggs pushes Denver off the porch and into the community.

Although the house can be the structure that illustrates a stable environment where morals and values are taught and enforced, the house in Beloved is a place of stagnation and must be transformed into a new creation. It is the legacy and gift of slavery. Baby Suggs is placed in the house by the abolitionist Bodwins, and Sethe keeps it after Baby’s death. Slavery’s power comes with Sethe from a plantation, ironically called Sweet Home. Inside 124 lives the ghost of her baby girl, Beloved, whom she kills so that the slave holder cannot take her. Slavery works to isolate the individual, to hinder the development of family and community. Sethe extends this to 124. As a result of the horror of Sethe’s action, there are no visitors at 124 Bluestone for twelve years. Because of Sethe’s alienation from the
community, Denver too has to deal with alienation. For example, she attends Miss Lady Jones' school. She, however, leaves it and is silenced after a year later when Nelson Lord implicates her in her mother's crime, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). The implication that Denver suffers along with her mother because she is somehow guilty of the murder of Beloved silences Denver.

Sethe, who represents the legacy of Sweet Home, the house, carries some African traditions of motherhood. For "on the slave plantations as well as in Africa, motherhood was the most important rite of passage for Black women" (Campbell & Rice 61). That bond is distorted in slavery, as mothers become producers and children product in the capitalist system. Sethe makes the choice many female slaves made to "take her [daughter] out of this world so that [s]he would be out of pain" (Campbell & Rice 51). Yet, from this African tradition, Sethe feels the need to atone her daughter's death. However, when Sethe calls for Beloved to come back--"But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her" (Morrison 4)--Sethe does not realize what she is asking. What she is asking is a chance to rememory--to understand the meaning of her enslavement and abuse and of the murder. She asks for a release for herself and her children from victimhood. Through Beloved, the structure of 124 Bluestone--Sethe as murder/mother--and slavery--Sethe as the victim of the house Sweet Home--are deconstructed and lose their power. Sethe must experience her losses, rememory and mourn.
Sethe's flaws are her pride and her excessive mother love. Her expression of pride in refusing to eat the community's food or to ask for help causes the community to ostracize her. She is treated like a traitor in a mode from the slave tradition: "Although physical chastisement and even the execution of traitors were not unknown, the community as a whole most frequently employed the weapons of shame and ostracism. At the very least, unreliable slaves were excluded from clandestine meetings and unsanctioned social events" (Webber 233). The love that Sethe has for her children is excessive and crippling. This mother love causes her to be unable to separate her children from her own self and makes her kill her daughter. This act of love is "too thick" (164); it causes her to lose everything that is important to her—her husband, her two-year-old daughter, her sons, Baby Suggs, the community and Denver (Winsboro 138). Sethe admits to herself that "unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (Morrison 132).

Even though Denver breaks down in the kitchen from the isolation—"I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (14)—Sethe refuses to leave the house. She identifies with the house, slavery, motherhood, her act of pride, and the remnants of family, and refuses to run. Later in the novel after she realizes that Beloved is her daughter, she says "whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (183). She adds,
“there is no world outside my door” (184). Sethe confines herself to the
house, distancing herself even more from the community. The house and the
presence in it has stunted Sethe’s growth and, indeed, that stagnation in the
mother role is what Sethe thinks she desires.

Sethe, Denver, and Beloved, governed in their relations by this “too
thick” (164) love, create an unstable entity. The house cannot stand. Sethe
loses Paul D because Beloved wants him gone. Then Sethe, because she
becomes enthralled with Beloved, loses her job:

The cooking games, the sewing games, the hair and dressing-up games. Games her mother loved so well she took to going to
work later and later each day until the predictable happened: Sawyer told her not to come back. And instead of looking for
another job, Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who
never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the
bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk. (240)

Sethe loses all control and all contact with the outside world. Sethe, Beloved
and Denver, locked in a struggle over identity and ownership, are starving
physically and spiritually. The house cannot take care of itself. It needs
support. Denver, therefore, must mature and become the extension of the
house, the porch, that mediating structure that prevents the ultimate demise
of the house and that facilitates its transformation from Sweet Home to a
sweet home—a true home.

Baby Suggs serves as an ancestral presence to Denver so that she may
save 124. The presence of ancestors in literature is important to Toni
Morrison, for in an essay in Mari Evans’ Black Women Writers, Morrison says
that ancestors "are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the
characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a
certain kind of wisdom" ("Rootedness" 343). Also, Morrison argues that "in
contemporary fiction . . . whether the novel took place in the city or in the
country, the presence or absence of that [ancestral] figure determined the
success or happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that
was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and
disarray in the work itself" (343). Furthermore, when asked about ancestors
in her 1987 interview with Essence, Morrison replies, "It's DNA. It's where
you get your information. And it's your protection, it's your education"
(Taylor-Gutherie 238). Morrison says that she feels a "strong connection" to
the ancestors in an interview with Nellie McKay: "They were the culture
bearers, and they told us [children] what to do" (415). Barbara Christian in
"Fixing Methodologies" also acknowledges the African ancestral system in
Beloved. She focuses mostly on Beloved as the ancestral spirit as an
"embodied spirit, a spirit that presents itself as a body" (366). She does,
however, state that Baby Suggs is an elder: "In Beloved, Morrison uses this
aspect of traditional African religions in her representation of the Clearing,
that space from which Baby Suggs preached and the place to which Sethe,
hers daughter-in-law, comes to communicate with her elder when she has
passed on" (368). Karla Holloway also acknowledges the importance of the
presence of the ancestor in literature: "I believe that far from being a
coincidental selection of metaphor, the ancestral presence in contemporary
African-American women's writing reconstructs an imaginative, cultural (re)
membrance of a dimension of West African spirituality, and that the spiritual
place of this subjective figuration is fixed into the structures of the text's
language" (2). Morrison, Christian, and Holloway recognize how essential
the ancestor is African-American literature. For Morrison, however, Baby is
an ancestor, not just an elder, and Morrison insists, with the case of Denver,
that in the case of Denver the ancestor presence is essential to identity
formation.

Rememory of Baby Suggs is the avenue that Denver uses to leave the
porch and go into the street, the community:

Remembering those conversations and her grandmother's last
final words, Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't
leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked--and then Baby
Suggs laughed, clear as anything. 'You mean I never told you
nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't
remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and
about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told
you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My
Jesus my.'

But you said there was no defense.
'There ain't.'
Then what do I do?
'Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.' (244)

These words from Baby Suggs are the words that aid Denver in leaving the
porch. It is "Baby's spirit [that] tells Denver that life is a risk, and only
through risk, relationship, and rememory is the self formed" (Jones 619).

Elizabeth Cooley in "Remembering and Dis(re)membering: Memory,

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Community, and the Individual in *Beloved*" adds, "Denver's passage from the microcosm of desire at 124 into the larger world is not easy, but memory comes to her aid" (355). In Winfrey's film, we see Denver still in her "carnival colors, "a hat, a green jacket and an orange skirt, on the porch. She covers her eyes, and we see her fear as she leaves the porch and steps into the yard and street.

For Denver, Baby Suggs is her protective, spiritual, and educational ancestral presence, who makes this first step possible. Baby Suggs pushes Denver to leave the porch, to educate herself about the world, and to save herself and her mother. Baby Suggs tells her that there is no certainty in life, a valuable lesson; Denver comes to understand that without taking risks and falling and fighting the unknown, nothing can be accomplished. More specifically, unless she leaves the comforts of the porch, the entire family dies. Baby Suggs, the ancestor presence, wants to impress upon Denver the need for Denver to change. For without change, Beloved as memory and spirit will never leave 124 and Sethe will never leave Sweet Home.

After leaving the porch, Denver begins to heal the structure of the house and Sethe who is greatly damaged. Denver has to refamiliarize herself with the community surrounding 124 Bluestone--the community that embraced Baby Suggs, that alienated Sethe, and that will aid Denver. Denver is afraid of the community because of her lack of communication with and knowledge of it. She realizes, however, that "one must remember the past
and then lay it down, but never lose it" (355). Denver gains this knowledge through Baby Sugg's words and applies them so that she can reunite herself with the community: "like Paul D and Baby Suggs before she took to her bed, Denver begins to understand that memory, though painful, affirms and confirms who one is, that remembering makes us whole" (355). Although Sethe is unaware of this lesson, she will eventually learn it, but not before Denver reunites her with the community and Paul D.

The community, symbolized by the Thirty Women, is a character in its own right in Beloved. From chapter two, we learn that the slave community was a close-knit unit; in some cases it can be referred to as an extended family. Since slavery, the black community has been an essential force for the survival of black individuals. The community, for example, provided food to a family who needed a little extra. The tradition originated in Africa where "the obligations of family were related to the survival of all. Dependency was reciprocal: one took from all, and everyone was sustained by one's substance" (Huggins 162). Still, in many African-American communities, the people are both open and judgmental. When the community realizes that 124 is haunted with a baby ghost, they abandon visiting the house: "Years ago-- when 124 was alive--she had women friends, men friends from all around to share grief with. Then there was no one, for they would not visit her while the baby ghost filled the house" (95-96). This begins the judgment of the community on Sethe.
The community is also upset with Sethe for murdering her own child. They believe that "no one can commit such a crime without eventually receiving the just punishment of God" (Winsboro 150). The community has the attitude that Sethe should beg forgiveness from God and them. Because Sethe has the ability to survive without the community and, of course, without her apology to them (Winsboro 150) and because of her refusal to join in the hymns of the community at Baby Suggs' funeral and her refusal of their food for herself and Denver, "Just about everybody in town was longing for Sethe to come on difficult times" (Morrison, Beloved 171). Morrison states that the community abandons Sethe "because of what they felt was her pride. Sethe's silent statement about what is valuable to her seems to criticize what they think is valuable to them. They have had losses too. In her unwillingness to apologize or bend... she would kill her child again is what they know. That is what separates her from the rest of the community" (Taylor-Gutherie 246). Kathie Birat in "Stories to Pass On," says "The 'remembering' which Toni Morrison sees partly as an act of putting back together, involves not only the members or limbs of the body, but the members of the community. Sethe's act and her willingness to talk about it have led to her exclusion from the black community" (329). This isolation persists for twelve years.

When Denver goes into the community to ask for help, the community responds--initially, with food. Denver finds her way to Lady Jones' house
which she recognizes by “the stone porch sitting in a skirt of ivy, pale yellow curtains at the windows” (246). She tells Lady her need not her story, but Lady understands. Near the end of the visit, Lady Jones calls her “baby,” but “she did not know it then, but it was the word ‘baby,’ said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her in the world as a woman” (248). Just as Baby claimed her identity by claiming the name called her in love, Denver claims her place as she is able to go into the community and ask for help.

Though the initiative of Lady Jones, various members of the community communicate their good intentions through gifts of food. Two days after her visit “Denver stood on the porch and noticed something lying on the tree stump at the edge of the yard” (248). The aid is seen from the porch, but Denver must still leave the porch in order to bring the help from the street into the house. So, the food, which Sethe refuses at the funeral feast, now sustains her and her children and become a vehicle of change and exchange. As Denver returns the dishes of the ladies, sometimes “a small conversation took place” (249). These conversations begin to establish the channel through which the community learns to accept Sethe, through Denver, back into the community. Through these conversations she learns that “all of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing. Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their
children, cut a skirt" (Beloved 249). Cooley states, “Through stories of the recent cultural past, Denver experiences others’ personal and communal memories, and through this experience she begins to reassess and understand her own place and identify in terms of the past and present community” (356). Even though “Denver is re-membered by the community” (Cooley 356), the community, as in many African-American ones, needs to know why Denver is seeking help.

After Denver delivers the story of her mother’s condition to Janey Wagon, the community reconstructs the story through its own network of story-telling:

The news that Janey got hold of she spread among the other coloredwomen. Sethe’s dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. Sethe was worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally bedeviled. That this daughter beat her, tied her to the bed and pulled out all her hair. It took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation. They fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through. (255)

Eventually, the community changes its attitude of condemnation to that of ministration. That is, the community feels that Beloved is not the punishment that Sethe deserves. They begin to see Beloved as “the devil himself” (Winsboro 150). The community realizes, through Denver’s actions, that Sethe cannot handle the burden of Beloved. With the leadership of Ella, “[who] more than anyone [else] convinced the others that rescue was in order” (256), the Thirty Women organize. The community does recognize that
"Denver, however, appeared to have some sense after all. At least she had stepped out the door, asked for help she needed and wanted to work" (Beloved 256). Although the women of the community condemn Sethe, they commend Denver for her humility, courage, and bravery. Denver, as a result "represents hope for the future." These characteristics determine the women's decision to help Sethe.

As Sethe walks out of the house holding hands with Beloved, both of them, surprised, "saw Denver sitting on the steps and beyond her, where the yard met the road, they saw the rapt faces of thirty neighborhood women" (261). Here the porch becomes a space of transition. In the film we see the thirty women, women who are varied in size, skin tone, and age, with Bibles, coming down the street. Winfrey Christianizes the scene, with the women singing hymns. In the novel, they make a primordial sound that is both African and from grief. The sound reaches through and connects with creation. It is a sound they make for Baby and for themselves: "They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (259). Seeing them, Denver stands up, and Sethe and Beloved come onto the porch. After years of separation, the community joins together to drive out Beloved and to reunite themselves with Sethe as the murder scene is repeated and re-enacted with a different result:

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her. (262)

The community “reclaim[s] Sethe as a member of that community of mothers and children who, despite separations, deaths, and violations, have survived to help other survivors. Sethe, like Denver, is re-membered into the community of women while Beloved is once again run out of 124, this time apparently for good” (Cooley 357).

Richard C. Moreland in “He Wants to Put His Story Next To Hers,” argues for a wider reading of the relation of Sethe, Denver and the community. Denver, he suggests,

appeal[s] to a community—including the wider community reading Beloved—that has in its position of relative power denied its connection to Sethe for what she did and for disavowing her connections to them. Sethe and Denver’s situation now offers that community, as it did Amy, the opportunity and the courage to begin addressing in the situation at 124 various inarticulate, represses memories and fears of their own... and the modern readers’ uneasy memories of American slavery and the history of American race relations. (520)

Moreland calls for a more practical connection of Denver to not only the community and Sethe, but to the whole readership of Morrison’s novel (519-520). Including the readers in the equation calls for a national healing,
suggesting that Morrison wishes to transform her readers by immersing them in a personal experience of slavery, including rape, death, and separation from loved ones, and to suggest that “rescue is in order” for the nation. In the novel, without the “rapt faces of thirty women,” Sethe and Denver would be unable to make themselves complete. We see here that Sethe is drawn out of the house, onto the porch with Denver, into the street, and only then is she transformed and ultimately reunited with the community.

Women’s work, represented in food and quilts and music, points to and is the element in Denver’s transition to adulthood. The film uses a detail that suggests Baby’s presence in this moment. Beloved, draped in Baby’s quilt, joins Denver on the porch. After the exorcism of Beloved, Denver turns to the porch, but all that is left is Baby’s quilt; Beloved has vanished and, we could argue, Baby, the ancestor, takes her place. Denver fingers the quilt the symbol of Baby’s presence in the household, after Beloved vanishes and Sethe is saved. Winfrey connects women’s creativity, the quilt, with the transformative power of music, the hymns.

By the end of the novel, Denver has been transformed from an apprehensive little girl to a self-confident, secure young lady. This transformation is evident from her meeting and conversation with Paul D near the end of the novel. They discuss Sethe’s condition, and who Beloved was:
They were both silent for a moment and then he said, “Uh, that girl. You know. Beloved?”
“Yes?”
“You think she sure ‘nough your sister?”
Denver looked at her shoes. “At times I think she was—more.”
She fiddled with her shirtwaist, rubbing a spot of something.
Suddenly she leveled her eyes at his. “But, who would know that better than you, Paul D? I mean, you sure ‘nough knew her.”

He licked his lips. “Well, if you want my opinion—”
“I don’t,” she said. “I have my own.”
“You grown,” he said.
“Yes, sir.” (266-267)

Established as an adult, Denver warns Paul D: “Be careful how you talk to my ma’am, hear?” (267). Denver through this conversation asserts her independence from the house and her control of the porch: she regulates Paul D’s comings and goings in relation to 124. Initially the community, through its ostracism controls the visitors to the house, but once Denver is re-membered into the community she can move freely from house, to porch, to street. In the beginning of the novel, Denver’s comments to Paul D are made eyes downcast, but here she “levels her eyes with his.” In doing this Denver claims not only herself but her family as well. She does not hide the truth or the past, but exposes it and calls for reconciliation with it.

Through Baby Suggs and desperate need, Denver finds the strength to step onto and, eventually, to leave the porch. Doing so, she creates the space to transform herself, her mother, and their relationship with community. Initially, “Denver had taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting
was done by an evil thing looking for more" (37), but by the end of the novel, her pride comes from her own power. She has to be drawn onto and off the porch by Baby Suggs, her ancestral guide, in order to be able to return and reclaim it and reconstruct the house. Denver creates a space of unity, bringing about the reunion of her mother with the community and with Paul D, and, ultimately, she brings about reconciliation between herself and her mother. Denver leaves the porch and goes into the community, claiming the porch and opening the house to the world.

Conclusions

*Beloved* calls attention to the mediating structures present in the African American community. Remnants of slavery, oral tradition, community, quilts, feasts, ribbons, and porches, all serve as reminders of that history. Toni Morrison combines African and African-American traditions along with rich language to illustrate the importance of these for community for the formation of self during and after slavery. Her novels, she says, are like music:

> Comparing novels to music, like a mediating structure or a performance like performance theory. I think about what black writers do as having a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends. Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does do not do that. Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. Spirituals agitate you, no matter what they are saying about how it is all going to be. There is something underneath them that is incomplete. There is always something else that you want from music. I want my books to be like that--because I want that feeling of something held in
reserve and the sense that there is more—that you can’t have right now. (429)

This quality of openness leaves room for the reader. The reader “stands on the porch,” linking Morrison’s work to self and a community of participation. Morrison states in an interview, “I tend not to explain things very much, but I long for a critic who will know what I mean when I say ‘church,’ or ‘community,’ or when I say ‘ancestor,’ or ‘chorus.’ Because my books come out of those things and represent how they function in the black cosmology” (“An Interview” McKay 425). Morrison, indeed, accomplishes this goal through her novels and the 1998 release of the film version of her novel Beloved.

African-American women writers are essential in the formation and expression of such mediating structures. The women who are writing now have “this incredible range; no one is like the other” (“Talk,” Washington 236), Morrison asserts. A wide range of possibilities for transformation are explored in Black women’s writing. Morrison discusses this women’s intelligence and its range of mobility:

I think one of the interesting things about feminine intelligence is that it can look at the world as though we can do two things or three things at one—the personality is more fluid, more receptive. The boundaries are not quite defined... I mean we’re managing households and other people’s children and two jobs and listening to everybody and at the same time creating, singing, holding, bearing, transferring the culture for generations. (Moyers 270)
Morrison, here, is defining a space in which women freely and creatively move. Denver, through Morrison, is able to experience this mobility once she understands her history and accepts it so that she can define her own boundaries. Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs, and Denver are all products of the fluid feminine intelligence, for Morrison says that “Beloved is an incredible story about . . . choices” (Washington 236). The choices that the women make in this novel about life, slavery, history, and rescue all factor into the formation of the identity of Denver. Denver, through her own choices is able to leave the house and the porch to rescue her mother from the dangerous rememory that has manifested itself in 124. Morrison indeed transforms Denver from a girl into a women through mediating structures like the ancestor presence, quilts, and music, but most importantly, she transforms Denver in her own terms, on the porch.
Chapter 4: “Yuh Got Tuh Go There Tuh Know There”: The Porch in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston is noted for “publishing more fiction than any Black woman before her” (Bethel 10), but her best known work in Their Eyes Were Watching God. John Lowe’s work Jump at the Sun focuses on the role of humor in Hurston’s works, comments on the influences of Hurston’s life on her literature, and explains how Janie’s voice works through language and laughter for self-definition: “Their Eyes describes a woman’s quest for identity and, like most quests, ends with the heroine’s returning to the community for the reintegration; she thereby achieves wholeness while enriching the community with her newfound insights” (158). Elizabeth Mess agrees: “Hurston offers the tale of Janie Crawford’s development from puberty to womanhood as a model of black female development” (61). A central structure of that development is Janie’s telling her story on the porch.

In Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, the porch does not represent a molding place, but a space that integrates the house and the street in order to clarify their roles and elements. Janie’s telling her story to Pheoby on the porch represents this integration, while opening a space for a possible transformation of Pheoby. The porch is the stage for the entire novel. When Janie and Pheoby converse about Janie’s life, it is on the porch. The porch, in this novel, is the stage, a site of memory, to use Toni Morrison’s term.
The porch is an important site for the development of this novel. The porch is, for Zora Neale Hurston, an essential place in all her novels because she sees the "porch as a stage for the presentation of black folklore" (Hemenway 239). Hurston notes her personal fascination with the porch in "How It Feels To Be Colored Me":

The front porch might seem like a daring place for the rest of the town, but it was a gallery seat for me. My favorite place was atop the gate-post. Proscenium box for a born first-nighter. Not only did I enjoy the show, but I didn’t mind the actors knowing that I liked it. I usually spoke to them in passing. I’d wave at them and when they returned my salute, I would say something like this: "Howdy-do-well-I-thank-you-where-you-goin’?" Usually automobiles or the horse paused at this, and after a queer exchange of compliments, I would probably "go a piece of the way" with them, as we say in farthest Florida. If one of my family happened to come to the front in time to see me, of course negotiations would be rudely broken off. But even so, it is clear that I was the first "welcome-to-our-state" Floridian, and I hope the Miami Chamber of Commerce will please take notice. (152)

The porch, therefore, is a place for presentation and performance and a place to be watched. Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (22). The porch, especially in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, can be seen as a space of performance for all the "actors." Observers can look onto the porch and observe the activities. The porch as a stage is the symbol of Janie’s return and claim of home and authority. The porch as setting "tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who use a particular setting as part of
their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place" (22). This is the place Janey feels she must be; only from here can she tell her story authentically.

Hurston acknowledges the importance of the porch in the play **Mule Bone** that she co-wrote with Langston Hughes. All the action occurs on the store porch. Men gather there, and stories are told there. The climax of the play occurs when Jim and Dave, both jealous of one another because of Daisy, as a result of an accident, fight. The porch is the space where the town is free to talk. **Mule Bone** also includes another mediating structure that I discussed in chapter one and that I will discuss later in this chapter in relation to Tea Cake, music. For it is through music that Jim and Dave make their living. Also, it is through music and dance that Jim and Dave rekindle their friendship after Daisy comes between them. Jim is asked by Daisy to give up his guitar to do manual labor, but he refuses; likewise, Dave declines the offer that Daisy makes. So, after Jim is banished from town by Joe Clark and the men rekindle their friendship through music, "they start back together toward town, Jim picking a dance tune on his guitar, and Dave cutting steps on the ties beside him, singing, prancing and happily" (**Mule Bone** 153).

The porch also appears in **Dust Tracks On a Road** and **Mules and Men** as the store porch where stories are exchanged by men. For when "Hurston writes of Eatonville, the store porch is all-important. It is the center of the
community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior" (Hemenway 239).

Indeed, in the video, Zora Is My Name, the porch is recreated from Mules and Men and Their Eyes Were Watching God. In this video, we see men and women participating in "lyin' sessions" on the store porch. Initially Zora, like Janie, is unable to participate. After she leaves home goes to school, and then returns to Florida, she is then able to participate in the folk culture.

As an ethnographer who wanted to document Black folklore, she had to prove her authenticity as a southern woman which included participating in the "porch talk." Elements of this porch talk enter Their Eyes Were Watching God. It is on the porch in Mules and Men that we witness the tale by Jim Allen of how women became the "mules of the world":

After God got thru makin' de world and de varmits and de folks, he made up a great big bundle and let it down in de middle of de road. It laid dere for thousands of years, then Ole Missus said to Ole Massa: "Go pick up dat box and it look so heavy dat he says to de nigger, "Go fetch me dat big ole box out dere in de road." De nigger been stumlin' over de box a long time so he tell his wife:

"'Oman, go git dat box." So de nigger 'oman she runned to git de box. She says:

"Ah always lak to open up a big box 'cause there's nearly always something good in great big boxes." So she run and grabbed a-hold of de box and opened it up and it was full of hard work.

Dat's de reason de sister in black works harder than anybody else in de world. De white man tells de nigger to work and he takes and tells his wife." (74)

From this tale we see how the woman carries the load of the work, worry,
and burden in the African-American community. Janie is defined and resists becoming a mule of the world. Her narrative chronicles that resistance.

The porch is transformed in Their Eyes Were Watching God. On her own porch and on the store's porch, Janie is, at first, silenced, but later narrates her own story. It is what Cheryl Wall in “Mules and Men and Women” defines as a "transformative space" (663). Wall goes on to state that the porch is full of male participants and onlookers (663). Although the porch is portrayed as a male-dominated place, Janie takes this image and converts it into her own personal, female space. The porch for Janie is a space where stories are shared and conversations heard, and it serves as a physical marker for the entrance into the storehouse. As a result, in Their Eyes Were Watching God, the porch is a the stage for various activities in the novel.

The community seems to revolve around the porch. As in my personal experience, the porch becomes a place of sharing. It is a place to find out local events, pass the local gossip around, and to tell and re-tell stories. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, it is used as a landmark for the community. It marks the store. It marks the mayor's house. It marks the activities for the town informational meetings. For Janie it marks the place where her old life within the structure of the house ends and her new life with Tea Cake begins. And, finally, it becomes the site that marks her claiming of self.

This claim is articulated as Janie converses with her friend Pheoby. Pheoby is the only character on the porch who is separated from the other
They want to send her to get all the information from Janie: “she left the porch pelting her back with unasked questions” (4). However, Pheoby goes for her own reasons. When Pheoby finds Janie “on the steps of the back porch with the lamps filled and the chimneys cleaned” (4), she tells Janie that the women are talking as she leaves. This scene establishes the porch as a meeting place. More importantly, this conversation takes place on the back porch. The back porch is a more private place than that of the front porch. The front porch is a public space where the community can participate, but they are excluded from this conversation. Pheoby allows Janie to transform the porch into her own space through her telling the story.

The porch, through Janie, inadvertently becomes a space of transformation for Pheoby. Near the end of the novel, after hearing Janie’s personal narrative, Pheoby exclaims, “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listen’ to you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo” (183). Before beginning the story, Pheoby sits “eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity” (6). While telling her story to Pheoby, Janie is “full of that oldest human longing--self revelation” (6). The self revelation is the healing process of re-telling her story in order to complete the learning process that comes with experiences in life. As Augustine tells us in his Confessions, we live life forward and understand it backward. Janie’s telling is an ordering and interpretative act. This scene also helps to establish the porch as a place of friendship, a place
where bonding occurs. This same sense of bonding occurs with Mr.___ and Celie near the end of The Color Purple, which I discuss in the following chapter. Yet, in The Color Purple all the characters change. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, only Janie and Pheoby do. Pheoby through Janie understands and feels the transformation that Janie undergoes. As both Janie and Pheoby evolve into new creations, Tea Cake, Joe, and Logan all remain static characters.

Not only is Pheoby an excellent listener, she is also a good pupil. Pheoby represents us, the readers, in the framework of the novel. Henry Louis Gates Jr. in his book, The Signifying Monkey states:

And to narrate this tale, Hurston draws upon the framing device, which serves on the order of plot to interrupt the received narrative flow of linear narration of the realistic novel, and which serves on the order of theme to enable Janie to recapitulate, control, and narrate her own story of becoming, the key sign of sophisticated understanding of the self. Indeed, Janie develops from a nameless child known only as “Alphabet,” who cannot even recognize her own likeness as a “colored” person on a photograph, to the implied narrator of her own tale of self-conscious. (185)

Through Pheoby, Hurston sets up the African and African-American structure of call and response, affirming Janie’s blackness. Pheoby, as respondent to Janie’s call, helps to validate Janie. Pheoby, representing the Black community, gives us, the readers, an opportunity to hear Janie’s narrative. Janie, the community, Pheoby, and we must understand Janie’s trials and tribulations, sorrows and disappointments: we go there to know there (183) through Pheoby. Janie is defined by her own experiences:
It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh themselves. (183)

On the porch, Janie is able to mediate between the house and the street and transform herself. At the same time, the action on the porch allows Pheoby to mediate between her house and the community, making her a witness and "it may be argued that Hurston stresses Pheoby's listening to the story as much as Janie's telling it" (Racine 291).

Janie begins her story where she "decided her conscious life had commenced" (10)--Nanny's gate. On this afternoon in West Florida Janie lies in the grass and fantasizes about marriage: "She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; 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. So this was marriage" (11). Here Janie sees marriage through nature and views it as pleasurable, including sexual pleasure. After this revelation, Janie seeks to confirm her vision of marriage within her boundaries of the house and yard. First, she searches her Nanny's house for answers, but "nothing on the place nor in her grandma' house answered her" (11). So, "she searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing, short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made" (11).
The house, her boundary, does not allow for self-expression and discovery. We see Janie trying to confirm her view of marriage, but she is not able to find the answers in the house. She then proceeds to the porch where her view is better, but limited. She must explore the world beyond the porch in order to learn what she cannot in the house or on the porch. Although she gazes down the street and does not go literally into it, she is waiting for the street to come to her and to transform her, implying that creation is essential in her transformation. Johnny Taylor is that first and brief “street figure” in Janie's life.

Her ability to become her own creation, exemplified by the flowering pear tree, is stifled at sixteen when her grandmother catches her kissing Johnny Taylor while at the gatepost. Janie “extended herself outside of her dream and went inside of the house” (12) when her grandmother catches her. This is significant to Janie’s growth. First, Janie is outside of the house, though limited by the fence, where life is free and where she has the ability to experience her vision of pleasure. However, when she is called into the house, her freedom ends. There, Janie experiences her first sense of limitation from Nanny. From this point until she re-enters the street with Tea Cake, Janie is forced to live under “house rules.”

This limitation of freedom and “house rules” are represented by physical violence. All the characters who try to control Janie, even Tea Cake,
slap her. When her grandmother wants her to marry Logan Killicks, a man that Janie does not love, Janie puts up a fight and disagrees with her grandmother. As a result, Nanny “slapped the girl’s face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle” (13). This action foreshadows the actions of Joe’s and Tea Cake’s slapping Janie. Joe slaps Janie to put her in her place as his wife when she tries to stand up for herself. Finally, Tea Cake slaps Janie to satisfy his own jealousy and to show the men that he is really in charge. All of them, on one level or another, want to make Janie a “mule of the world.”

Logan Killicks’ is the second “house” Janie experiences. Janie describes his house as “absent of flavor,” but “Janie went on inside to wait for love to begin” (21). She is married to him for two months when she realizes that she will never love Killicks like her grandmother tells her she will. This house, absent of love and “pear trees,” represents the “house mentality” her grandmother wishes to thrust upon her. Nanny equates love with material possessions and financial security, so she chooses someone for Janie who has those things. Janie explains her grandmother’s position:

She was born 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 madame looked lak uh mighty fine thing tuh her. Dat’s what she wanted for me—don’t keer whut it cost. Git up on un 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’. (Hurston 109)

The porch for Nanny is static—a pedestal where she has nothing to do. She takes this image from that of a white slave mistresses. However, while this is
ultimate achievement to Nanny, it is only an extension of the controlling power of the house for Janie. Trees and nature represent freedom and identity, and Killicks does not provide those experiences. Janie, as Lorraine Bethel says in ""This Infinity of Conscious Pain’: Zora Neale Hurston and the Black Female Literary Tradition,"“can only see marriage to Killicks as an obstacle to such explorations [of life], yet she cannot communicate the reality of her lyric vision to her grandmother, whose sensibilities are restricted by her nearness to the slave experience" (15).

Her second house figure, Logan Killicks, tries to turn Janie literally into a mule, harnessing her to a plow. However, when Janie tells Logan that she may leave, he is unhappy:

"S'posin Ah wuz to run off and leave yuh sometime."
There! Janie had put the words in his held-in fears. She might run off sure enough. The thought put a terrible ache in Logan's body, but he thought it best to put on scorn.
"Ah'm gettin' sleepy, Janie. Let's don't talk no mo'. "T'aint too many mens would trust yuh, knowin' yo' folks lak dey do."
"Ah might take and find somebody dat did trust me and leave yuh."
"Shucks! 'T'aint no mo' folks lak me. A whole lot of mens will grin in yo' face, but dey ain't gwine tuh work and feed yuh. You won't git far and you won't be long, when dat big gut reach over and grab dat little one, you'll be too glad to come back here." (29)

Logan then "flops over resentful in his agony and pretended sleep. He hoped that he had hurt her as she had hurt him" (29). Logan is trapped in the house, the patriarchal notions of manhood that are so rigid that he is unable to express his emotions and feelings.
Janie who, at this point, desires passion, emotion, and feeling, leaves her first husband, Logan Killicks, to run away with Joe Starks: "What was she losing so much time for? A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good" (31). Here, Janie leaves while preparing hoe-cakes, a domestic task, and turning south out of the front gate, a symbol of passage, represents her leaving the house. That she turns South suggests a turn back to slavery. Unfortunately for Janie, she leaves one restrictive house only to enter into yet another one with different, yet equally difficult circumstances.

Initially, Joe is a wonderful, caring husband who allows Janie to live her life freely. After Janie tells him that Logan has gone to buy a mule for her to plow, he replies: "You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is gut wid a 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" (28). Joe's language on the surface looks very complimentary. However, if closely examined, it is deceptive. A doll-baby is not animated. It just sits in one spot. It does not talk back, and it does not do anything on its own. It is entirely controlled by its owner. This is how Joe indeed acts toward Janie. She is his puppet. He controls her words and her actions and tells her that she is not made to think. She is a "doll-baby": an
object and a child, both silent. This language echoes the sentiments of
Nanny of Janie getting on “uh high chair and sit[ting] ther” (109).

As he enters the patriarchal structure, with his position in society as
mayor, Joe loses his free spirit with Janie, and she, in his mind, should
conform to the doll-baby image. Consequently, he represents, along with
Nanny and Logan, the rigid, coded house. After Joe and Janie are first
married at Green Cove Springs, “they sat on the boarding house porch” (31).
However, when Joe and Janie settle in their own house, Janie does not sit on
the porch, but spends her time tending the store. For Joe, "a house is a place
of personally controlled space, a shelter for individual or a close knit social
group. Within its walls people make a claim for privacy, security and self-
determination " (Perry 14). Joe wants to control all aspects of Janie's life,
from whom she associates with to how to wear her hair. When Janie is asked
to give a few words on the approval of Joe’s being named Mayor, he replies,
“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" (Hurston
41). This statement exemplifies the strict structure of the law and order that
Joe is building. Also, Joe’s “big house” represents a master mentality, not
just with Janie, but with the rest of the community as well. Joe’s house “had
two stories with porches, with bannisters and such things. The rest of the
town looked like servants' quarters surrounding the 'big house'” (44).
Additionally, the house is painted a “gloaty, sparkly white” (44). Lowe adds, Janie, his centerpiece, seems intended as a replica of “Big Missy” (170).

Even though Joe owns the porch, it does not always function in his favor. As I mentioned in chapter one, the liberating structure, the porch, can fall prey to oppressive forces, and as a result, fail as a mediating structure. The porch only becomes a space for transformation for Janie after the death of Joe, the oppressive owner. Joe cannot always control the porch in the sense of controlling his public image. For sometimes when he leaves the porch, the men talk about him. They recognize that he has economic control which means he has one kind of power: Jones states, “All he got he done made it offa de rest of us. He didn’t have all dat when he come here.” Sam replies, “Yeah, but non uh all dis you see and you’s settin’ on wasn’t here neither, when he come. Give de devil his due” (46). So, the men on the porch recognize him as the owner, literally, of the porch, but when he is not present, they, temporarily, control the porch. Yet, no one speaks up to Joe: “The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe’s positions and possessions, but none had the temerity to challenge him” (47).

Joe brings everything under his control. For example, Janie is renamed “Mrs. Mayor Starks.” This naming illustrates how “the namer has the power; the named is powerless” (King 384) and adds more concrete to the house that Joe is building. Janie loses her identity completely and assumes
that of Joe's. With that level of rigidity, Janie is soon to require breathing room.

Janie hears stories on the porch and wants to participate even before Tea Cake enters her life. While still married to Joe, she hears a variety of stories that are told, usually in the evening, on the porch: "Jody was on the porch and the porch was full of Eatonville as usual at this time of day" (68). The emphasis on this time of day is historical. As I mention in the introduction, during slavery, the slave population gathered outside their homes around the fires in the evening after leaving the fields for the day. Likewise, the slave community shared the day's events and upcoming social events on the porch.

When the porch as performative site is open, Janie participates. She has wanted to participate in this porch talk for quite some time, but is forbidden to by Joe: "Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge" (50). However, when she does defy him and participate, Jody lets her know how he feels: "You gettin' too moufy, Janie" (71). This statement reinforces the strict structure of the house in which Joe is the "master."

Like that of the slave community discussed in the introduction: The stories told on Joe Stark's porch appear to have significance beyond their immediate entertainment value. The people who make fun of Matt Bonner's tired mule can identify with this beast of burden, that works in dumb obedience and silence much as they have been trained--and more, pronounced--to do, and as Joe has trained Janie to do. But unlike the mule, Janie rebels rather than going silently to her grave. (Hubbard 172)
This passage shows us the layers of oppression that being denied porch talk means: the matter of slavery, the oppression of blacks after slavery, and the oppression of Janie by Joe. Joe continually silences Janie. He wants her to be submissive. This is symbolized in his wanting her to hide her long hair. Joe wants her to cover her hair—"This business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store" (51) and wear clothes that do not call attention to her body. African-American free women of color in New Orleans, for example, were required to keep their hair covered, as an identifying racial sign. Joe, wanting to keep Janie for himself, makes her wear a slave symbol and a symbol of blackness. He also makes her wear clothes to hide her beauty which he wants only for himself.

Joe too wants to make Janie a "mule of the world," silent and submissive. "Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I, god they sho don't think none theirselves" (69), Joe says. This is animal imagery that a slave master might use to describe a slave. This infuriates Janie who responds, "Ah knows uh few things, and women folks thinks sometimes too" (67). Janie, at this point, feels the burden of not only herself, but that of all women and tries, in turn, to make a voice for them as well. Joe replies, "Aw naw they don't. They just think they's thinkin'. When I see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" (67). This position leaves Janie with no voice to defend herself or any
other woman. After this display, Joe wants to make “peace but on his own terms” (68). Joe is still displaying his house mentality. He wants to settle the exchange of words, but still insists that his terms be met. However, for Janie the marriage is over:

She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. (68)

Janie, through this imagery, mentally leaves the marriage. According to Lorraine Bethel, “Janie discovers the emptiness of class status, and especially of status by affiliation—the territory of women. In particular, she grows to understand the loneliness of silence, how orality is required for community” (64).

When Janie mentally leaves Joe, the master begins to deteriorate. He seems unable to live without Janie’s allegiance and obedience. As “his prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his lions,” Joe, more and more “began to talk about [Janie’s] age, as if he didn’t want her to stay young while he grew old” (73). Physically, Joe, is unable to stand, as in many houses the warnings signs start with an initial crack or leak, but eventually all parts of the house begin to falter. Joe loses his voice. After Janie speaks up in the store, Joe’s presence in the text dwindles:

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Along with Janie’s authorisation comes Joe’s gradual loss of voice. When Joe was first introduced in the text, the narrator was absorbed in his diction by integrating his discourse. After the store incident and his illness which follows it, dialect features are limited to the minimum. The narrator chooses not to integrate his language in the narrative commentary in order to underscore Janie’s linguistic and emotional liberation which will lead us to her third partner, that is Tea Cake.
(Emmanouelidou 177)

Janie, we see, is beginning to emerge not only physically and emotionally, but also as a voice. The text, through its play on language, shows the demise of the structured house and the resurgence of the diversity of the street, giving a way for the porch to reach its full potential.

Near his death Janie proclaims to Joe, “You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don’t half know me at all” (82). Janie loses so much of her voice and is so suffocated by Joe that when he dies, she exclaims to her friend Pheoby, “‘Tain t dat Ah worries over Joe’s death, Pheoby. Ah jus’ loves dis freedom” (89). With this freedom, Tea Cake can enter her life.

The porch is a structure for courtship after Joe’s death. Men, such as Ike Green, only have access to the store porch for courtship purposes after the death of Joe. However, Janie resists someone taking Joe’s place as her master: “six months of wearing black passed and not one suitor had ever gained the house porch” (87). The house porch remains Janie’s space, private and limited to those who have an invitation.

After Joe dies, Janie feels free to occupy the porch at anytime: “She kept the store in the same way except of evenings she sat on the porch and

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listened and sent Hezekiah in to wait on late custom" (85). Without Joe, she is free to socialize with the community on the porch. When Janie meets Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods, he comes to the store to share in conversation with Janie. The store porch is a public space, and he engages her in both the public and private spheres, the store and her home. Even after her first encounter with Tea Cake, Janie sits on the porch alone after he leaves: "So she sat on the porch and watched the moon rise" (95). After this meeting, the community begins to talk, but Janie has already buried her old self and is in the process of re-creating herself and her image of love in the symbol of the flowering pear tree. Tea Cake is the vehicle for this transformation. He offers her mobility and growth through experience. Since Janie goes from the store to home, with Joe, she cannot create a space for herself. The place she will claim, finally, is the porch, but only after indulging in the delights of the street with Tea Cake.

With mobility comes the increased capacity to name, especially the self, and to engage in self-creation. The oppressive powers, Nanny, Logan, and Joe, name her "mule of the world." She begins to name herself when she chooses to be involved with Tea Cake. Tea Cake and Janie's situation is different from what has come before. It gives Janie the power to listen to no one but herself and her heart. When Janie makes up her mind to be happy and move to Florida, she reflects on her grandmother. She states to her friend, Pheoby, "Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine"
This is the time in the novel that Janie breaks free from the shackles of the house. She is beginning her walk toward self-definition as she sheds the ideas of Nanny, Logan, and Joe and puts on the robe of love and freedom created for her by the street, Tea Cake. Mary Helen Washington in “I Love the Way Janie Crawford 'Left Her Husbands': Emergent Female Hero” says, “As object in that text, Janie is often passive when she should be active, deprived of speech when she should be in command of language, made powerless by her three husbands and by Hurston’s narrative strategies” (99). After this cycle is broken, Janie is at the beginning of claiming the porch. Tea Cake represents variety and adventure from the time he enters Janie’s life to the intense action-filled moments of his death. From his gambling to his hard work, Tea Cake imitates and finally becomes all the “street” that Janie can handle.

Tea Cake, with his young, mobile personality, gives Janie an entrance into a world where she is able to play. When Tea Cake first meets Janie, he teaches her to play checkers. Janie “found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play” (91-92). Janie sees the invitation to play as an affirmation of her intelligence and as a concern for her pleasure. Janie states, “Jody useter tell me Ah would never learn. It wuz too heavy for mah brains” (92). Tea Cake begins to heal Janie’s damaged self-confidence. Tea Cake literally comes onto the porch on their second meeting: “Tea Cake fell in beside her and mounted the porch this
time“ (97). Tea Cake comes onto the porch, which, at this moment for Janie, is a space of waiting and stagnation. He breaks this waiting and stagnation, bringing with him the street: “movement, novelty, and action” (Da Matta 209). Tea Cake asks Janie “ ‘Tuh stand up wid him” (Hurston 110) and relocate to Jacksonville. He urges her to disregard the usual concerns of the house and patriarchy—money, age, and stability—and enter a life full of action. With the move to Jacksonville, Janie has a chance to experience unconditional mobility within the black community. This mobility results in the ability to play and grow. For without any notion of play, there would be no room for personal growth. Tea Cake shows Janie how to play, and, therefore, she grows as a person.

Tea Cake also has a mediating structure through which to express himself freely, his music. Music, as for Ma Rainey in _Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom_, becomes a functional mediating structure for Tea Cake in this novel. He plays the guitar. Hurston in “Characteristics of Negro Expression” discusses the role guitars play in the jook joint: “One guitar was enough for a dance; to have two was considered excellent. Where two were playing one man played the lead and the other seconded him. The first player was “picking” and the second “framing,” that is, playing chords with the lead carried the melody by dexterous finger work” (89). Tea Cake realizes that he misses his guitar during the party he hosts with Janie’s money, “so that put him in a notion he ought to have one” (118). While down on the muck, Tea
Cake demonstrates his love for music: "The way he would sit in the doorway and play his guitar made people stop and listen and maybe disappoint the jook for the night" (126). Tea Cake's music, like Ma Rainey's, comes from the soul. Whereas Ma Rainey gains economic freedom through her music, Tea Cake is able to demonstrate his creativity through music, thus gaining spiritual freedom, like Alice Walker's mother through her garden.

Unlike Joe's and Logan's houses, Janie and Tea Cake's house is "full of people every night. That is, all around the doorsteps was full. Some were there to hear Tea Cake pick the box; some came to talk and tell stories, but most of them came to get into whatever game was going on or might be going on" (127). Although the town gathers on Joe's porch, it is the store porch, not his house porch. Gathering on the house porch makes the activities more personal. The doorstep is in that liminal space between the house and the street. In that space Tea Cake provides the music while others gather to tell stories or gamble. The space here functions as it should because it is not owned by an oppressive force, which allows Janie to freely participate in the activities. Janie and Tea Cake's relationship as Missy Dehn Kubitschek says in "Tuh de Horizon and Back" "rejects ordinary conceptions of dominant and subordinate sex roles. Tea Cake is Janie's companion on her quest, not her master or mentor" (25). Tea Cake's house, therefore, differs from both Joe's and Logan's. For Logan's house was "absent from flavor" (Hurston 21), and Joe's house was named by the community the "big house"
Janie's "participation in the Everglades community contrasts dynamically with this restricted relationship to Eatonville, just as her partnership with Tea Cake contrasts with her subordination to Jody" (Kubitschek 27). As a result, while with Tea Cake on the muck Janie "could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (Hurston 128). The storytelling sessions in the Everglades are crucial to community and unity and self-definition, since they generate and develop communal traditions. Participation in this process is also crucial for the individual's self-definition, since communal traditions define available roles. Janie's previous passivity, enforced by Jody and by her own avoidance of a confrontation with him locks her into a fixed role: Her active participation in the storytelling on the Glades exemplifies Hurston's vision of the relationship between communal and individual definition. (Kubitschek 27)

Tea Cake and Janie become key figures in the community at work—"outside of the two jooks, everything on that job went on around [Tea Cake and Janie]"—and play (Hurston 127).

To Janie, Tea Cake represents all that she wishes to do and think and feel. But he too begins to limit her. He takes her money after they arrive in Florida, right after they are married: "When she heard the twelve o'clock whistle she decided to get up and dress. That was when she found out her two hundred dollars was gone" (113). He, like Nanny, physically abuses her. "Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to
whip her reassured him in possession” (140). Maria Racine in her article “Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God” writes, “In contrast to Jody’s actions which are motivated by hierarchal social power, Tea Cake behaves from a communally shared romantic position” (289). However, for me, when Tea Cake slaps Janie, he is reinforcing the patriarchal order and signaling his limitations and the limits of this relationship. He begins to try to possess her, and, again, she breaks that possession.

The scene in which Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog in a hurricane is a testimony to this possession. The storm becomes a passage that Tea Cake does not make. Trying to save Janie, he is bitten by a rabid dog. While in the storm, Tea Cake tells Janie to grab the tail of a cow with a dog on its back. While Janie is holding onto the cow, “The dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge” (Hurston 157). The image of the dog who is masculine standing on top of the cow who is feminine is powerful. These parallels are symbolic of the patriarchal order. In order for a man to exert his masculine power, he must have a woman to “stand on.” Man depends on the female. If he is alone, he does not have anyone to control. He needs a woman to shape his identity. This symbol reminds us of Mrs. Turner and her brother, and Mrs. Turner’s interference in Janie and Tea Cake’s relationship which leads to Tea Cake’s slapping Janie. In both situations, Tea Cake jumps in to “rescue”
Ja nie from the other “man.” In making this unnecessary rescue—the dog is afraid of the water—he brings about his own death.

In order to learn from her experiences and complete her cycle, to break from the house and be herself, Janie must kill Tea Cake. Racine suggests that, “Shooting Tea Cake is Janie’s assertion to the world that she has a life worth living, whether married or single. Ultimately, voice is more than speech; it is a state of mind—a positive sense of self” (291). Earlier in the novel, Janie is neither able to speak for herself nor is she fully able to act for herself. Janie chooses her life over love; she does not let Tea Cake, now rabid, kill her. When she chooses life, she claims her voice in the face of adversity. Tea Cake is the last stage of the educational process of her life. Even though we do not hear her testimony, she bears witness to that love at the trial. However, she must integrate Joe, the house, with Tea Cake, the street, in order to transform those two places into her own space.

Janie represents and claims the porch. The porch is “a vital transition space between the uncontrollable out-of-doors and the cherished interior of the home” (Price 36). Janie occupies this space between Tea Cake, “the uncontrollable out-of-doors” (36), and Nanny, Logan, and Joe, “the cherished interior of the home” (36). The porch for Janie becomes the space that she can claim as her own.

In claiming the porch, Janie exhibits qualities expressed in womanist theory. Alice Walker coined the term “womanist” based partially, on her
reading of Zora Neale Hurston’s work: “Zora was committed to the survival of her people’s cultural heritage as well” (Walker, In Search 91). She is conscious of Janie’s character in her definition. Janie is in search, throughout the novel, for love and identity. She becomes conscious of her community, wants to join it, and is concerned with its survival. Unfortunately, she is stifled by her grandmother and her first two husbands. Janie, like Celie, Shug and Sofia in The Color Purple, “appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength” (Walker, In Search xi). Janie loves intensely. She steps into life. Janie counterbalances her melancholy mood through laughter. For example, when Tea Cake reappears and states, “Looka here, folks . . . Sister Woods is ‘bout tuh quit her husband!”, Janie “laughed at that and let herself lean on him” (Hurston 116). Janie, always womanist in her desire for freedom, becomes more so with Tea Cake. The community notices her womanish ways—"usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior"—when she begins to wear blue, spend time with Tea Cake, and eventually when she marries and moves to Florida with him. Janie definitely loves the moon and the spirit symbolized by her pulling in the horizon at the end of the novel.

When Janie returns from burying Tea Cake, the whole town is watching her intently. They sit in judgment, as does the community in Beloved. She returns in the evening. It is sundown, the “time for sitting on
porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk" (1). Once again the porch is used as a gathering place, just as it is in The Color Purple.

In contrast to the women in Beloved who save Sethe, the women in the community sit on the porch degrading Janie as she walks past. However, it is evident that the women who are degrading her are only jealous of her. Hurston merges the living women with the inanimate porch. When she passes by and speaks to the whispering women, "the porch couldn't talk for looking" (2). This merger illustrates a unity of place and time. The women must be on the porch in order to see Janie, but the porch must be occupied in order to become a significant portion of this scene. The occupation of the porch by the women foreshadows and contrasts to Janie's and Pheoby's occupation of and conversation on the porch.

The community here, as in Beloved, wants to judge. However, unlike Sethe in Beloved, Janie is not the initial cause of the severance from the community. Initially, Joe keeps Janie from the community. Joe's vision of Janie as a "doll-baby" "entails a crucial separation of Janie from the town folks, setting her apart not just in life-style but in attitude" (Connor 153). However, Janie's leaving with Tea Cake completes the break which causes the community to feel as if they are an authority on Janie's life. Pheoby says, "'Yeah, Sam say most of 'em goes to church so they'll be sure to rise in Judgment. Dat's de day dat every secret is s'posed to be made known. They wants to be there and hear it all" (Hurston 5-6). Pheoby says, "Ah hears
what they say 'cause they just will collect round mah porch 'cause it's on de big road" (5). Because her porch is "on de big road," it is the perfect location for the community to oversee and pass judgment on the rest of the community. Janie and Pheoby defy this judgment. They converse on their own terms, in private, in a border space.

The contrast between the woman's porch and Janie and Pheoby's porch is acute in the aspect of naming. The women on the porch attempt to name her "Janie Starks" which is incorrect and which signifies the women's limited power. Janie has now renamed herself; this name, given to her by the powers other than her own, does not affect her. As a result, as she "develops in the novel, she experiences the oppressive power of those who name her, the growing potential of being named and finally the freeing experience of being unnamed" (King 685). She has renamed herself Janie Woods, a name linking her to Tea Cake, who is essential to her liberation, but also independent of any oppressive powers (see King 683-696).

On the porch, Janie releases her pain to Pheoby, making the porch her own place as well as a symbol of transformation. When Janie tells Pheoby her story, she "establishes herself as a storyteller" and "Pheoby is the eager audience that responds to Janie's desire for community" (Emmanouelidou 177). Likewise, "Hurston shows Janie's artistic temperament, previously limited to private and escapist images of the pear tree, now expressing itself in communal creation integrating her concrete experience and her
transcendent vision” (Kubitschek 27). By sharing all the stages of her life with Pheoby from her grandmother to the death of Tea Cake, Janie shows that she has gone to the limits of experience and returned:

Now, dat’s how everything wuz, Pheoby, jus’ lak Ah told yuh. So Ah’m back home agin and Ah’m satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons. Dis house ain’t so absent of things lak it used tuh be befo’ Tea Cake come along. It’s full uh thoughts, ‘specially dat bedroom. (182)

She brings the horizon to her own self on the porch: “Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see” (184). In these powerful actions, Janie declares her position: her position of being a part of the stable house that can claim the street, the vital organic experience represented by the flowering pear tree. She needs both experiences to define herself, understanding the differences and combining them in order to narrate herself on her own terms, while giving Pheoby a space to narrate herself as well.

Lynda Marion Hill states that “Hurston’s work exemplifies the way in which language is a vehicle not only for cultural knowledge, but also for cultural transformation and individual survival” (XXIII). This knowledge, transformation, and survival are shown through the character, Janie. Janie uses the porch to transform her own knowledge into shared knowledge through and with Pheoby. The language Janie uses characterizes her growth. As a child she dreams of pear trees, but by the end of the novel, she has
experienced the flowering pear tree through Tea Cake. She learns not only to survive, but she learns how to live without limits. Only then can she accept a limit, the space of the porch. Limitation changes Hurston, through Janie, and illustrates the strength and growth of a woman from childhood to adulthood.

Janie, the woman, no longer needs to enter creation. She can draw it to herself, pulling it in, like fish in the net of her narrative, to the limited but limitless space of the porch.
Chapter 5: “For the First Time in My Life, I Feel Just Right”: Womanism in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple

Many critics focus on the function of letters to discuss Alice Walker’s The Color Purple. Kimberly Rae Conner in her book Conversions and Visions in the Writings of African-American Women argues that Walker’s use of the epistolary form gives a unique view of Celie’s change from a girl to a self-defined woman: “Unlike most conversion narratives that are constructed after conversion to show us how a life inevitably led to conversion, Celie’s letters show us how that process actually occurs as it happens” (248). Throughout her chapter, Connor discusses Celie’s conversion, the effect others had on it, and the effect it had on others. Both Valerie Babb in “Women and Words: Articulating the Self in Their Eyes Were Watching God and The Color Purple” and Lillie Howard in Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston: The Common Bond, who looks at Janie and Celie, discuss issues of language. Howard articulates that although both authors focus on language, Janie’s powerful words are oral, while Celie’s articulation is written. She states that Celie’s journey to self-definition is contingent on her ability to develop through the written word: “In the experiences of both Celie and Nettie, then, we see the power of words to articulate and strengthen both personal and cultural identity” (93). Like both Howard and Connor, Elizabeth Fifer in her article “The Dialect & Letters of The Color Purple,” notes that the letters allow the audience to experience the actions of the characters vicariously: “Celie and Nettie shape themselves before our eyes, helping us
understand a grief that stretches over thirty years” (156). Fifer demonstrates the way in which written language gives Celie a voice and is responsible for much of her transformation. Likewise, Susan Willis in “Alice Walker’s Women,” explains that the education of Celie is essential to her transformation. This education, she notes, is evident through her ability to learn and understand English through her letters. She adds, “Clearly, the ability to raise questions, to objectify contradictions, is only possible when Celie begins writing her letters” (40). Although the epistolary form is significant to the structure and form of this novel, language is only part of Celie’s journey toward an articulation of the self. Celie, like both Janie and Denver, has a community of women who aid in her transformation. Celie must become independent of the house that both Alphonse and Albert provide and of their control. By leaving the house, literally, Celie is able to go into the street with Shug and become her own person.

_The Color Purple_ is a womanist text. Sarah Brown-Clark in “The Community of Black Women” says that, “_The Color Purple_ is a womanist celebration of the black female characters, who bond together, consolidating their individual strengths to ensure the survival of each woman” (296). It demonstrates its womanism through many of the female characters, and the concerns of the novel go beyond Celie’s individual identity formation to its inclusion of the importance of community. In Alice Walker’s _The Color Purple_, Celie, like Denver and Janie, represents the porch, the bridging character
who brings Mr.____ and Shug into a collective community. Walker’s novel contains many aspects of the house and street interacting through the porch, the ambiguous space between the two. The house is represented by Mr.____ and Alphonso; Shug and Sofia represent the street, and Celie symbolizes the porch. The porch as a site, a physical site, is prominent in *The Color Purple*, just as it is in the novels I discuss in chapters two and three. However, the porch is not only significant in the actions of Celie, but also important to the entire novel.

As the owner of the house and all of its belongings including wives and children, Mr.____ illuminates the order represented by the house, which in turn symbolizes him. Because the house represents law and order, there is a definite hierarchy in the plantation house passed down to Mr.____ by his grandfather who was a white slave holder. Indeed at the beginning of their marriage, Celie is asked to come outside so that Mr.____ can see her:

> Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it wasn’t nothing. Mr.____ want another look at you.  
> I go stand in the door. The sun shine in my eyes. He’s still up on the horse. He look me up and down.  
> Pa rattle his newspaper. Move up, he won’t bite, he say.  
> I go closer to the steps, but not too close cause I’m a little scared of his horse.  
> Turn round, Pa say.  
> I turn round. (11-12)

Here the porch is like a platform for a slave action. While on the porch, Celie is spoken to like a slave. She has no voice. She has no control over her life. She is treated like cattle, as if she is not even present. Walker in *Living By the*
Word, suggests that “Mister learns how to treat women and children from his father, Old Mister. Who did Old Mister learn from? Well, from Old Master, his slave-owning father, who treated Old Mister’s mother and Old Mister (growing up) as slaves” (81). Therefore, the plantation mentality permeates the house. Moreover “in the house, relations are ruled ‘naturally’ by the hierarchies of sex and age, with males and the elderly taking precedence” (Da Matta 209). Mr. governs his house by rules of discipline, “Wives is like children. You have to let’em know who got the upper hand” (Walker, Purple 37). Mr.’s words echo this behavior. He continually degrades Celie from the time she arrives, until the time she leaves the house forever.

Not only does Mr. disrespect Celie, he appears to have a lack of respect for all women, except for Shug. For when Kate, Mr.’s own sister, attempts to defend Celie by telling Harpo to help her bring the water in, Mr. is not pleased. Harpo “mutter[ed] somethin to Mr. sitting on the porch. Mr. call his sister. She stay out on the porch talking a little while, then she some back in shaking” (22). When Kate comes back in the house, she says, “You got to fight them Celie . . . I can’t do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself” (22).

But Celie cannot fight Mr. on his terms, physically. He is an abusive and violent man, further evidence of Mr.’s plantation mentality. When Harpo asks Mr. why he beats Celie, he replies “cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for—he don’t finish. He just tuck his chin
over the paper like he do” (23). Mr., like Joe in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, seems to have a place for women, a preconceived notion about the status and roles of women. Like Joe, Albert compares wives to children—“Wives is like children. You have to let’em know who got the upper hand” (37). However, Mr. takes it a step further by adding, “Nothing can do better than a good sound beating” (37). This use of physical violence to control women is further evidence of the structure of the house, patriarchy, which informs the male characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple*.

Just as the men in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Color Purple* are similar, so are the main female characters, Janie and Celie. Both Celie and Janie change through their experiences, creating their own boundaries. Also, both of these characters integrate the house and the street.

After discovering Hurston, Walker “began to fight for Zora and her work; for what I knew was good and must not be lost” (*In Search* 87). Walker “fights” for Hurston by marking her grave and immortalizing her in Walker’s own works. She also “fights” for her as an ancestor by applying her method. From the plot and narrative style, we see that Hurston’s writing had a profound effect on Walker’s work. For example, both Hurston and Walker allow the transformation of the two women to be shaped through a female character. Hurston uses Pheoby in order to share her narrative while Walker uses Nettie through her letters to share Celie’s transformation.
The men in these two novels, however, differ in one important aspect. The men in Janie’s life are all static, but Mr. changes through his experience. Although his change is not detailed in the novel, it is clear near the end of the novel that Mr. has changed through Celie’s affirmation of herself and through the loss of Shug. His movement from “Mr.” to “Albert” is evidence of his developed humanity and consciousness.

Mr.’s misogynistic attitude permeates this novel and is evident in his treatment of Celie. From the start, Mr. allows the children to “run over” Celie. Furthermore, he beats Celie because he says that she is stubborn. Celie says, “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them” (23). Mr.’s beating Celie because she is stubborn is the same behavior as the slave masters who could punish slaves at will. It is probably the treatment of his father by his grandfather that he witnessed as a child. In turn, Mr.’s father probably instilled this same slave-like mentality in his son. This “house” mentality, constructed over generations, has to be deconstructed in order to be reconstructed into something that is more positive. When Shug Avery enters the house, she becomes the tool that breaks down the hierarchy of the house. She allows Celie to be influenced by the street in order to reconstruct and redefine herself in her own terms.

Celia too has absorbed the plantation mentality. For example, she is so caught up in the actions of Mr. towards her that she advises Harpo on how to make Sofia obey or “mind,” telling him to “beat her” (38). When Sofia
approaches Celie about the situation and asks her why she says it, Celie explains that she envies Sofia's freedom: “I say it cause I'm fool... I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't” (42). This shows the deep-seated envy that Celie has for Sofia, envy that leads her to oppress her own “sister.” Unfortunately, Celie inwardly desires to see someone else in her state of misery instead of attempting to save Sofia. The lack of self-esteem and the broken self-image that Celie possesses are fueled by a continuous cycle of abuse. For Celie to grow, she must break this cycle which oppresses both her and Mr.___.

Sofia is the first representative of the freedom Celie seeks. Sofia is a powerful, self-defining, black woman in this novel. Celie needs this model in her life as she contends with the history of abuse and servitude she endures at home and with Mr.___. In The Same River Twice, Walker wonders if “viewers (or readers, for that matter) ever realize that Sofia is named after the goddess of wisdom: for it is wise, however painful, to stand up for one's self, to have one's laughter and one's say, no matter how long one's tongue has been tied” (41). Sophia is a womanist. She possesses all of the qualities as prescribed in the Walker's definition. Walker describes Sofia as:

one of the finest womanists. She can work and fight her own battles, enjoys men, the company of other women, sex, her children and her home. The sort of strong, hardworking woman who, once out of her overalls and into her lipstick and dress, makes a man blink not one but many times. Women also like her for her directness, humor, generosity and loyalty. (54)
For Celie, this is a woman who is a friend in whom she can confide. Celie, I believe, needs both Shug and Sofia, both "streets" for her, to claim the porch, and thus her identity.

As a result of her womanish behavior, Sofia finds herself in jail for refusing to be Miz Millie's maid. After she is released from jail, she is indeed forced into the role of a servant, but Sofia does not conform to this role psychologically even though her spirit seems to be broken by spending time in jail, where she was "dying fast" (204), and by becoming a maid. Linda Selzer in "Race and Domesticity in The Color Purple" states, "Sofia is entirely unsuited for the role of mammy, but whites--including and perhaps especially Miss Eleanor Jane--continually expect her to behave according to their cultural representations of the black mother" (74). This is evident when Sofia proclaims her lack of feelings for Miss Eleanor Jane's son— "I do not love Reynolds Stanley Earl" (Purple 271). From the depiction of mammy, Sofia is supposed to love all children, both white and black; however, she does not.

Because of this mammy status, Sofia has been physically and mentally separated from her family: "I'm at they beck and call all night and all day. They won't let me see my children" (108). Sofia has the strength, however, to overcome this separation. When Sofia declares herself home-- "But just to clear this up neat and quick . . . I'm home. Period." (209)-- she sheds her "stranger" status and becomes, once again, a member of the family. This moment clarifies Sofia's place in the family, not just for the rest of the family,
but for Sofia as well. Before this point, Sofia is an outsider and has not reattached herself to the family. However, after this time she reasserts herself as mother and wife.

Sofia communicates this strength to Celie. The porch is a site for conversation between Sofia and Celie. Through conversation on the porch, Sofia also aids Celie in her transformation. Sofia:

is one of the women who helps Celie transform herself from a fearful self-hating victim of male domination and oppression to a self-assertive and self-loving woman refusing to be mistreated by any man. Sofia shows Celie that life for women need not be characterized by disrespect, abuse, neglect or any other form of persecution. (Jamison-Hall 196)

They are often found conversing about Mr.____ and Harpo on the porch, sewing their latest quilt together on the porch, and watching the children play from the porch: “Me and Sofia work on the quilt. Got it frame up on the porch. Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress, and I work in a piece every chance I get. It a nice pattern call Sister’s Choice” (61). Sofia’s anger against whites and men, however, does not let her fully utilize the freedom of the porch. She, like Celie and Mr.____, must undergo healing.

Sofia urges Celie to fight as do Nettie and Kate. Nettie, like Kate, tells Celie to fight, “You got to fight. You got to fight,” but Celie replies, “But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (18). By the end of the novel, Celie learns how to fight. Through learning how to fight, she can, in turn, teach other women in the same predicament to fight as well, but not in Mr.____’s terms. Sofia’s imprisonment is proof that violence is no answer
to violence. Even though Celie is submissive and Mr. ___ is aggressive,
Walker suggests in *Living By the Word*, that humility is a virtue:

> It is a mistake to assume that Celie’s “meekness” makes her a saint and Mister’s brutality makes him a devil. The point is, neither of these people is healthy. They are, in fact, dreadfully ill, and they manifest their dis-ease according to their culturally derived sex roles and the bad experiences early impressed on their personalities. They proceed to grow, to change, to become whole, i.e., well, by becoming more like each other, but stopping short of taking on each other’s illness. Celie becomes more self-interested and aggressive, Albert becomes more thoughtful and considerate of others. (80)

Both of these characters are in transition, in need of healthy images of growth.

Shug, despite her own illness, supplies an initial image of freedom.

Before Shug Avery, the Queen Honeybee, even arrives back in town, Celie is introduced to her by a photograph. From that point on, Celie is overcome by the thought of seeing her. Celie begins to see Shug as an image of difference and change before she actually comes into her life. After Shug arrives, Celie wants to go the club, “Not to dance. Not to drink. Not to play card. Not even to hear Shug Avery sing. I just be thankful to by eyes on her” (26). However, Mr. ___ does not allow her to attend.

Shug, along with Sofia, represents the street. Angelene Jamison-Hall in “She’s Just Too Womanish for Them: Alice Walker and The Color Purple” argues:

> Worldly, bold and bound by none of society’s restrictions, Shug is an explorer, a lover of life and all living things. She finds satisfaction in the blues and in sex, the very things women are
taught to fear and shun, but which illustrate Shug's insistence on growing and experiencing life her own way. (195)

She represents the aspect of choice: "in the street, relationships . . . have an indelible character of choice, or imply the possibility of choice" (Da Matta 209). Shug's love of blues is reminiscent of Ma Rainey. Both women characters are blues singers, bold and in control of their lives, especially in the area of music. These women are assertive, and if allowed, will help others in their quest for self-expression and independence—mentally and creatively. Unlike Levee, who resists Ma Rainey, Celie and Squeak allow Shug to enter their lives and thus create a space for them to recreate themselves. As a result, she is responsible for the choice that Celie and Squeak make to leave the house go onto the porch and into the street, which Celie calls "the creation."

The creation for Celie is two-fold. It involves literally leaving the house and creating her own life which she has never possessed and creating a new image of herself without reference to a "house" or, in other words, a man with all the attending patriarchal codes. Celie must leave Mr. in order to create a space in which she can freely move and express herself. The rigidity that the house represents stifles Celie's mental and spiritual growth. The house enforces its own image of Celie; therefore, Celie has to gain independence. This independence will be a balance of house and street, as is suggested when Celie first thinks about the world (Walker, Color Purple 60). Celie says, "I see myself there quilting tween Shug Avery and
Mr. . . . For the first time in my life, I feel just right” (60). Metaphorically speaking, Celie has found her position between the house and the street while physically sitting on the porch. She will later amplify the integration of the two, but this is an early indication of her eventual identity. First, however, she must gain the confidence that men or the “house” cannot give to her.

The creation is also the world itself, including nature and the human body. As mediator, Shug helps Celie to define God, love, and ultimately self. Shug allows Celie to see that “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it” (202). As Shug opens Celie’s eyes to the various aspects of God, Celie learns to love. She begins with her own body and comes to love Shug’s body, and from those, she can love the “body of God,” the world, in which, for Walker, God is immanent. After a conversation with Shug, Celie reflectively states, “Well, us talk and talk about God, but I’m still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking about him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) Not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing” (204). As Celie begins to uncover the beauties that God grants her, she, in turn, learns to love herself and to redefine herself as love, allowing her to become the person who transforms the house and the street into her personal space, the porch.
Before Shug has the conversation with Celie about God, Celie's description of God is of another oppressive male figure. She is unable to identify with God on a personal level, except through her letters. She states: "God all white too, looking like some stout white man work for the bank" (96). She adds, "He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted (201). She sees him as the ultimate patriarchal oppressor because she describes him as white. It is only after her discussion of God with Shug that Celie truly appreciates and can understand God on her own terms. This new vision also contributes to her creation of herself.

From both Shug and Nettie, her sister, Celie develops a sense of self-worth that is essential to the foundation of Celie's re-creation of herself. In this novel, Celie takes up the porch—that "ambiguous space between the house and the street" (Da Matta 210). Celie does not feel as if she belongs either in the house or in the street. Ultimately, however, she looks outward, facing the street representing the possibility of leaving the house in order to gain the freedom the street symbolizes. Because of his cruelty, Celie longs to flee Mr. ___'s presence. Through Shug, she gains a controlled access to the street. With Shug in her life, Celie looks upon herself as a person with feelings, not as a mule of the world. She states, "My life stop when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stop with Mr. ___ maybe, but it start up again with Shug" (85). When Celie says that nobody has ever loved her,
Shug states, “I love you, Miss Celie” (Walker *Purple* 118). The sense of value that Celie gets from Shug helps to form the foundation on which she builds the courage not only to stand up to Mr. ____, but to leave his house, and create a life for herself.

Nettie “conveys to Celie her belief that Celie is of value” (Proudfit 23). Nettie, through her letters, opens Celie to an African reality that also helps to define her identity and to reshape her image of God. For example, Nettie informs Celie that the pictures in the Bible are deceiving: “All the Ethiopians in the bible were colored. . . It is the pictures in the bible that fool you. . . All of the people are white and so you just think all the people from the bible were white too” (141). Nettie continues to thank God throughout her letters. Nettie influences Celie because of their relationship; Nettie helps to form her identity. As a central part of that formation, Nettie educates Celie about Africa through her letters. Celie learns about her native land Africa and her children which gives Celie a sense of her ancestors as well as her own generation of “peoples.”

The community is important in *The Color Purple*. The community of women facilitate the growth of Celie. This community differs from that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in that that community condemns Janie and does nothing to support her growth. Instead, they degrade her because of their jealousy. Like the community in *Beloved*, the women in *The Color*
Purple help to save Celie from destruction. They show her a way out of oppression even as they define themselves.

Squeak, for example, another of the female characters, mirrors and encapsulates Celie’s experience. Shug also helps Squeak to gain her voice. After allowing herself to be raped by her white uncle to free Sofia from prison, Squeak declares her independence by standing up and saying, “My name is Mary Agnes” (102). She sheds the name her male oppressor, Harpo, gives her and becomes a new and her own creation. After her declaration of independence, “She begin to sing. First she sing Shug’s songs, then she begin to make up songs her own self” (103). This move from singing Shug’s songs to singing her own shows the movement toward self-definition—the same move that Celie makes. Shug encourages Squeak to sing—“Shug say to Squeak, I mean Mary Agnes, You ought to sing in public” (120). When Mary Agnes declares that she is going to Memphis with Shug, Harpo is not pleased:

I need to sing, say Squeak. Listen Squeak, say Harpo. You can’t go to Memphis. That’s all there is to it. Mary Agnes, say Squeak. Squeak, Mary Agnes, what difference does it make. It make a lot say Squeak. When I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public. (210)

Mary Agnes denounces her name “Squeak,” reminiscent of a mouse who has no power, to reclaim her own name. This gives her a new sense of identity, created in a space provided by Shug. Mary Agnes’s use of music functions differently than Levee’s structure in Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom because she
learns how to form and to negotiate her space. While Mary Agnes asserts herself by renaming herself and breaking from Grady and her addiction to drugs, Levee allows Sturdyvant to name him through the purchasing of his songs and supplying Sturdyvant’s name to them.

Music also plays a part in Celie’s freedom. Shug names a song after her: “She say this song I’m about to sing is call Miss Celie’s song,” because Celie then thinks to herself, “First time somebody made something and name it after me” (77). Song here, as in the spirituals, is a space for freedom. The slaves, Ma Rainey, Mary Agnes, Shug, and now Celie, through Shug, experience this freedom.

The porch is Celie’s springboard. Porches are “…central places for educative socializing” (Perry 14). Celie stands and denounces the house and Mr.____ from the porch:

Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble. . . Until you do right by me . . . everything you even dream about will fail . . . Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice . . . A dust devil flew up on the porch between us, fill my mouth with dirt. The dirt say, anything you do to me, already done to you. (213-214)

When the dust flies, the porch itself actually forms the necessary gap between them—that liminal space needed for her to declare her independence from him while leaving him in the house.

The claiming of her self is expressed as Celie leaves Mr.____. While she is physically leaving the house Celie says, “I’m pore, I’m black, I may even be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here” (214).
This is Celie's final disassociation with the house. She affirms the self that has been forged in her trials and tribulations and through her survival: she makes it through. With that experience behind her, leaving the house will not be difficult. Thadious Davis in “Alice Walker’s Celebration of Self in Southern Generations” says, “Celie is, or in her own black folk English, she be’s her own black, nappy-haired, ordinary self in all power and pain that combine in her writing to reveal the girl, the female becoming totally a woman-person who survives and belies the weak, passive exterior her family and community presume to be her whole self” (51-52).

That independence from the plantation where she is mule, beast of burden, comes in making pants, an act of creativity and, ultimately, economic agency. Shug is the person who first mentions the idea of making pants to Celie. After discovering the evil of Albert hiding Nettie’s letters, Celie wants to kill him. Shug says, “let’s make you some pants” (152). Initially, Celie is not thrilled at the idea of making pants. Then Celie thinks, “A needle and not a razor in my hand” (153). Daniel Ross in “A Fairy-tale Life: The Making of Celie in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple,” adds “Celie learns to control her aggressive desires by two means of sublimation: assertive speech and the substitution of one cutting instrument, the needle, for another, the razor. The needle symbolizes Celie’s hard-won autonomy; by learning to make pants, Celie finds a means of freeing herself from Albert’s domination” (165). Celie
convinces herself that it is better to create something new instead of
destroying her life by killing Albert. She is agent, not victim.

Celie, discovers herself fully through her creative activity:

I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants
now in every color and size under the sun. Since we started
making pants down home, I ain’t been able to stop. I change
the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the
pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I
make so many pants Shug tease me. (218)

From her business, Celie gains an independence with which she can go back
to the house on her own terms and recreate her relationship with Mr.___.
She’s not just “wearing the pants” but making them. Wearing the pants is an
image of power. Celie makes them, in lots of varieties—so “authority”
changes, is in a different form, an image of community since both men and
women wear her pants. Celie demonstrates her womanish ways through her
love of pants as Walker discusses the love of gardens one her mother
possessed when she was unable to express her spirituality and creativity
otherwise. Before her mother “left home for the fields, she watered her
flowers, chopped up the grass, and laid out new beds . . . Whatever she
planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as a grower of flowers spread over
three counties” (“In Search” Walker 241). Both Walker’s mother and Celie are
empowered through their art. Memphis, therefore, can be seen as a figurative
porch for Celie serving as a space for her performative action, sewing, to
surface. Willis adds:
The possibility of Celie's transformation is brought about by her journey away from the rural backwater and to the big city: Memphis, where she comes to support herself—not by means of wage labor, and it is clear that Walker sees no hope for liberation in the transition to the industrial mode, but by means of learning a trade—which is both artistic and necessary. She designs and sews custom pants. (37)

Celie uses Memphis as a porch between Mr.____ and herself. From Memphis, she can rehearse, allowing a bridge to be gapped through her creation of pants. When Celie has a mode of self-expression, she matures emotionally, thereby, providing the space in which to heal the broken relationship between her and Mr.____. When Celie returns from Memphis, she finds Mr.____ occupying the liminal porch. She passes Mr.____'s "house and him sitting up on the porch and he didn't even know who [she] was" (244). When he leaves the house, he and Celie, returning from the street, begin to heal their broken relationship. Susan Willis in "Alice Walker's Women," states, "Return is the developmental imperative in all of Walker's novels, where the journey over geographic space is a metaphor for personal growth and, in a larger sense historical transformation" (36).

Mr.____ does change. Sofia first notices that change, "I know you won't believe this Miss Celie, say Sofia, but Mr.____ act like he trying to git religion. Big a devil as he is, I say, trying is bout all he can do" (229). Mr.____ has to undergo what he forces Celie to undergo. He does "women's work." Sofia adds that he works in the field and cooks for himself now. He must undergo his own trials. He cannot sleep at night and always thinks he hears
bats and other things rattling in his house. This suffering prepares him to meet Celie as a human being. Also, Mr. ___’s change parallels Celie’s change. Their transformations occur simultaneously and bring them together to heal their relationship. For example, he, too begins to sew, and sewing binds Celie and Albert together: “Speaking of learning, Mr. ___ say one day us was sewing out on the porch, I first start to learn all them days ago I use to sit up there on my porch, staring out cross the railing” (289). Albert seems to find his creative side through sewing. Later, he “is busy patterning a shirt for folks to wear with [Celie’s] pants. Got to have pockets, he say. Got to have loose sleeves. And definitely you not spose to wear it with no tie. Folks wearing ties look like they being lynch” (290). Through the use of the porch, Albert and Celie not only reestablish their relationship, but find sewing as common tool to express themselves and to come to know each other as equals, out of their roles as victim and victimizer. They become friends and partners.

Mr. ___ becomes Albert, and his name represents his transformation:

“Even Albert and Celie are reconciled, his change of heart signaled by the earning the right to have his first name written” (Selzer 76). Albert understands that he has changed. The porch becomes a site for Mr. ___’s desire and transformation. When Nettie is there, early in the novel, Mr. ___ “come out on the porch in his Sunday best. She be sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling” (17). Mr. ___ is on
the porch when he is trying to impress Nettie, and he goes back on the porch when news of Shug Avery’s arrival gets to him: “Yeah, he out on the porch, trying to shave where the light better” (26). The porch then becomes a practical location for “better light,” for illumination and understanding. It also becomes the site of preparation, the space outside of the house where Mr. ___ prepares himself for Shug, the street. It is also the site of transformation. Mr. ___ “sit on the porch and stare” (28) and “sit on the porch, look out at nothing” (29). Mr. ___ is daydreaming about Shug, forming the porch into a temple for Shug. Even this early, Mr. ___ knows his life is limited and incomplete. His desire for Shug is his desire for a different self.

On the porch, the space where the house and the street meet, Celie and Mr. ___ communicate. After the porch becomes a place of conjure, where Celie declares her freedom, and condemnation, where Mr. ___ denounces her, it becomes a place of healing for Celie and Mr. ___. On the porch both Celie and Mr. ___ are able to discuss their one true love, Shug, and to come to love each other. Albert states:

I’m real sorry she left you, Celie. I remember how I felt when she left me. Then the old devil put his arms around me just stood there on the porch with me real quiet. Way after while I bent my stiff neck onto his shoulder. Here us is I thought, two old fools left over from love, keeping each other company under the stars. (278)

In a conversation with Celie, he says, “Just experience” (277), after being asked what has “gotten into him.” He adds, “You know, everybody bound to git some of that sooner or later. All they have to do is stay alive” (277). To
explain part of his transformation, Albert relates to Celie that, when he discovers how Shug really feels about Celie, he tries to tell Shug, “You don’t really love old dumb Celie...She ugly and skinny and can’t hold a candle to you” (277). Shug’s reply, after this conversation, helps Albert to understand fully the relationship between his wife and lover. Celie and Albert are bound by their love of Shug. There is sympathy between the two in love and in the loss of Shug, and Shug, as bridge, helps them define their feelings for each other. When he affirms his own love—“I have love and I have been love” (277), he fully accepts Celie for the person she was and has become through their common love, Shug.

This healing is evident throughout the remainder of the novel. Celie admits to Nettie, in a letter, that she does not hate Mr.__: “I don’t hate him for two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him” (267). Even while in the healing process, it is Shug that ties them together. Shug makes the porch the opening to the world, really function for the house. Through her, the patriarchy is open to play, and its values are transformed. It is Shug who allows Mr.__ (house) and Celie (porch) to interact with her (street) as the medium of love and communication which leads to healing.

This image of love and calm is reinforced where we find Mr.__, Celie, and Shug “sitting out on the porch after dinner. Talking. Not talking” (292). This explicitly expresses the house, the street, and the porch coming together in harmony. And, “No longer a voiceless chattel to her man, Celie is able to
Converse with her husband. Having undergone liberation in both economic and sexual terms, she is for the first time perceived—not as a domestic slave or the means toward male sexual gratification—but as a whole woman: witty, resourceful, caring, wise, sensitive and sensual” (Willis 37). This kinship is “articulated most explicitly late in the novel when a mature Celie and a reformed Albert enjoy some communal sewing and conversation” (Selzer 69).

Kinship closes the novel. Finally, on the porch Nettie and Celie are reunited—“When Nettie’s foot come down on the porch I almost die” (293). The porch is a site of personal integration, returning to Celie that portion of her life that had been taken away from her by Mr. ___. Nettie’s coming back brings Celie’s development into full circle. She states, “Us sit and lay there on the porch inside each other’s arms” (293). This moment of full reconciliation occurs on the porch, Celie’s place. The whole community occupies this intermediate site. Walker suggests, through this image, the possibility of a new kind of community in which men and women, Africa and America, blood family and chosen family come together, are reconciled, and offer new possibilities for creative existence.

Celie acknowledges her people—“I point up at my peoples. This Shug and Albert, I say” (294). Claiming Albert as her “peoples” shows the growth of Celie and indicates the growth of Albert and Shug. Selzer notes that the “individual realizes her full potential only within the supporting bonds of a strong kinship group (no matter how unconventional that group might be

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defined) . . . (76). Abuser and abused, wife and lover, and wife, lover, and
husband, freedom and stability come into balance in a new identity. Celie’s
great sense of self-esteem, independence, and self-acclamation on this border
site bring to everyone a strong sense of stability. Celie combines and
transforms Sofia’s and Albert’s red rage and Shug blue depression in order to
redefine herself as purple: the color of God, creation, and power.

From Novel to Film: The Porch in Steven Spielberg’s The Color Purple

Walker created Watch for Me in the Sunset as an alternative title for
the film because she was afraid Steven Spielberg’s version of The Color
Purple would not be worthy of the title. The alternative title indicates
Walker’s apprehension about the film version of the novel. She conversed
with both Quincy Jones and Steven Spielberg throughout the processes
associated with the making of the film. Attributing her love of gardens to her
mother, Walker tended a garden while writing the script and throughout the
filming, praising and linking with her mother’s love, spirit, and endurance.
She gives back to her mother in the same way her mother gave to her.

The porch is an important image in the film The Color Purple. The
porch functions in a variety of ways in this movie, but it is, through its
presence, essential to the African-American community in the film. In the
initial minutes of the movie, Celie comes onto the porch when Mr. ___ comes to
marry Nettie, but is offered Celie instead. Alphonso says:

I can’t let you have Nettie. She too young. But I tell you what, I
can let you have Celie. She’s the oldest anyhow. She ought to
marry first. She ain't fresh, tho. But I spect you know that. She been spoiled—twice. Celie is ugly but she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do anything to her and she ain't gon make you feed clothe or her. But Nettie you flat out can’t have. Not now. Not ever.

This passage indicates the stereotype of women in slavery. The difference with Celie is that she makes no product—children. When Celie leaves the house and steps on the porch, the ownership of the porch belongs to Alphonso, an established person of the “house.” As in the novel, Celie, at this time, has no ownership of the porch and is thus treated as chattel. He tells Celie to “Move up” because Mr. ___ “won't bite.” As she reaches the ground, her stepfather tell her to “turn around.” This command to show herself like a thing for purchase is reminds us of the slave auction.

Indeed, the film presents in graphic terms how the men believe themselves to be “owners” of women. After Mr. ___ marries Celie, Nettie has to fight her stepfather to prevent him from sexually abusing her. When she arrives at Celie's house, Celie is on the porch. Also, even though he has ulterior motives, Albert is on the porch when he says that Nettie can stay. The porch here functions as a place of reunions and new beginnings. The porch, however, is owned by an oppressive force, and cannot support healthy relationships; therefore, this reunion is already doomed because the porch is owned by Mr. ___. Mr. ___ is on the porch of the “big house” when he agrees to let Nettie stay, and both Celie and Nettie are on the ground. This
positioning of the characters suggests a lord and master who is over and owns his slaves.

The porch, when occupied by both Mr.____ and his father, changes ownership temporarily. Old Mr.____ becomes the dominant force, particularly since Old Mr.____ actually owns the house. Old Mr.____ commands the porch when he degrades Shug. In contrast to Celie, who is described as clean, Shug is described as “nasty.” Ironically, Old Mr.____ seems to respect Celie whom Mr.____ hates because she is not Shug. Mr.____ defends Shug and eventually asks his father to leave. This action demonstrates the power struggle that occurs between these two men. They are from two different generations even though Mr.____ carries many of the abusive characteristics of his father, and Old Mr.____ clearly desires to define and control his son’s identity.

Mr.____ asserts his identity by abusing Celie and separating her from Nettie. Indeed, the porch becomes the site of separation. Mr.____, after Nettie defends herself against him, decides to force Nettie to leave. On the porch, Celie and Nettie are hugging. At this time this is the safest place for them because they are not still in the house and not yet in the yard. Mr.____, however, drags Nettie from the porch into the yard and throws her into the street. A fence separates the girls, reminding us of the fence in Their Eyes Were Watching God. They move along the fence together until Nettie enters the street. From the yard Celie yells, “Write,” and Nettie replies, “Nothing but death can keep me from it.”
The porch is also a site for Mr. ___'s shavings which are a symbol of his control of Celie's actions and emotions. She shaves him like a servant, and he trusts her not to harm him because of her fear. The first time we see Celie shave him, she is still a young girl. There is a rocking chair and a basin on the porch and a child is swinging. Celie is nervous and Mr. ___'s statement, "You cut me and I'll kill you," evokes feelings of ownership and fear in Celie. While she attempts to shave Mr. ___, Celie sees the mailman appear for the first time after Nettie leaves. She, as a result, gets excited and nearly cuts Mr. ___. He, however, does not allow her ever to get the mail, controlling her even more fully, and, once again, the porch does not function as it should. Celie is "trapped" in the limen, unable to make the transition. Near the end of the movie, however, after finding Nettie's letters, a now adult Celie begins to command authority over the porch. Mr. ___ again calls Celie to shave him, but now Celie's demeanor has changed. She sharpens the razor as he hurls insults at her, ready to take Mr. ___'s life as he has taken hers in oppression. Like before, Mr. ___ trusts his power. He believes that no matter what he does, she will not kill him. Initially, he says that he will kill her if she cuts him; however, by this point Mr. ___ has "cut" Celie, and now she is ready to kill him. Only Shug who runs to the porch and grabs her hand stops Celie from killing Mr. ___ on that porch that evening. The porch almost becomes a site for murder, but that would, once again give ownership to an oppressor.

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Celie, like Sofia, would go to jail. With Shug, the transformative figure, interrupting the actions on the porch, Celie is saved from further destruction.

The central women figures interact on the porch. Celie first sees Sofia, for example, from the porch. Sofia is a robust woman who is strong both physically and mentality. She commands respect from everyone. The original script uses the porch to emphasize that Sofia is not "of the house," willing to be oppressed. For example, the meeting between Harpo and Sofia and Albert takes place in the house, Mr. ___'s space of control, in the movie, but in the original script this meeting takes place on the porch. This change suggests that Sofia will come under the control of patriarchy, if not black men white men, despite her power.

Shug, too, is introduced on the porch. When Shug first enters Celie's life, Celie says that it is a peculiar day. She is sitting on the porch reading to the children. She then descends the steps of the porch and proclaims it "twister weather." This is the day Shug Avery, who is indeed a twister, enters Celie's life. Celie is standing on the porch when Mr. ___ and Harpo first bring Shug into the house. Celie remarks that she cannot move until Shug looks at her. The strong women responsible for Celie's transformation, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug all enter or re-enter her life while Celie is on the porch. The porch then becomes a space where Celie can invite others in both physically and mentality to allow a change to occur.
On the porch, Celie reads the letters that she and Shug find. Shug spots the mailman from the porch, acting as a surrogate for Celie, and her getting one letter for Celie leads to the discovery of years of letters from Nettie. After Celie finds the letters, she spends time reading the letters on the porch under the guise of reading a book. Indeed she is reading a new text, for from Nettie's description, Africa breaks into Celie's world. The porch becomes a stage on which Nettie's life is reenacted and from which Celie views it and participates in it. Finding Nettie gives her the courage to leave Mr. ___.

When confronted about the letters and his abuse, Albert, on the porch, announces to Celie, "I should've locked you up. Just let you out to work." The porch, however, is not his place of power. After Celie curses Mr. ___, we see the deconstruction of Mr. ___. He dances at the jookjoint alone to Shug's song, "Sister." Also, his porch as well as his house is overrun with animals and filth. The filth of the porch and the house are symbolic of Albert's mental health. He has been devoured by his own "house," and it serves as a reminder to him of his bad deeds. Furthermore, Albert is pictured by himself on the porch alone twice after Celie and Shug leave his house. He is a broken man on the porch both of these times, in contrast to the power we feel when we first encounter him. He is alone and without anyone over whom to rule.

In the final scene of the movie, the porch serves as place of reunion—for everyone except Mr. ___. This is a significant change in the making of novel to
film. The porch serves as a space where Celie’s life and transformation come full circle. In the movie, Shug and Squeak are on the porch, and Celie comes on the porch when she sees dust flying in the road. The movie depicts this reunion as taking place in the yard with Celie and Nettie hugging. However, in the original script of the movie, the reunion takes place on the porch, and Albert is present on the porch. In the movie, however, he is in the distance, leading his horse. That he is not on horse suggests that he gives up a place of power, but he seems alienated. Walker states, “The ending is moving. But I wanted Mister up on the porch too!” (Same 161). Mister’s placement on the porch both in the script and in the novel displays the healing that occurs between Celie and Albert, for in the end of the book Celie introduces Albert and Shug as her “peoples” (Purple 294). That placement also emphasizes his inclusion in the community. With Albert absent from the porch, the movie viewers are robbed of the sense of circularity that this scene possess. In other words, Celie is “sold” from this porch in the beginning of the film; at the end, she is reunited with her family there, creating a “sweet home.” By the end, the movie audience would have understood Albert’s transformation more fully had he joined the family. Instead he is isolated and estranged, in the film, watching from a distance. His inclusion could have reduced the amount of negative criticism of the film, especially that from African-American males.
Later, Walker seems to contradict herself in an attempt, perhaps, to save the movie. She argues that “I think you really understand Albert better in the movie than in the book” (Same 181). In saying this, she seems to want to give credit to Spielberg for wanting to focus more on Albert’s change. I disagree because the book shows the transformation of Mr.____ to Albert in the form of conversations, actions, sewing, and spending time on the porch with Celie. In the book he also discovers the common bond that he and Celie share in their love for Shug. He understands her sexuality in the book, but none of these things come out in the movie. He begins as a powerful figure but ends as a transformed one.

The Missing Pieces: Alice Walker’s Script of The Color Purple

Alice Walker in her work, The Same River Twice, publishes the original script for the movie version of The Color Purple. Walker’s script includes many scenes on the porch, but these scenes are absent from the movie. Walker, through her conscious inclusion of the porch, recognizes its importance as a symbol in the African-American community. Also present in the script, but is absent in the movie, is the emphasis on sewing and the quilting. The script describes an incredible quilt done by Celie, one that chronicles her life and that is completely absent in the movie. The significant changes in the use of the porch involve Sofia, the relationship between Albert and Celie, and the issues of family and creativity.
Sofia, in the screenplay, inhabits the porch with Celie. When Harpo and Sofia first come to the house together, Celie is on the porch. Furthermore, the initial meeting of Harpo, Mr.__, and Sofia occurs on the porch. Although Mr. __'s attitude is domineering, Sofia defines herself in spite of his power. Because of her presence, Harpo appears to be the weak one, following behind Sofia. Celie, after Sofia leaves the porch, is truly amazed by Sofia. She feels a kinship to Sofia already because she wishes she could have talked to her about her sister:

Celie: (Sitting down herself. Deeply sad. To Harpo, but almost to herself.)
I never got a chance to talk to her. I would have told her I got a sister name Nettie. I got a sister, too.
Mr.__: You **had** a sister, you mean.
Celie: Nettie not dead.
Mr.__: Why she don't never write you, then? If “nothing but death could keep her from it”? (Same 71-72)

This dialogue takes place on the porch, but in the film the house, Mr.__'s place of power, is the site for the meeting of Harpo, Mr.__, and Sofia. Also, in the movie, the conversation that occurs after Sofia leaves does not take place at all.

Sofia and Harpo's marriage ceremony takes place on the porch of Jack and Odessa's house without the consent of Mr.__. This ceremony in the movie occurs in a church. The ceremony taking place on the porch is more consistent with Walker's attitude about the church and religion. Her ideals on religion have to do more with nature and the outside world and people's actual interaction with nature: "It is my habit as a born-again pagan to lie on
the earth in worship. In this I am like my pagan African and Native American ancestors, who were sustained by their conscious inseparability from Nature prior to being forced by missionaries to focus all their attention on a God 'up there' in 'heaven' "(Same 25). This ceremony is a space where love and ceremony are defined outside of what Walker would call the strict structure of church. Mr.'s absence demonstrates the porch working as a functioning mediating structure. Noteworthy in this respect is the narration of Celie's inner feelings:

Celie doesn't realize it yet but already she is infected with Sofia's womanish manner. It makes her feel proud of herself as a woman for the first time. Pride, envy, amazement mingle in her look. Sofia and Harpo's wedding is the first happy occasion in the film and the wedding is something of a rebellion against Mister, who is conspicuously absent. (Same 77)

Celie seems to be more overtly affected by Sofia in the script than in the movie.

We see this influence most strongly over the issues of abuse of women. Harpo's porch is the site of Mr.'s misogyny. Harpo goes to his father for advice on how to make Sofia mind. Harpo's father instructs him to beat Sofia. Because Harpo is not strong enough to command his own porch, he, like Celie, falls prey to Mr.'s dominance. Sofia, however, will not be dominated by her husband, and she confronts Celie on the porch:

Sofia: (Her arms laden with odds and ends of items Celie has given her. Which she dumps on the porch at Celie's feet.)
Celie: (Quilting at a quilting frame hanging from the rafters of the porch. Surprised. Scared. Noticing a bruise on Sofia's face.)
Sofia: Here your curtains. Here your smoothing iron. Here that
Celie from her confrontation with Sophia learns the importance of a supportive female community. She enters into this community of women. As a result, these women help her to deal with Mr. ___'s oppressive behavior, and to transform her into the woman she eventually becomes. Sofia through her acceptance of Celie's apology aids in Celie's growth. This all takes place on the porch in the screenplay, but what remains of the scene takes place in a cornfield in the film. Also noteworthy is Sofia's last response to Celie about taking action against Mr. ___. She is a rebel. Her womanist characteristics reminds one of the attitudes of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. The shared laughter brings both of this women back into a sense of community even stronger than the initial bond.
The quilt, “Walker’s favorite icon of folk expression” (Digby 160), becomes a symbol of community in the screenplay, linking Sofia’s strength to Celie’s. Albert finds the quilt in the house and gives it to Celie on her porch. At this time Celie has returned from Memphis and is now selling pants. The act of Albert returning the quilt and upon exiting the porch, leaving a white shell, demonstrates that he is growing. Shortly after that meeting, Albert is on Celie’s porch cutting out a shirt that he designs. The porch here is a site of healing for Albert and Celie, as well as a space for Albert to express himself creatively through his shirts. The row of shells on the railing represents a bond between the two of them for as the number of shells increases so does the bond between Celie and Albert.

The script shows the porch as a place of community, creativity, family and heal, involving Celie, Shug, and Albert. On the porch, “Celie, Albert, Shug sit in rocking chairs. Shug is fanning herself, every once in a while. Totally back, at home, and relaxed. Albert is sewing on his shirt and Celie is sewing on something entirely new—neither quilt nor pants—having reached, somehow, another level in her creativity” (Same 132). Celie can reach a new level of creativity through her relationship with Shug, her re-invented friendship with Albert, and her new love of herself.

Once Celie has her new sense of self and her sense of family intact, she is ready to receive Nettie back into her life. In the screenplay, from the porch Celie, Albert, and Shug see a car approaching the house. The porch is again
the site of reunion when Nettie and Celie are reunited. This reunion is emotional as these two sisters embrace and kiss with a sisterly passion.

Celie introduces both Shug and Albert as her "peoples" on the porch.

Without the healing process that takes place between Celie and Albert, this reunion would not be possible, for Albert would not be a part of this family.

The porch, as Walker sees it, is an important space for conversation and creativity, healing and reunion.

The quilt is an another essential part of the script, that is absent from the film. The script begins with a quilt, different from Celie's, that pictures a white house with a garden with beautiful flowers with the sun shining. (Same 60). After Celie is raped and bears two children for Alphonso, the narration in the script states:

Celie is again on her knees beside the bed in an attitude of prayer. But she is not "praying." She is sewing. We see parts of the dress she was wearing when raped now cut into precise shapes. We also see pieces of PA's checkered bib. We see a heavy black piece of cloth in the shape of PA's hat. There is a replica of her baby's brightly embroidered star, and likewise a flower like the one on her mother's tray. As she works, totally absorbed, cutting, placing, contemplating, sewing, we should have the feeling that in putting these poor scraps of her life together Celie is in fact praying—and telling her story to God. (Same 63)

Silenced and abused, Celie sews her story and talks to God. We could argue that the quilt is, in the screenplay, the material equivalent of the letter. The notion of the quilt occurs frequently in Walker's original version of the script.
This quilt and the focus of sewing are essential to the eventual formation of free self-expression seen both in Celie and Albert.

After Sofia and Harpo’s wedding, Celie, later that night, works on her quilt. She looks at Shug’s picture and then she as

spreads the pieces on the bed we begin to see that she is quilting the story of her life. Each square represents a scene from the past. She strokes Nettie’s “farewell purple sun” and looks out into space longingly. Then she begins her work.

Cutting and sewing and laying out. There is a sense of total absorption in what she is doing. And a sadness. And a peace.

As she works, she gradually sinks to her knees beside the bed—cutting shapes, pinning, sewing. (Same 77)

Quilting, at this time, only takes place when Celie is alone. She does not quilt with anyone. For example, after Shug leaves, Celie quilts pieces of Shug’s dress into the quilt after reading her Bible and while she is alone. At this time in her life, Celie probably feels as if she is unable to express herself to anyone; therefore, she creates a space in which she is able to function without opposition. She is able to negotiate her own feelings without the oppressive presence of Alphonso or Mr. ___. Noteworthy, is the fact that she first reads her Bible and then looks at a picture of Shug before beginning her work. Celie finds strength in God and in Shug. And through these avenues she is able to express her feelings through her quilt.

The quilt changes Albert as well. We see the quilt, this time, in greater detail through a drunken Albert who accidentally finds it.

Interestingly, he goes through the same rituals that Celie does before she
works on her quilt because the Bible is on the quilt and the picture of Shug is in the Bible. He then puts the picture of Shug aside and takes up, as if to fling it on the rubbish heap, Celie’s quilt, but it falls open and the first word he reads on it is “help.” There are only two other words written on it. “Dear God” appears in the very first square and there is a tiny black figure praying to a large white one with a halo around his head. Curious, he spreads the quilt out and begins to “read” the squares. There is the sickness and death of Celie’s mother; the rape of Celie by her stepfather; there is Celie holding her babies; Celie’s children being stolen from her. There is the beating of Celie by Albert. Celie carrying two buckets of water. Scrubbing. Celie and Nettie parting. Sofia and Harpo marrying. Fighting. Albert speaking abusively to Celie. The vicious face Celie has given him is a surprise to Albert, for whom her feelings have never been real, or mattered: His hair seems to be burning. Flames are coming out of his mouth. There is a square in which Celie is holding the photo of Shug Avery. There is a square in which Celie and Shug Avery kiss . . . It is a life that Albert has not expected, and the art that depicts it, in Celie’s humble quilt, acts on him forcefully. Stricken, he throws it on the rubbish pile after all. But as it falls, he notices it is unfinished. The blank ending intrigues him. He slumps to the floor beside the foot of the bed, sobering, contemplating it. (Same 114)

The quilt details the story that Celie is unable to articulate. She works through her painful life by “writing” it through art. Art, her quilting, is indeed a mediating structure, what is available to Celie as “woman’s work” and through which Celie is able to write her story. Celie’s story, however, cannot be complete until she feels that her life is complete. Completion for Celie includes her sister. However, Albert is complete by reading Celie’s quilt. He has come into the knowledge of Celie’s pain, making him recipient of her art.
The quilt fails to function for Celie after she receives a telegram that Nettie is dead. Without Nettie, there is no meaning to her life, so she cries in her sleep, wakes up and gets her quilt. She needs Nettie to be complete; when quilting does not relieve her grief, she throws the quilt out the window. Her life, sewn into the quilt, becomes that physical symbol of the end of her life. By the end of the script, however, Celie completes her quilt as Nettie “reads the squares. Gets to the last one, now completed. It is a large rising purple sun with yellow/orange rays, filling the square, filling Life. Coming up” (Same 136). The completion of the quilt completes Celie’s life. She has all the components, and all the healing is complete.

The script of the movie proves to be more a womanist document than the movie. Could it be possible that the male screenwriter’s version of the movie does not take into account the theoretical application of womanism that Walker has? The movie most certainly would have been very different had Walker’s version been produced. Would the movie have been appreciated for its womanist values and ideas? Would The Color Purple have been criticized as much? One thing is certain, the porch would have been central, in contrast to Spielberg’s version of the film.

Conclusions

The Color Purple “clearly develops Walker’s ‘womanist’ philosophy through the experiences and interactions among the black women in the novel, who, realizing their individual and collective strengths and
weaknesses, determine to love themselves and one another, "Regardless"
(Brown-Clark 303). In the novel, Walker connects each person's unique
identity with the community. Each needs the other. Without the support of
the community in this novel, the characters cannot heal. Through mediating
structures, such as music, womanism, quilting, and sewing, the characters
are able to develop fully and completely. The porch, another mediating
structure, provides a space where all of the characters can be actively
transformed. It is a site of sewing, represented by Celie's pants in the novel
and the quilt in the script. It is on the porch, a place of separation and
reunion, a stage for performance and a place for contemplation that people of
The Color Purple live and grow. The porch in the novel and in the script is
the site, finally of Albert and Celie's relationship. He changes from oppressor
to human being, and Celie changes from victim to woman. They develop
from black and white to lavender to purple, living and working with intensity
and power and love—and with each other. Walker uses womanism to define
the common ground that, finally, supports the characters. The space of
womanist transformation, action, and community, revelation, and reunion is,
finally, in the novel, film and film script, the porch.
Chapter 6: From the Porch to the Deck: The Disappearance of the Porch

The importance of the porch in the slave community and later in the African-American community is translated into African-American literature. In these particular communities, the porch, practically, serves as a place to escape the hot, humid house and, communally, serves as a gathering place and a place of story-telling. It is a private place, connected to the house, but a public one, open to the street. Porches "were extensions of the people who lived inside the house" (Barker 10), allowing controlled access to the street:

Sitters are continually attentive to the activities of children, passersby and even dogs. Front porches support mechanisms for social control and territorial gatekeeping, offering a place for observing the streets and side walks for aberrations from normal patterns and encouraging the idea of a neighborhood as mutually protected area. (Perry 14)

The porch was a significant place of playing, eating, freedom and negotiation. As we see in African-American literature, "If there was an argument it was usually settled on the porch" (10). The porch's variety of functions and its importance in the African-American community explain its essential function in African-American literature, and, as I have shown here, in African-American women's fiction.

As various characters in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Alice Walker's The Color Purple, and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God illustrate, the porch provides a platform--a site of performance and receptivity--where transformation occurs. The characters that I have
examined in this study are defined by the house and the street initially, but ultimately combine both of the structures, represented by various characters, in order to create their own senses of self or to allow the repressed qualities of self to surface and to be proclaimed. As a result, each character goes through a metamorphosis—a transformation of identity that gives her capacity for narration.

In *Beloved*, *The Color Purple*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* male characters represent the house, the patriarchal structure and its values. Women, like Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, also can internalize and represent these values. In *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the marriage relationship signifies the patriarchal house and its power. Celie breaks free from her stepfather and her husband in order to re-create herself through Shug, while Janie breaks away from Nanny, Logan, and Joe in order to narrate herself through Tea Cake and form her own identity. Celie is free from a man, while Janie clings to a man who in the end sets her free. *Beloved's* representation of the house is Sethe, who internalizes and must release herself from the plantation house, "Sweet Home." In trying to escape the house, she enacts its values, stifling the growth of Denver indirectly by her actions. This resembles Nanny's stifling of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. All the characters representing the house are equally damaging even though the damage manifests itself in a different physical, spiritual, and/or psychological fashion.
The street represented by various characters in each novel symbolizes a sense of freedom. The community in Beloved illustrates the sense of self that Denver must claim in order to transform into a new creation. The street in The Color Purple and Their Eyes Were Watching God is represented by one individual. However, the community in both of these novels is essential to the development of the characters. Both Hurston and Walker, whose writing was influenced by Hurston, suggest that transformation comes through association. A person enters the lives of the protagonists, and by association, change becomes inevitable. The street offers experience and variety, pulling these women away from the house so that they eventually can return to it with the power to deal with it on her own terms.

In each of the novels I have discussed, the community is an important element in the development. In Beloved the community uses the porch indirectly to monitor the actions of 124 and eventually to protect itself by exorcizing the ghost that threatens the stability of the community. The community in Their Eyes Were Watching God uses the porch to observe the street and Janie. They mark their territory, casting out those like Janie and Tea Cake who seem different. Finally, in The Color Purple the porch becomes the site where community is reconstituted and reconstructed.

The community in each novel I discuss functions in a variety of ways. In Beloved and Their Eyes Were Watching God, the community is an agent of judgment, more than an agent of transformation, but in The Color Purple the
community serves primarily as passage for transformation. First, in *Beloved*, the community forms its ideas of Sethe and causes 124 to be absent of guests for twelve years. However, the community, the Thirty Women, is the element that transforms 124 Bluestone back into a respectable home absent of the presence of a ghost. Second, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is ostracized from her community, and she continues to be an alien to her own community for the length of the novel. As a matter of fact, the only link that she has with the community is her friend Pheoby. Because she does not have the support of the community, Janie goes outside of it in order to find a place for herself. Finally, in *The Color Purple*, Celie finds peace within her community. Unlike Janie, Celie is not alienated from her community. Celie's community, Shug, Sofia, and Nettie, helps to guide her in the right direction. Her community allows her to grow. Each novel involves the community in a different way; however, each community is essential in the development of each of these female characters.

From the three novels I discuss, the themes of play and mobility emerge. Denver has to learn how to play before she realizes that she must accept the responsibility no longer to play and to become an adult first, to save her mother and, second, to be the women she is. Janie learns how to play through Tea Cake, and, as a result, she is able to discover freedom and learn to emulate it. Also, Celie must learn how to play through Shug and Sofia before she can heal completely and complete her transformation. In
terms of mobility, Denver must leave the porch, her familiar surroundings, in order to discover the world that will eventually exorcize Beloved, ridding the house of the destructive presence. Janie must also move away from Eatonville, Florida, in order to return and claim her space on the porch.

Finally, Celie leaves Mr. ___ so that she may experience the creation in order to learn how to mend the broken relationship between her and her husband. All of these characters need to know how to play and to have the experience of mobility in order to evaluate the critical situation that each is involved in so that each can understand that the situation is unhealthy and must be repaired. Mobility provides distance which offers perspective and opens possibility and offers a variety of choice. Mobility is generally a masculine value, the hero journey, but these Black women appropriate and transform it.

The porch is primarily the site of healing and transformation. In Beloved, Denver, who has no communication with anyone beside Sethe, needs, first, to realize that she needs healing before seeking counsel. She finds this valuable information through two spirits—through the appearance of her sister, Beloved, and through the presence of Baby Suggs. Both Celie and Janie realize that transformation is necessary. Although Janie appears to understand the need for growth more strongly than Celie, Celie too recognizes that she must gain strength to overcome the obstacles of the house. Celie, through Shug, learns how to begin her conversion, whereas Janie learns how to complete her transformation through Tea Cake. All the
characters representing the porch in each of these novels use both the house and the street to transform themselves into new creations, whose space is the porch, the site from which they proclaim their self-creation.

Although there has been criticism done on Their Eyes Were Watching God, Beloved, and The Color Purple, the critics tends to focus only on its literary issues, but my work involves material culture. My work serves as a bookmark for this passing structure, the porch, and the significance it once held in the community. Don Barker reminisces about the loss of the porch: “Porches back in those days had personality. They were extensions of the people who lived inside the house. It seemed to me that the house belonged to the porch rather than the porch belonging to the house” (10). Today the porch has been replaced by the privacy of the back yard, where the deck provides a sense of community within a family or a group of friends. Access to the deck is limited. The porch is not a free space; one must be invited onto the porch, but it is open to the world. The deck, in contrast, is private, closed off from the world and does not mediate between structures. “As we turn the streets over to our children and our automobiles, adult socializing turns to the rear” (19), writes Barrie Greenbie in Spaces: Dimensions of the Human Landscape:

the term backyard used to imply a utility area where tools were stored and clothes were dried and children went or were sent. Now the backyard is the first to acquire fences, trees, shrubbery. The porch has been traded for the “patio”. The sense of security, pleasure, and pride that human beings find in a piece of private landscape, away from the street, occurs on all levels of scale and
affluence, and one can safely conclude that it is found the world over in all climes and times. Where space is adequate, the public urban landscape is greatly enhanced if backyard gardens can flow around side yards and are partially visible from the street without being too accessible. (19)

Henry Glassie in *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, like Greenbie, attributes the porch's growing absence to a sign of the times:

> The porch of the nineteenth century . . . was a living space between the indoors and the outdoors, a room that stretched the length of the facade, providing a place to escape from the inferno inside, to rock and watch the action on the road. Toward the beginning of the twentieth century the porch became less and less a usual appendage and people had to swelter inside or move their chairs into a shady parch in the yard. (137)

This inward turn shows a breakdown of community, and suggests an inward turn in terms of understanding identity, expressed in identity politics, for example.

The authors I have chosen, writing in the face of this inward turn, call for a participatory sense of identity that enlarges community. The porch becomes, as the reader answers the writer's call, a space of performance for writer, text, and reader. It functions as a space of freedom and participation. As a cultural symbol, therefore, the porch reveals to the reader a past that informs a future.

Ultimately, each character representing the porch changes, just as the literal function of the porch has changed. Denver allows Sethe to love herself independently of Beloved. As Sethe learns to love, she is then able to be reunited with Paul D, and they ultimately and truly love one another,
symbolized in putting their stories side by side. Celie's family cannot return to her until she redefines herself. They re-enter her life when she claims her independence and redefines herself on her own terms. Janie through Joe, the house, and Tea Cake, the street, defines herself on the porch. The porch ultimately becomes a net that catches all the important experiences of her life and proves them useful to her finding a voice. As each character is transformed, balancing the house and street, she uses and claims the porch as a place of learning, self-declared independence, and love.
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Appendix: Porches

Figure 1 Front porch at paternal grandparent's house.
Figure 2 View of veranda at paternal grandparent's house.
Figure 3 Front porch at maternal grandparent's house.
Figure 4 View of side porch at maternal grandparent's house.
Figure 5 Negro houses at Cape Meserado, Grain Coast, Ca. 1700. Sketch by Mary Lee Eggart.

a. Main dwelling place, complete with a veranda.
b. The kitchen.
c. The storage place for millet, rice.
d. The men's place for talking and meetings.
e. The Court.
Figure 6 West African hut. Sketch by Mary Lee Eggart
Figure 7 Houses in Celebration, Florida.
Vita

LaJuan Evette Simpson graduated Magna Cum Laude from Fisk University with a bachelor of arts degree in English in May 1994. She was one of eight graduates included in the distinguished honor society of Phi Beta Kappa. In May of 1996, she received her master of arts degree in English at Louisiana State University. Upon the completion of her dissertation entitled, "The Women On/Of The Porch: Performative Space In African-American Literature," she plans to graduate with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Fall of 1999.

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Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: The Women on/of the Porch: Performative Space in African-American Women's Fiction

Approved:

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