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Richard Hardack

*Haverford College*, [rhardack@haverford.edu](mailto:rhardack@haverford.edu)

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## "A MUSIC SEEKING ITS WORDS" Double-Timing and Double- Consciousness in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

by Richard Hardack

" . . . the music the world makes has no words . . . "

--Jazz <sup>1</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois claimed that American blacks possess a double-consciousness, "two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body," with neither necessarily triumphant. <sup>2</sup> Representing an African, an American, a male and a female, this African-American **body** becomes the site of endless, dialectic hierarchy. Blackness is associated with violent dichotomy, with what Charles Johnson in *Middle Passage* refers to as the **transcendental** American split between spirit and matter, and between observer and observed. As the unreliable Captain Falcon articulates the stakes, the self always contains a double at war with itself:

For a self to act, it must have somethin' to act **on**. A non-self--some call this Nature--that resists, thwarts the will, and **veto**es the actor. . . . Well, suppose that nonself is another self? . . . . Conflict **is** what it means to be conscious. Dualism is a bloody structure of the mind. Subject and object, perceiver and perceived, self and other--these ancient twins are built into the mind . . . . They are signs of a transcendental fault, a deep crack in consciousness itself. Mind was **made** for murder. Slavery, if you think this through . . . is the social correlate of a deeper, ontic wound. <sup>3</sup>

Johnson's book makes these crucial connections between white representations of an allegedly transcendental nature and the dualistic consciousness of slavery. For Johnson, the white conception of a unified nature fails because American society has always been fragmented racially. Where *Middle Passage* ostensibly focuses on the American Renaissance, and its transcendental faults, to depict contemporary America, Morrison's latest novel more pervasively roots American modernism and post-modernism in the interplay of two American Renaissances. In *Jazz*, through an even more complexly unreliable narrator, Morrison reconfigures Johnson's transcendental American fault, this crack in language and space, as a projected attribute of a Modernist black consciousness. With some reservations, Johnson argues that the **[End Page 451]** African mind, before its exposure to the West, only experienced a "Unity of Being"--one suspiciously reminiscent of an imagined but never achieved transcendental American sublime--and no split between self and world. When rendered dual, i.e. American, this mind is remade for murder. By contrast, Morrison initially accepts and uses the attributed double-consciousness of Western blacks to launch a critique back at the West; once that end is achieved, she removes the onus of double-consciousness from her characters and leaves it to be divided between her narrator and readers.

For the characteristically transcendental American mind, double-consciousness always entails a metaphoric bondage to some overriding other--one's violent possession by an other self, a sentient Nature or City, or a phantom narrator. In *Symbolism in American Literature*, Charles Feidelson identifies these possessive Modernist traits as already emergent in American Renaissance literature; as he writes of the transcendental pantheist, "in order to become-god possessed, [they] deny a personal god. By the same token, in order to unite themselves with nature, they also deny personal identity."<sup>4</sup> American transcendentalists and pantheists imagine a self possessed by the transcendent force of nature, and thus a fragmented and often amputated or literally divided self whose body and will are almost entirely possessed by external agency. Transcendentalism and Modernism are then two stages of an exigent American double-consciousness, both of which generate a series of ungoverned bodies, of arms and hands with wills of their own. Double-consciousness becomes a form of endemically American self-alienation and self-expression. In Morrison's conception, blacks become nature-possessed, City possessed, narrator possessed, and music possessed, and seem to be denied personal identity and bodily integrity as a consequence.

In its broadest sense, double-consciousness demarcates the American psyche as a house divided. America is the nation that fragments itself from its mother country and thus becomes an orphan/amputee; it wages war upon its own house; and it is perpetually doubled and divided from itself. Black double-consciousness then updates, and for Morrison emerges coterminously with and is indissociable from, what Emerson and Melville perceived as a "truncated society" of the walking wounded; their 19th-century works are populated by amputees whose physical wounds reflect a fragmented American self well before any Modernists had disconnected pen from paper. Throughout Melville's fiction, for example, characters lose control of their bodies, whose borders they often can no longer determine. The fragmentation of the American Renaissance is re-staged in the period of American Modernism--not surprisingly when Melville is himself effectively resuscitated or reborn--and particularly during the Harlem Renaissance.

The implicit connection between transcendental/Modernist fragmentation, violence, and the site of the involuntary has been recently reinforced and rendered explicit in Morrison's *Jazz*. Morrison asserts that the violent fragmentation of the American character--in Melville's *Pierre*, who loses control of his body, and in *Billy Budd*, who kills without intention, in Norris' *McTeague* or De Lillo's *Axton* in *The Names*, or in any of a plethora of American characters who are defined by what is in some context an act of involuntary or unconscious violence--is foremost a projected attribute of American blackness. For many white writers, race is used to express a **[End Page 452]** universal American splitting; for many black writers, universal American fragmentation reflects their specific and representative role in American culture. For Faulkner and Morrison in particular, blackness finally becomes the heuristic emblem of a fragmented American modernity.

For many twentieth-century black writers, alienation from an allegedly universal model of self-representation provides a more immediate access to the depiction of dual identities. Throughout *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, for example, James Weldon Johnson, an emblematic black Modernist, marks modern black self-representation as split, as always containing an other. For Johnson's protagonist, the division between the races "gives to every coloured man, in proportion to his intellectuality, a sort of dual personality." Not just in passing for white, but in the very delineation of his blackness, Johnson's character winds up feeling "that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life."<sup>5</sup> Double-consciousness thus generates an unobserved observer, the ghostly narrator, the phantom other in black narration. This privileged spectator, the voice of double-consciousness, also stands behind Morrison's narrator in *Jazz*, who is omnipresent yet never tangible, who shapes the narrative yet must remain a passive and spectral observer of human affairs. (Though a version of this duality is present in the perpetual third-person representation of the self throughout American autobiography, from Benjamin Franklin to Henry Adams and Gertrude Stein, this more general form of narrative ventriloquism needs to be distinguished from double-consciousness itself; as Du Bois states, blacks experience a particular and always racially inflected "sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others.") Black American characters often see

themselves, and even their bodies, as others, internalizing their attributed roles as spectral observers of themselves. Faulkner's Joe Christmas and Wright's Bigger Thomas, for instance, incessantly watch themselves from afar, locating a self split into parts.

For many American writers, the involuntary also serves as the secondary reification of double-consciousness. Characters who are split into observed and observing selves, into racial halves, into parts of lost familial and cultural wholes, lose conscious control of their bodies. In seeing themselves from afar, they also lose the ability to identify absolutely with these bodies, which often become fragmented and amputated doubles, of themselves. As a result, they begin to observe themselves acting in an involuntary, and often expressly violent, manner. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas continually "[sees] himself as from a distance." <sup>6</sup> Christmas wanders through the text brandishing weapons he doesn't even realize he possesses; he is described as descending into an unconscious, or black, phantom state of mind whenever he commits acts of violence, a state from which he emerges with no clear memory of what he has done. Writers from Poe to Conrad to Faulkner project desire, the white unconscious, and in effect white violence, onto non-white characters, and American black writers at times perpetuate this association.

Throughout *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas acts, speaks, and even kills involuntarily, without conscious will: Bigger, for example, "struck Gus before he was conscious of doing so." <sup>7</sup> Repeatedly "possessed by a force which he hated, but which he had to obey," Bigger acts at each crucial moment of his life "as if the decision were being [End Page 453] handed down to him by some logic not his own, over which he had no control, but which he had to obey" (162, 215). Hearing "his words issue involuntarily from his lips, as of a force of their own," Bigger embodies a man divided from himself, whose consciousness, particularly his consciousness of violence, is dual (47). His "involuntary" words and his violence have an identity of their own, one which Bigger does not possess. Though his "reclaimed" murder of Mary becomes the defining, existential act of his life, Bigger tells Max, "I couldn't help it . . . It was like another man stepped inside of my skin and started acting for me" (326). Finally, Bigger's self-same desire to kill, to tell his story, and to confront himself, "sprang up of itself, organically, automatically" (255). <sup>8</sup> In *Jazz*, Morrison takes this uneasy conjunction of the natural and the mechanical, this highly specific double-hybrid of the organic and the automatic, and translates it into a narratized emblem of black consciousness. (And Morrison's narrator tries to exert a greater influence over her characters than even Wright, in his introduction, does over the reader's interpretation of Bigger Thomas; Morrison thus takes the black writer's attempt to dramatize yet also control the double-consciousness of his or her characters to its logical extreme). Joe Trace's trailing of his mother and Dorcas, and finally his "involuntary" murder of Dorcas, echo Bigger's violent sense of dislocation; Joe Trace is also clearly conceived in response to Joe Christmas's search for racial and familial identity. (Even Christmas's razor blades litter Morrison's text). Through most of her novel, Morrison's narrator claims that true desire is involuntary, a force existing outside of the way we define ourselves, a violent possession, double-consciousness itself: the desire for an other as the self. And at least at first, it is emphatically race which stands behind each version of Morrison's trace.

Jazz, this "race music," represents the reified and personified hunger of double-consciousness, of a self which can never be complete in itself. What Alice hates most about jazz is "Its longing for the bash, the slit; a kind of careless hunger . . ." (59). This "It" is reiterated throughout the text, providing the characters with the only seeming absolutes in their lives. Personified agency in *Jazz* resides not with characters but with Nature, the City, Music, or the Narrator, each of which feeds off the characters to achieve existence. The appetites of these impersonal yet personified forces, these Its, then determine our destinies. <sup>9</sup> (Like Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Morrison universalizes hunger while also keeping it specifically black; in so doing, she first reclaims American Literature as black, while situating blackness itself as quintessentially American; yet in *Jazz* Morrison ultimately makes a troubling bid, perhaps under the guise of some more all-embracing humanism, to "transcend" race entirely.)

In Morrison's world view, appetite feeds on itself, can never be sated, and is indissociable from duality; a double-chin becomes the emblem of double-consciousness. Just as hunger--also an endemic trope of black American characters, from Joe Christmas to Wright's Black Boy--is always impersonal in being involuntary, double-consciousness is also involuntary, impersonal and public:

That was what her hunger was like . . . floating like a public secret. . . . Alice Manfred had worked hard to privatize her niece, **[End Page 454]** but she was no match for a City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day. "Come," it said. "Come and do wrong." (67)

Alice is also no match for the narrator's gently dismissive tone. She cannot privatize what Dorcas thinks of as "that life-below-the-sash," for we can never directly represent ourselves via the involuntary, nor via desires which are focused outside the confines of our identities; a public secret is already a double of itself, its own negative (60). Dorcas loves secrets, and loves hiding things as much as Violet, for these very secrets must always be staged publicly for an other who will define the self (201). For Morrison's characters, the involuntary is what exists below the sash, beneath the belt, beyond the self, for it precisely cannot be privatized; it is impersonal and beyond individual control or understanding, and, like double-consciousness, cannot be narrated by us, but only by a narrator, an other. In effect, Morrison is making public what has been kept private in American literature. The narrator tells us at the end of the book that she envies Joe and Violet "their public love. I myself have only known it in secret" (229). The narrator's public love, her publication, is, as she admits in her lonely confession at the book's close, necessary for her survival. The narrator, the gossip, makes all messages about fragmentation, the involuntary, and duality public; few secrets stay private from the narrator, and no hungers.

At the center of Morrison's text, Joe Trace is the unknowing son, or at least the figurative heir, of a man already doubly color-coded as much as Gray, whose primary desire is to meet then kill the father whom he imagines as his missing limb: not surprisingly, then, "Mr. Trace looks at you. He has double eyes. Each one a different color" (206). Joe, the descendent of the male line of double-consciousness, is also controlled by "involuntary" desires which reemphasize his distance from himself: "I don't know to this day what made me speak to her on the way out the door . . . I couldn't talk to anybody but Dorcas and I told her things I hadn't told myself" (123). The self communicates with itself only through the medium of an other. As Joe himself repeatedly admits, "I couldn't tell myself because I didn't know all about it" (121). Morrison is telling us that you don't listen to a story to find out what's going to happen: you tell it to find out. Until relinquished by the narrator, all these characters wander in search of an other as audience and/or as recipient of violence, moving autonomically, in the same position vis-a-vis their lives as the reader. The narrator tries to appear as this double and take credit for this duality as well as this control, but ultimately, though perhaps untrustworthily, confesses that she doesn't control her characters.

After Faulkner has given double-consciousness to a notably violent white woman, Joanna Burden, in *Light In August*--who speaks "of herself and of [Joe] as of two other people"--Morrison applies this model to black women with the sense of restoring a lost heirloom. <sup>10</sup> Like Joe Christmas and Bigger Thomas, Violet in *Jazz* remains virtually unaware that she is armed: though Violet wields the blade, "the ushers saw the knife before she did" (90). Traditionally associated with typically violent male characters, in Morrison's hands double-consciousness becomes a facet of black women as well as men, and hence of a feminist Modernity. Where Faulkner at times **[End Page 455]** and Wright consistently portray women as passive objects, perhaps because of some imputed lack of access to the violence of double-consciousness, Morrison, especially in Violet/Violent, at first seems to accept the necessary conjunction of the two and delivers both to her female characters. Morrison also recalibrates the association of blackness both with embodiment--with sexuality and violence--and with disembodiment--with phantoms and shadows--by reminding us that gender often plays the same role as race. Women, like blacks, are emphatically embodied, made to emblemize the "primitive" and the carnal, yet simultaneously denied materiality, and made to emblemize the ethereal and the abstract. While projected as somatic others, black women are also treated as inherent specters

and spectators; they are the prototypical unobserved observers of much of American Literature.

Black women thus endure "the watched and guarded environment"--always under a narrator's or double's eye--of a typically unidentified or impersonal audience; they grow up

where unmarried and unmarriageable pregnancy was the end and close of livable life. . . . she wondered about the hysteria, the violence . . . of pregnancy without marriageability. . . . They spoke to her firmly but carefully about her body. . . . The moment she got breasts they were bound and resented, a resentment that increased to outright hatred of her pregnant possibilities and never stopped until she married . . . when suddenly it was the opposite. (76)

Because a woman can in effect be two different people, herself and her child, double-consciousness can also reflect an internalized alienation from her body; the perpetual inversion of expectations and identity; and a violent hysteria centered around her disruptive ability to create and identify with another human being. Though primarily a male trait in the literary tradition--often imagined as the male alienation from or loss of a woman--this self-alienation or doubling for Morrison becomes the defining mark of a particularly female black psyche, and this female black psyche the defining characteristic of American identity. As in *Light in August* and *Native Son*, the murder of a woman occupies the center of Morrison's novel; but in this case it is a black woman killed by, or who decides she will die at the hands of, a black man. (Unlike her literary antecedents, Dorcas also figuratively and literally keeps her head.) This obviously double-edged privileging or reinscription of the black female body, and of black female double-consciousness, then represents the central assertion of Morrison's text. Though later abstracted from her text's resolution, for Morrison race and gender must first be used to define a double-consciousness almost all American writers seem to want to possess as their birthright.

For many black women, the immediate effect of double-consciousness is then experienced in an alienation from their own bodies. Dorcas feels this music "while her aunt worried about how to keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both" (60). Alice thus breaks the self into disconnected parts, trying to keep Dorcas and that life below the belt from meeting; in and of themselves, the heart, head, and hips represent the socialized double-consciousness of black women: "There was a **[End Page 456]** night in her sixteenth year when Dorcas stood in her body," and from then on she is an adult, a duality (64). Recalling Charles Johnson's configuration of the West's Cartesian double-consciousness, Violet, in a manner parallel to Alice, splits her mind from her body: "All my troubles be over if I could get my body sick stead of my head" (84). This divided self quickly and inevitably loses control of its body, as Violet discovers when her body begins to hide and attack things of its own volition. When her fiancé leaves her, Neola similarly loses not just her love but her control over the arm and hand on which he placed the ring, an arm which then remains forever poised over her heart: "As though she held the broken pieces of her heart together in the crook of her frozen arm. No other part of her was touched by this paralysis" (62). These broken bodies are cast to extremes, becoming either wholly animated or wholly inanimated by an internalized double-consciousness.

Much like Neola, Violet loses the singular possession of her body, which becomes a force she must wrestle with: "instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street." When Violet "had stumbled into a crack or two"--which the narrator calls "cracks because cracks is what they were. Not openings or breaks, but fissures in the globe light of the day"--she also immediately "felt the anything-at-all begin in her mouth. Words connected only to themselves pierced an otherwise normal comment" (23). In other words, the physical fissure Violet experiences, her inability to identify with her body as her self, reflects a fragmentation of language and consciousness; the globe is split in half, and Violet falls into a transcendental crack in consciousness itself. From disconnected words soon come disjointed actions: "Less excusable than a wayward mouth is an independent hand that can find in a parrot's cage a knife lost for weeks" (24). (The loosed household parrot represents a wild yet autonomic and Citybound nature, a voice and language without intention or meaning, reiterating--mimicking, doubling, and of course parroting--to Violet the "I love you" which her



husband could no longer manage and neither Violet could bear to hear.) Trying to stave off this race music, Alice also encounters a Modernist crack in language, and in fact only cannot connect:

What she read seemed crazy, out of focus. Some great gap lunged between the print and the child. She glanced between them struggling for the connection, something to close the distance between the silent staring child and the slippery crazy words. (58)

The disconnection between print and child, parent and child, word and meaning, self and body, self and other, are all staged as in need of jazz, of these talking "drums which spanned the distance, gather[ed] them all up and connected them." <sup>11</sup> Though Alice still reaches for this "gathering rope" with one hand, and balls the other into a fist--"I don't know how she did it--balance herself with two different hand gestures"--the music transcends the artificial separation between the two hands. It is only the music--half Nature, half City--which ultimately transcends double-consciousness and restores nature to itself, when, as Morrison tells us with a tip to Charlie, "the winds blew and so did the musicians. . . . From then on the bird was a Pleasure to itself and to them" (224). **[End Page 457]**

In attempting to disfigure Dorcas' corpse, Violet tries to kill what's already dead and without a will because Violet has lost control of herself; Alice knows that behind the act of this woman called Violent lay "A terrible and nasty closeness. . . . And of course race music to urge them on" (79). Consistently described as a compelled and possessed figure, "Violet walked past her, drawn like a magnet" to Dorcas' picture; she is possessed by music, by the dead, by some other. Violet's conversation with Alice, like Joe's with himself, takes place as if under the observation of some third person, an overriding but unidentifiable presence and power, in fact the narrator:

"I'm not the one you need to be scared of."  
"No? Who is?"  
"I don't know. That's what hurts my head." . . .  
"Why did he do such a thing?"  
"Why did she?"  
"Why did you?"  
"I don't know." (80-81)

The narrator alleges that most of her characters don't know what they are doing, let alone why they are doing it. (No one save the narrator acknowledges being in-charge; as Violet laments, "Where the grown people? Is it us?" [110].) When we discover that Alice also has a figurative skeleton in her closet, that her life has in many ways paralleled Violet's, we are told that "Violet listened as closely to what she was saying as did the woman sitting by her," split into observer and observed, into double-consciousness. <sup>12</sup> Both women are waiting to find out what they will say and do.

In Morrison's fable of double identity, we even wind up with an "other Violet": Violet wonders

who on earth that other Violet was that walked about the City in her skin; peeped out through her eyes and saw other things. . . . **that** Violet slammed past a whitewoman. . . . She has been looking for that knife for a month. Couldn't for the life of her think what she'd done with it. But **that** Violet knew and went right to it. (89)

This other Violet--the emphatic Violent of double-consciousness, the murder lurking in duality--is also in effect another narrator of Violet's life. When Violet goes to Dorcas' funeral, she is as much a spectator to the scene as anyone else, as "surprised to see now [her knife] aimed at the girl's haughty secret face" (91). Her violence represents a public attempt to break through what remains of the secret, the private and the voluntary, though even this desire turns out to be largely a function of the involuntary. Like Joe, Violet through most of the text speaks less than she is spoken through:

I got quiet because the things I couldn't say were coming out of my mouth anyhow. I

got quiet because I didn't know what my **[End Page 458]** hands might get up to. . .  
. The business going on inside me I thought was none of my business and none of  
Joe's either,

even if the narrator insists on making their business public (97). We don't speak the truth, language, or what we can't or won't express: these things speak us. Much of what goes on inside is split from us, none of our business. After losing her mother to the fires of the race riots, Dorcas too has her voice cut out for her:

One of [these exploding wood chips] must have entered her stretched dumb mouth and traveled down her throat. . . . At first she thought if she spoke of it, it would leave her, or she would lose it through her mouth. (61)

Words and sounds emanate from us, keep coming out of our mouths, without our pure volition, for we never achieve anything like pure volition; we always share our wills with racial, ancestral, gendered, unconscious or observing others. These other voices are always traveling down our throats and emerging in inhuman sounds. "A fifty year-old woman in a fur-collared coat" becomes wild, even if she can't immerse herself in the role consciously: "the sound that came from her mouth belonged to something wearing a pelt instead of a coat" (92). As Ishmael Reed would claim, Nature speaks through us, uses us as Pan's pipe, a means for its expression, not ours; Morrison makes us ask, however, if this distinction, this doubling, between its and ours any longer makes sense.

When Violet realizes that she and Joe were substitutes for one another's real loves--who, in keeping with Morrison's other texts, are incontrovertibly their parents and children--she discovers that all identity is defined by some form of insupportable duality (97). Once Alice reminds her that sexual rivals are only (in)versions of yourself--"Somebody wanting arms just like you do"--the division which reinforces our identity collapses. Each hand, each arm, turns out to be dependent on another. Supposing in Charles Johnson's terms that the nonself is another self, the other winds up as only a version of the self; in fact, the other frequently appears to be the self displaced in time, a younger or older version of one's public hunger. Just as Neola's arm is both self and other to her body, the other is also the self, and so consciousness is always double. Violet and Alice both laugh after this moment of recognition, for the other becomes understandable, a mirror, no better or worse than its reflection, only somebody who might stand on an equivalent piece of ground. Violet imagines another self in the daughter she never had, conjures another phantom child even as she endures a "crooked kind of mourning for a rival young enough to be her daughter" (111). Just as Joe is mesmerized by the signs of his mother's wild tracks, Violet, perhaps the other Violet, "did the dance steps the dead girl used to do," and in dancing becomes a possessed double of the dead, and of her own imagined offspring (5).

This other self, however, needs either to be killed or made kin in order for the self to become whole. Felice understands "about having another you inside that isn't anything like you . . . Nothing like me. I saw myself as somebody I'd seen in a picture **[End Page 459]** show or a magazine" (208-29). This familiar enough Modernist trope of self-alienation, of seeing oneself through the images of an ill-fitting popular culture, in *Jazz* is used to achieve a more dynamic critique of the American desire for a stable and self-contained male identity. Throughout *Jazz*, no character, male or female, can or would want to be self-reliant and self-created; for most of the text, they are not even allowed to be self-identifying. In order to escape this second condition, Violet "killed [this other]. Then I killed the me that killed her."

This process of constant and inherently violent self-revision finally keeps the Modernist narrator unable to pin us down, makes her have to improvise simply to keep track of us. If Modernism begins in part as a protest against mechanization, its aesthetic of fragmentation often recapitulates rather than subverts this mechanization; Morrison, however, uses fragmentation to resituate the improvisational against the inevitable. She recontextualizes the use of violence to oppose violence, fragmentation to transcend fragmentation, and double-consciousness to undo double-consciousness.



For Morrison, the Harlem Renaissance occupies the crucial juncture where the transcendental Nature of the American Renaissance is transformed into a transcendental City. Just as a sentient Nature possessed men during the American Renaissance, a sentient City/music/text possesses them to similar ends in Morrison's text. The mass exodus of blacks from the rural South to the urban North matches, and for Morrison perhaps even precipitates, the resonant replacement of transcendental, and perhaps unduly white-washed, Nature with a black City. As Morrison argues throughout *Playing In the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, an Africanist presence often stands behind major assumptions and shifts in American literary ideology. <sup>13</sup> Morrison's "Modernist" repersonification of Nature in the guise of the City stakes her claim that Americans always project the greater part of themselves onto some deified and personified other; just as violence is projected onto a phantom blackness, consciousness itself is projected onto a sentient Nature or City. This Nature or City acts as the repository of the excess of individual will, the site where all the fragmentary bits of doubled-selves wind up. Whatever parts of our bodies are lost or that we cannot control are gathered up and manipulated by this transcendental Nature or City.

If you can manage the risks of love, "Nature freaks for you, then," while "the City in its own way, gets down for you, cooperates . . . send[s] secret messages disguised as public signs. . . . Covering your moans with its own" (62-63). The City becomes a transcendent duplicity, staging the private as the public, and usurping all individual voices--like Violet's and Dorcas'--with its own transcendent voice. Morrison's narrator always personifies Nature and the City for she herself represents a personified Modernist idea. But the City music of jazz, half organic and half mechanical, soon controls even nature: "Up there, in that part of the City, the right tune . . . lifting up from the circles and grooves of a record can change the weather" (51). The City tracks our movements, for it is a City transformed from Nature, one which has taken over nature's function of possessing men. Morrison's image for modernity is the Victrola in the garden. I argue elsewhere that Morrison, in Reed's wake, would insist that the transcendental nature of the American Renaissance in fact owes much to a suppressed **[End Page 460]** and thoroughly appropriated black nature. When black people literally and figuratively move from nature to City, they then resituate the entire underpinning of American culture: "Like the others, they were country people, but how soon country people forget. When they fall in love with a city, it is forever, and it is like forever" (33). Morrison then transfers many of the unpredictable and possessive aspects of transcendental American nature to, or back to, black culture, particularly in the guise of urban black music.

Like its musical namesake, *Jazz* embodies an aesthetic exploration of improvisation and control; it dramatizes the self-alienation and double-consciousness which result from trying to control a music which has to control you. Throughout *Jazz*, people do not play music, they are played by it. "They believe they know before the music does what their hands, their feet are to do, but that illusion is the music's secret drive," like the narrator's: "the control it tricks them into believing is theirs" (65). Like Joe Christmas and Bigger Thomas, Morrison's characters do not know what they are doing until they have done it, do not know the dance until the music has stopped playing, perhaps do not recognize their bodies until after they have had hands laid violently upon them. "The music the world makes, familiar to fishermen and shepherds"--Pan's flock in effect, those who merge with a transcendental nature--"woodsmen have also heard. It hypnotizes mammals" (176). This music is the It, and we are the mammals. If the world is alive and makes music, streams and Cities can equally talk to us, equally express themselves through us. Here, Joe's trace isn't like Joe Christmas tracking his linear and ultimately self-directed path toward crucifixion; it's a groove: the narrator asks us to

Take my word for it, he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That's the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants. . . . All the while letting you think you're free. (120)

Again the It is upon us, pulling and spinning us; not our hunger, but its, drives us. Morrison

pursues these metaphorical descriptions with literal fervor. (As I will argue, however, the narrator crucially reverses all such sentiments about control at the close of her book). Morrison personifies all aspects of the City as easily as nature: "The train stops suddenly, throwing passengers forward. As though it just remembered that this was the stop where Joe needs to get off if he is going to find her" (181). The Track of this train, this It, equally natural and urban/mechanical, runs throughout the text; and Dorcas' hoofmarks and his mother's traces direct Joe's actions through much of his life. As frequently happens, the language of the narrator and the character bleed together: Joe remarks,

In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to find the trail and stick to it . . .  
Something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you, gives out its signs so  
strong you hardly have to look . . . if the trail speaks, you can find yourself in a  
crowded room [End Page 461] aiming a bullet at her heart. . . . I wasn't looking for  
the trail. It was looking for me. . . . (130)

Violence comes looking for us, and a series of impossibly personified and conscious inanimate agencies preside over human will through most of Morrison's text; the trail which comes looking for us--sending messages through the City, voices along the track--always denotes the presence of double-consciousness. As in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*--which sets up a similar correlation between genealogy, projected mothers and daughters, impersonal hunger, controlling ancestral spirits, and the backdrop of a dispossessed culture--in *Jazz* the track takes us over, becomes more articulate than even its narrator. It perpetually leads and lures us.

Yet such a ravenous It also locates a fissure within the structures of power itself. Inverting Richard Slotkin's model of a white culture defining itself via the violence it perpetrates on the cultures it displaces, Erdrich's and Morrison's dispossessed cultures resist co-option by regenerating **themselves** through violence. The involuntary, the fragmentary, and the **possessive** forces of double-consciousness mark not only racial division, but an uncontainable resistance. The almost redemptive and surprisingly venial nature of this violence, and its inextricability from seduction, hunger, and even music, makes *Jazz* a disturbing text. Alice Manfred "swore she heard a complicated anger in [the music]; something hostile that disguised itself as flourish and roaring seduction. But the part she hated most was its appetite" (59). This music hungers for us, needs us to give it voice, but its hunger/anger also vitalizes us, even if we don't want it to. Alice frantically decides it is "better to close the windows . . . than to risk a broken window or a yelping that might not know when to stop" (59). But exactly like the narrator, this music is not stopped by the ordinary barriers of windows and doors; like our hands, it has a will of its own: "A melody line she doesn't remember from where sings itself loud and unsolicited in her head" (60). Music appears without warning exactly like an unforeseen weapon in our hands. This Dionysian "music that intoxicates them more than the champagne" represents the force of Nature's/the City's possession, a surplus value of individual will stored in the repository of double-consciousness (227). Throughout *Jazz*, characters become entirely lost in the grip of the narrator's music: as an incredulous witness asks, "You left a whole baby with a stranger to go get a record?" (20). This music locates the site of the involuntary in the text, of bodies which do not obey their owners, and particularly of once whole children abandoned--fragmented and amputated from their parents--by a wild nature which is not simply stronger than individual will, but which nullifies the very concept of a self-contained individual will. Only some version of the character Wild's music can call us away from and finally restore us to those we are bound to by lineage and love. In addition to making double-consciousness feminine, and nature black, with Wild Morrison becomes the American writer who finally genders Pan as female.

Morrison spends most of *Jazz* accepting and furthering a projection of double-consciousness, fragmentation, and psychic and somatic polarity onto blackness; but she uses it first to recalibrate these associations, and then at the end of her novel takes a dramatic and decisive turn away from this projection. For most of *Jazz*, the split of [End Page 462] double-consciousness has been internalized, and though cast historically as a product of race, it is also finally universalized; this move allows Morrison to discard the configuration she has just

corrected. As the narrator notes of Golden Gray's "phantom limb," "How could I have . . . not noticed the hurt that was not linked to the color of his skin, or the blood that beat beneath it" (160). This moment marks the first of the many turns away from double-consciousness as racial consciousness Morrison makes through her narrator in the last sections of *Jazz*.

Double-consciousness reaches its apotheosis and its final dissolution in the mind of Morrison's narrator, who is always observer to the observed, split from the very characters whose violence guarantees her very existence. Translator for the book of Nature/the City, the narrator is also the supreme voyeur of the landscape, following all the characters, "to gossip about and fill in their lives" (220). Especially in the early sections of the book, each character derives his or her voice from this narcissistically echoing narrator. For instance, the narrator says, in her voice as the composing writer, "I imagine [Joe] as one of those men who stop somewhere around sixteen inside. . . . he's a kid" (121). Felice, shortly after, expresses this same sentiment: "he's like a kid when he laughs" (207). This narrative bleeding, in this case quite literal, stands behind the text's configuration of duality, its insistence that we are possessed by books. This intrusion, while perhaps merely mischievous in the guise of an ontological rubber-necker like Malvonne, becomes a categorical imperative in the narrator. Far more than any unfaithful lover, the narrator has double-timed the reader, upped the ante and the tempo, for she, more than any other force in *Jazz*, takes the words out of our mouths, pretending thereby to narrate our lives. She stands as a kind of clearinghouse for voices, the inherited but impersonal traits which are passed down from character to character, and so in a sense made definitive and personal. This sympathetic, yet violent and voyeuristic narrator--who "got so aroused while meddling, while finger-shaping, [she] overreached and missed the obvious"--is actually the hungriest (phantom) body in the text (220). She is finally the vampyric figure of the novel, and so the violence of double consciousness ultimately settles on her, not the (other) black characters: "What would I be without a few brilliant spots of blood to ponder. . . . I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it" (219-20). This narrator, though ultimately a fragment of their imaginations, waits to pounce on the "involuntary" violence of her characters, her figurative progeny. One chapter ends with the virtually adopted Felice commenting that when she ate Mrs. Trace's meal, "It eased the pain"; and the next chapter begins with the narrator again eating Felice's words, remarking: "Pain. I seem to have an affection for it" (216, 219). This narrator then is not just the book, as John Leonard notes in his review of *Jazz*, but the sweet and sharp tooth of double-consciousness itself; she hungers for and feeds off what she projects and constructs as the split-consciousness of her characters, waits for them to feel pain so she can appropriate it. It is finally the narrator who must acknowledge her own duality, her own unreliability, her own divisive conjunction of "pain" with "affection," and the very absence of her own two hands. <sup>14</sup> This narrator then represents a parasitic nature, Violet made violent, impersonal forces given personality and will; in the narrator, desire itself suddenly has desire, particularly the desire to narrate--in this context, to create--the duality of others. **[End Page 463]** Intermediary of nature, the narrator starts out as an integrated and detached mind which chronicles the duality of others, but she winds up as an implicated narrator who tries to cause duality in others and winds up having to admit it in herself. *Jazz* opens with an inscription from "Thunder, Perfect Mind," from *The Nag Hammadi*: "I am the name of the sound / and the sound of the name." Such a presence presumably incorporates both halves of this Manichean duality, becoming a whole which fragments others: "Bolts of Lightning, little rivulets of thunder. And I the eye of the storm. . . . I break lives to prove I can mend them back again" (219). But in fact duality turns out to be precisely reflexive, and the narrator, this reflexive Eye/I, winds up with a dual, watched, phantom self and a displaced voice: "It was loving the City that distracted me and gave me ideas. Made me think I could speak its loud voice and make that sound human. I missed the people altogether. . . . and all the while they were watching me" (220). Here the narrator then makes clear that she in fact is not the City itself, only an interpreter, arranger, and conductor, and cannot integrate everything to her text/self. She falls in love with abstracted desire itself, with the City, and so misses the true agents of that desire altogether. In giving the music of the world words, however, the goddess of the text becomes almost human, starting to share needs she once only observed in her characters. Morrison then entirely revises her trajectory at the end of her book; neither a transcendent Nature, transcendent City, nor transcendent narrator controls her characters. Like Emerson and a horde of 19-century American

transcendentalists and pantheists, Morrison's narrator initially conceives of man as the eyes and ears of a sentient universe, a means for the world to achieve self-awareness; but she has second thoughts about this kind of consciousness, which would always be double:

I started out believing that life was made just so the world would have some way to think about itself. . . . Something is missing there. Something rogue. Something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out. (228)

Exactly like the elliptical suggestion at the end of *Beloved* that this is not a story to pass on, this closing passage resists any literal interpretation. Whatever is missing--the missing child, limb, or phantom other--must be replaced before double-consciousness can be figured out.

In *Jazz*, Morrison has used a quintessentially transcendental voice to renounce a kind of American transcendentalism. Despite the narrator's stream of words, she projects the voice of the world--a music without words, and so perhaps without duality, without the gap between expression and meaning--to question the very existence and identity of such music. The adopted family which convenes at the close of the book--when Joe and Violet and Felice find one another, and Joe and Violet even find their missing parents in one another--becomes a whole, while the narrator recedes into a duality with the reader, whom she must finally acknowledge hands on (224-25). In the book's parallel narrative, characters come together as the narrator of their double-consciousness comes undone. Violet isn't crazy or schizophrenic even when she's watching herself; she exemplifies what Carolyn Porter in *Seeing and Being* [End Page 464] calls the participant observer of American literature, but she also reclaims herself in thunder: "NO! **that** Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no **that** Violet is me!" (96-97). <sup>15</sup> Such moments ultimately force the narrator to recant her split-level constructions. Morrison reties the complicated knot she has woven through most of her text, letting her characters slip by, but splitting her narrator. As the book progresses, the narrator must increasingly acknowledge her unreliability, the duality and duplicity of her own vision:

How could I have imagined him so poorly? . . . I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) how unreliable I am. . . . Now I have to think this through, carefully, even though I may be doomed to another misunderstanding. I have to do it and not break down. . . . I have to be a shadow who wishes him well,

a figure who can "contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it," rather than feed upon it (160-61). But of course the shadow narrator does precisely break in two. Her repeated admission that she "missed the people altogether" renders the characters free and the narrator bound to double-consciousness, even as she tries to allow the reader the freedom to remake her and herself the freedom to be remade (220, 229). The narrator just "do[esn't] believe that anymore," doesn't believe the story she has told, the structures she has imposed on her vicarious selves, who turn out to be less controlled and doubled than she is (228). Morrison's violence is finally projected and siphoned not onto the other, the double, of black consciousness, but onto the other of the narrator, of the text itself. (Reed's Jes Grew text, the book which is its own central character, thus gets its own back, double.)

In the end, Morrison tries to exempt blackness from the fragmentation of Modernity, the very fragmentation the narrator had been using as an emblem of blackness. What the specific political, ethical, or epistemological implications of such a complex, abstract narrative turn could be seem to me as ineffable but as tangible as the presence of the narrator herself. I would argue that Morrison feels it is necessary to restage double-consciousness before rejecting it the way it might be necessary to use violence to reach a political state where violence is rendered obsolete.

**"I had the gun, but it was not the gun--it was my hand I wanted to touch you with." (131)**

Morrison's text thus becomes a kind of abstract manifesto on how to re-arm ourselves. Golden Gray once "thought everybody was one-armed like me," that everybody is an orphan, missing a part of himself, a relative. Golden Gray's phantom, in part like Joe Christmas, is not just race but the missing part of him, the father "severed" from his life, this "part of me that does not know me" (158). Uncannily, this is exactly the way Emerson, in "Experience," imagines the death of his son Waldo, as **[End Page 465]** the amputation of a limb. Morrison again recasts or reclaims this quintessentially American self-representation as fundamentally black. All orphans are kinds of amputees, cut off from parents, and blacks, dispossessed of an integrated identity and often of family by slavery and its after-effects, are imagined as prototypical orphans. Whether race ultimately reflects the split created by the loss of a parent, or the loss of a parent reflects the split created by American race relations, each of Morrison's characters bears the narrator's "designation of the division" (Epigraph to *Jazz*). As a result, the site of the involuntary is usually not far removed from the site of fragmentation or amputation. For Morrison, though all three are indissociably connected, race is less a primary division, and even sexuality less a primary wound--despite an internalized male conception of wounds as markers of female sexuality, evident in phrases which describe jazz as hungering for "the bash, the slit"--than the "doublings" of procreation. (In this text, Morrison moves away from John Irwin's and her own prior sense of doubling as incest, and seems to suggest that any form of parenting produces some kind of violence.) <sup>16</sup> Double-consciousness locates a self fundamentally fragmented from itself: the seemingly orphaned Golden Gray

will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of disfigurement.  
Perhaps then the arm will take its own shape . . . and its blood will pump from the  
loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade.

This "singing pain . . . wakes him with the sound of itself" (158-59). Throughout *Jazz*, the parts of us we do not know, the music that perpetually comes to us unbidden, that was written for us before we were born, remains the music the world makes through our bodies. This music finds its purpose in our pain, in our fragmentation, but it also heals these wounds. Like violence, music expresses itself through us without our volition; but unlike violence, it also acts as a rope, a bridge, a re-cording. Where Morrison ultimately rejects the music that nature makes, the music the City makes, and even the music of her narrator, she reinscribes the music itself, the one thing rendered inviolate in the whole book.

Our hope of transcendence in *Jazz* lies in the inversion of dual structures and the return of bodily coherence, the ascent from the involuntary; when the narrator "invented stories about [us] . . . [she] was completely in [our] hands" (220). The control of hands, whether Pierre's, Sherwood Anderson's, Violet's, Neola's, Shadrack's in *Sula*, or even Bertrand Russell's, marks the wholeness of self-identification; the exchange of arms at the close of the novel alters the nature of Morrison's violence as well as her ideological stance. This restoration provides a surprisingly traditional and conservative resolution for so revisionist a text, but Morrison has often returned to essentially humanistic verities at the close of her polemical novels. When the narrator gives us back our freedom, it is a gift we have always already taken in reading: "You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look where your hands are. Now" (229). Holding this talking book, these arms again come under our control, and as the narrator alerts us at the text's beginning, "what turned out different was who shot whom" (6). Morrison's work then represents not just Jes Grew seeking its text, but the **[End Page 466]** text seeking its characters; as such, *Jazz* stages the final reclamation of an integrated identity, one which recognizes, but is not entirely controlled by, reified forces outside the self. In 19th-century American fiction the control of hands could mark the absolute control of the author; and when Pierre, Melville's emblematic writer, loses control of his hands, he can no longer write. In *Jazz*, the control of hands instead ultimately represents the indefinite control of the reader, and the narrator's final gesture a passing of the baton.

*Jazz's* penultimate show of hands also marks a crucial turning point. Throughout the text, Joe



has "begged, pleaded for [his mother's] hand" as a sign of his birthright: "Her hand, her fingers, poking through the blossoms, touching his; maybe letting him touch hers" (36-37, 178). Joe's version of a missing limb--inherited from his father's missing father as well his own untraceable mother--leaves him holding a gun which was also not the gun, longing only to hold out his hand. Though Joe finds his missing part in Violet, it is the narrator who clasps his mother's hand. The unobserved observer finally realizes that she was being watched all the time, and that even Wild, "Unseen because she knows better than to be seen," has in fact seen her, accepted her, and transformed her: Wild "has given me her hand. I am touched by her. Released in secret" (221). The narrator's reconciliation with her double in the unobserved Wild represents her own redemption; hands touched, particularly hands once disembodied and doubled, are hands made whole. Through this process of narrative self-revision, the killing of old dual selves, we wind up no longer projecting our evil onto the other. We are no longer imitating a white race which projects its unconscious, or its evil, onto the black race, onto a god, a narrator, or some form of possession whereby the self is always absent at the moment of violence, always to return covered in blood and staring at its innocent hands. We no longer say, "I don't have no evil of my own," thereby letting the parasitic narrator take control of our actions (80). Violet and Joe accept what they have done and each other, and by accepting the past in some sense undo it.

The narrator first presumes "that the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack"--the crack in the record the music Violet and Joe both fall into--

and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. I was so sure and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable--human I guess you'd say, while I was the predictable one. (219-20)

No power on earth could lift Neola's arm but love, nothing could replace Golden Gray's missing arm but his father, and no power on earth could resist the narrator, at least until the narrator realizes that all along she was the one who has been in a groove which turns out to have been predictable. Even music remains predictable until it becomes improvisational, until it becomes jazz. Morrison reverses the polarity of human predictability, of the involuntary, in a manner not convincing, since the weight of the book is devoted to staging its inevitability; but Morrison allows herself along with her narrator to be changeable, complicated, and unpredictable. **[End Page 467]**

Jazz finally represents the strange almost oxymoronic merger of nature and machine, of wild and autonomic: "Some of them know it. The lucky ones. Everywhere they go they are like a magician-made clock with hands the same size so you can't figure out what time it is, but you can hear the ticking, tap, snap" (227). The machine then becomes magical, its all-important hands no longer dual but identical. These hands, these tone-arms, these rhythmically mechanical limbs, are as immovable as Neola's until they pass over a surface whose grooves as well as cracks turn out to be more unpredictable than we anticipated. A record player is a mechanical, automatic machine for unleashing sounds which could be entirely without precedent. Through such music we also become armed, and, as Morrison describes black women, dangerous (77). To turn the tables on this abused record, to escape double-timing and the spectral pull of the past, we have to use our magic, unpredictable hands as musical instruments. Like Prospero--or a Prospero who has overcome the dualism of his perception--Morrison's narrator waits for our hands to set her free.

[Richard Hardack](#) is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Haverford College. His articles have appeared in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, *The Arizona Quarterly*, and *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*. He is completing a book on pantheism in American literature for Cambridge University Press.

## Notes

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Vol. 19, No. 2, 151-71. I would like to express my gratitude to *BWR* and its editor, James Martin, for permission to reprint parts of that article. I would also like to thank Carolyn Porter and Dori Hale for their assistance.

1. Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 177. All further references to this text are noted parenthetically.

2. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet, 1969), 45.

3. Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage* (New York: Plume, 1990), 98. Of course, one should also keep in mind Ishmael Reed's adumbration of such a "metaphysics" of slavery in his "narrative" of the American Renaissance, *Flight to Canada*: "She said that slavery was a state of mind, metaphysical. He told her to shut the fuck up." See Reed (New York, Avon, 1976), 106.

While I can't fully address Johnson's text here, it is important to note that the African trickster god in *Middle Passage*, "Loki and Brer Rabbit together," also bears a startling affinity with a transcendental version of Pan, and is in essence a partly Western god; as "the heat in the fire. The Wetness in water," the shape-shifting Allmuseri god "is the universe" (100-02). As such, it represents the vital and all-encompassing agency of a transcendental American pantheism, which imagines an immanent deified nature as the defining substance in all objects. Johnson's black god is supposed entirely to transcend Falcon's dualistic opposition--"a separation between knower and known never rises in its experience"--with a unity in variety represented, for example, in the book's opening inscription from the *Brihad-aranyake Upanishad*. (This inscription figuratively parallels Morrison's opening inscription from the *Nag Hammadi* in *Jazz*.) But unity in variety was always Emerson's catch-phrase as well. Much like Melville's *Mardi*, Johnson's *Middle Passage* presents a complicated and untidy transcendental American allegory which scrambles clear distinctions between Western and non-Western epistemologies, fusing anachronistic and cross-cultural assumptions in order to present a catechismic dialogue about these ideas rather than a primarily historical account of their derivations. Still, for Johnson it is specifically slavery which causes blacks to lose their sense of non-Western unity and to fall into "the world of multiplicity, of **me** versus **thee**" (140). Ultimately, Calhoun finds nothing he

could rightly call Rutherford Calhoun, only pieces and fragments of all the people who had touched me, all the places I had seen, . . . The "I" that I was, was a mosaic of many countries, a patchwork of others . . . as though I was a conduit or window through which my pillage and booty of "experience" passed. (162-63)

Like Joe Christmas, Bigger Thomas, and many of Morrison's characters in *Jazz*, Calhoun is only a conduit, a channel for others to speak through; he is possessed by others, but not by a self. Again, in a surprisingly, and rather irritatingly conventional, resolution to a subversive narrative, Calhoun seems to become whole only when he effectively agrees to marry, even if he persists in imagining his putative fiancé as desexualized and almost literally as his sister.

4. Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism in American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 33.

5. James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 21, 210.

6. See William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage, 1932), 246.

7. See Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 40. All further references to this text are noted parenthetically.

8. Morrison's conjunction of the "organic and automatic" or involuntary can also be found in much of Melville's work. In *White Jacket*, for example, Cuticle presides over one of his many amputations, "divested of nearly all organic appurtenances":

As if an organic and involuntary apprehension of death had seized upon the wounded leg, its nervous motions were so violent that one of the mess-mates was obliged to keep his hand upon it.

Individual will in American literature is not contained by the body; conversely, our bodies do not obey our wills. The American mind is divided from itself and its body. For Morrison, the involuntary movement of bodies, which white transcendentalists seem to sacralize, reflects the alienating effects of slavery. White transcendentalists, on the surface, typically desire to "transcend" their families and to merge their bodies with the all of nature, in the process losing control of their individual bodies; these processes, beneath the surface, represent the condition of slavery, wherein men can lose all contact with their families and the self-possession of their bodies. In Emerson's truncated man of "The American Scholar," and Melville's innumerable amputated or involuntarily moving characters--including Samoa, Ahab, Pierre and Billy Budd--we also have a complex coding of what is imagined as the underlying blackness of American transcendentalism. See *White Jacket* (New York: Signet, 1979), 263.

In her article "Speaking the Unspeakable: The Representation of Disability as Stigma in Toni Morrison's Novels," Rosemarie Thomson argues that for Morrison "the umbrella of stigmatization, then, brings together persons in this society who are nonwhite, female, disabled, homosexual, ugly, old, poor, obese, non-Christian, illegitimate" etc. For Thomson, "it is important to understand that the problem our society must confront is **not** race, class, homosexuality, or disability: rather, the problem is the oppression and inequality that results from stigmatization." Aside from this slightly reductive grouping of disparate issues under the universal rubric of stigmatization, Thomson provides a useful analysis of the function of disability in Morrison's work: "[women's] physical anomalies reflect and correspond to the material effects which are manifestations of stigmatization, the psychological and social process that is always acted out upon the devalued body of the cultural other in the forms of rejection, isolation, lowered expectations, impoverishment--and, most egregiously--murder, rape, and enslavement." Though written well before *Jazz*, Thomson's article also resonates for that novel's use of amputation and trickster figures: Thomson interprets Eve in *Sula* as a

revisioned and rewritten black Eve and a female version of the Afro-American trickster whose asymmetrical legs suggest his presence in both the material and the supernatural worlds. However, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has noted, rather than suggesting a flaw, the trickster's disability indicates empowerment.

See *Courage and Tools: The Florence Howe Award for Feminist Scholarship 1974-1989*, Ed. Joanne Glasgow and Angela Ingram (New York: MLA, 1990), 239-41.

9. In reclaiming the Harlem Renaissance, Morrison restages not just Richard Wright's, but Ishmael Reed's "Jes Grew," hunger. Like the Harlem Renaissance/Modernist Jes Grew of *Mumbo Jumbo*, Morrison's music is an incarnated force that takes control of your body, representing a love that can cause a woman's body to become paralyzed or to sit down in the middle of the street. To a surprising extent, given the antipathy between the two writers, Morrison has riffed off Reed, the hunger of his music; Reed's Jes Grew text, and his Haitian Loas, need to be literally fed in much the way Morrison's Nature, City, and narrator do. (Individual, private characters in both texts are perpetually possessed by a hunger of public domain; in both works, a non-human agency--Jes Grew, Morrison's narrator--becomes the book's central protagonist.)

Hunger of course drives most of Morrison's characters, from Milkman to Joe. When he falls for Dorcas, Joe claims "you would have thought I was twenty, back in Palestine satisfying my appetite for the first time under a walnut tree" (129). Such a recurring appetite seems indiscriminate, involuntary; but these characters can't control themselves, not because they lack discipline but because these forces, like the voice of the narrator, exist independently, yet cannot be dissociated, from them. In her "mother-hunger," her longing for a mother as well as a daughter, Violet locates desire as a form of hunger: "I want some fat in this life" (108, 110). And in this text about the aging of eras and couples, everybody stays "hungry for the one thing

everybody loses--young loving" (120). Hunters Hunter is "saddened to learn that instead of resting [Wild] was hungry still" (167). The call of the wild, of some form of impersonally sentient nature--a nature so transformative it can even take the guise of a music navigated City--lures all the characters of *Jazz* with its hunger and its wordless tune.

10. See Faulkner, *Light* (265).

11. As evinced by the book's many images of twins and fake twins--e.g., of Violet imagining her lost child and her lost possible brother in Golden Gray, who also lived inside her and whose presence she had to exorcise; of the blind twins, one of whom is faking it; of the two babies lost in the woods--Morrison's characters are themselves shadows of selves, looking for their missing halves (208). The parallel lives and losses--always reflected in the narrator's descriptions, e.g., her tale of "the woman who avoided the streets let[ting] into her living room the woman who sat down in the middle of one"--also typically establish some mirror for the narrator, who seems perpetually in the process of herself becoming human (73). The text's endemic orphaning, signaled in a Faulknerian passage regarding black children being left at foundling hospitals, "where white-girls deposited their mortification," then represents only the outward visible symbol of an internal condition (148). For a comprehensive reading of doubling in black literature, particularly in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey," in *Figures in Black* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 235-76.

Morrison treats the theme of physical duality in many of her previous novels. In *Sula*, for example, Shadrack's loss of identity is represented in the terror he feels regarding his hands:

he noticed two lumps beneath the beige blanket on either side of his hips. With extreme care he lifted one arm and was relieved to find his hand attached to his wrist. . . . just as he was about to spread his fingers, they began to grow in higgledy-piggledy fashion. With a shriek he closed his eyes . . . . Once out of sight they seemed to shrink back to their normal size. . . . In panic he raised himself and tried to fling off and away his terrible fingers . . . .

Only when his hands are hidden beneath the straight jacket can Shadrack feel they have been contained. Again, such duality is directly connected to violence, for Shadrack the violence of the war, for Eva the killing of her son Plum: "When Eva spoke at last it was with two voices. Like two people were talking at the same time, saying the same thing, one a fraction of a second behind the other." Instead of Ishmael's pantheistic fusion, this doubling of voice represents a form of double-consciousness. See *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1973), 9, 71.

12. Morrison here circles back to the conception of music presented in her first book, *The Bluest Eye*; here the blues represents the reintegration of narrative itself, a transcendent joining of life's fragments:

The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Only those who talk their talk through the curve of gold metal . . . could give true form to his life. Only they would know how to connect the heart of a red watermelon to the asfetida bag to the flashlight on his behind . . . to a man called Blue and come up with all that meant . . . .

See *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 125. Thanks to Jeff Peterson for pointing out this passage.

13. See Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), for example 5, 65.

14. See John Leonard, "Her Soul's High Song," *The Nation* (May 25, 1992): 718.

15. See Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

[16](#). See John Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

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