KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

THE HORIZON RISING ABOVE ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S WORKS

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

DİLEK ÖNDER

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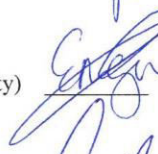
Asst. Prof. Galip Engin Şimşek (İstanbul University) 

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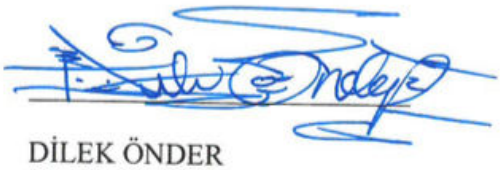

DİLEK ÖNDER

ÖZET

ZORA NEALE HURSTON'UN ESERLERİNDEN YÜKSELEN UFUK

Dilek Önder

Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı, Doktora

Danışman: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Jeffrey Winslow Howlett
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Harlem Rönesans döneminin önde gelen yazarlarından Zora Neale Hurston, edebiyatta siyahilerin temsili bağlamında kendisinden sonra gelen siyahi yazarlara önderlik etmiştir. Bu doktora tezi Zora Neale Hurston'ın beyaz ile siyahi anlatımını buluşturan ve Direnen Metni yaratan mecazi Temas Bölgesi'nde siyahi kimliğini temsil etme amacını oluşturan ufku nasıl tayin ettiğini araştırmayı hedeflemiştir. Eserlerinde zengin halk kültürünün damarlarını ve halk ifadelerinin, önemli derecede gün ışığına çıkarır ve bunları kendi sanatsal ufkunun yeni estetik standardı olarak belirler. Hurston siyahi kültürel öğelerin değiştirilmemesini savunmuş ve ufka, ya da hedefe giden yolda siyahi sanatçıya yol gösteren en önemli aracın Afrika kökenli kültürel değerlerin olduğunu kabul etmiştir. Hurston standart batı edebiyat kaidelerine uymayı kabul etmemiş, ve diğer siyahi yazarların sadece okumuş kesimde değil her yerdeki siyahi cemiyetlerde var olan belirgin sözel ve sanatsal kabiliyetleri göz ardı etmesini eleştirmiştir. Bu tezde Hurston'ın Afro-Amerikan Retorik Stratejileri temelli dilbilimsel ufkun hem siyahilerin temsilinde hem de çağdaşlarına yönelik ince eleştirilerindeki temel araç olduğunu öne sürmekteyim.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ufuk, Afro-Amerikan Retorik Stratejileri, siyahî diyalekt, siyahî kültür, Harlem Rönesans, Yeni Siyahi Akım, siyahî kimlik, Direnen Metin.

ABSTRACT

THE HORIZON RISING ABOVE ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S WORKS

Dilek Önder

Doctor of Philosophy in American Culture and Literature

Advisor: Asst. Prof. Jeffrey Winslow Howlett

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Zora Neale Hurston, the prominent writer of the Harlem Renaissance, has led the way for the future writers of black letters in terms of representing blacks in literature. This doctoral thesis is aiming at exploring how Zora Neale Hurston sets a horizon, which constitutes her aim to represent the black identity within the metaphorical "contact zone," where white discourse and black discourse meet and originates a "resistant text." In her works, she mines the rich vein of black folk culture and folk expressions to a very great degree and designates the effort to represent folk culture in a new aesthetic standard as her artistic horizon. She advocates using folk material without any alteration and feels that the collective African heritage should be the main tool for a black artist to light the way to the horizon. Hurston could not accept such an accommodation to the canon and criticized her peers for neglecting the opportunity of demonstrating the verbal and artistic talents everywhere evident in the black community, not just in its most privileged and educated members. In this thesis, I propose that the linguistic horizon, Hurston bases on black rhetoric of Signifyin(g), is her main tool for both true representation of blacks and subtle criticism of her contemporaries.

Key Words: Horizon, The Signifying Monkey, black vernacular language, black culture, the Harlem Renaissance, the New Negro, black identity, Resistant Text

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INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston is a prominent writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston deals with the problem of creating an original yet genuine representation of African Americans in her works, and for this purpose she mines the rich vein of black folk culture and folk expressions to a very great degree. She designates the effort to represent folk culture in a new aesthetic standard as her artistic horizon. According to Hurston, the black artist should base his work on unique African American characteristics including black expressions, black vernacular, the rhetoric of Signifying and black folk tales in order that the work of young black writers can be the equal of, but clearly distinguishable from, the previous works of the canon. In short, Hurston feels that the collective African heritage should be the main tool for a black artist to light the way to the horizon.

Hurston includes the image of the horizon as a prominent feature of her natural imagery. As a writer, Hurston herself constantly reinvestigates the figure of the horizon in all aspects of black modernist letters. The horizon appears to reveal a limit, the furthest point which can be seen by a viewer. Thus, it represents an epistemological boundary: it shows us the farthest extent of what can be known. In an effort to see and know more, the seeker necessarily bumps up against the horizon. In such a liminal zone, a contest emerges between conventional and authoritative knowledge and alternative ways of seeing. As an author, Hurston must deal with the force of tradition while attempting to break new ground according to her vision. The limits of knowledge and experience may have been established by men, by the ruling class, the dominant race, the literary community and other powerful interests, but the task of challenging the dominant discourses remains the struggle of the individual author.

Hurston frequently uses the image of the horizon to express the desire of women characters, and by implication of the woman author, for full freedom of expression. The process of mastering the master tropes of African American rhetoric becomes a quest for certain of Hurston's characters. In a world where the big voices belong to men, a woman's journey to discover her voice emerges as a theme in her work and also reflects her own goal of assuming the right to authorial power. Woman's voice must arise through the development of strategies that contest men's exclusive possession of the story and redirect narrative to a woman's perspective.

In the same way, Hurston must challenge the dominant culture's view of African Americans. She and her fellow writers must face a racial horizon in which they fight to prove the worth of their literary and cultural ways. Entrenched racism puts pressure on the young black authors of the Harlem Renaissance to prove that they measure up to whites in artistic pursuits. This pressure leads some of Hurston's associates to accept the norms of the white literary tradition. Hurston could not accept such an accommodation to the canon and criticized her peers for neglecting the opportunity of demonstrating the verbal and artistic talents everywhere evident in the black community, not just in its most privileged and educated members. Gender, "high" culture and race present boundaries that appear to set limiting definitions upon the young black artist, but these definitions are always fluid in such border areas.

Hurston aspires to a new place beyond the apparent boundaries. The image of the horizon often conveys exactly this sense of hope and aspiration. By its nature, the horizon always marks the boundaries of vision: what can be perceived and imagined. Travelling towards the horizon leads us into new landscapes, new conditions and new states of mind, but always a new horizon exists at the limits of our perception.

African Americans had arrived at a historical crossroads in the 1920s, the consciousness of slavery, reconstruction and Jim Crow receding into the background and a hopeful new perspective emerging. The new horizon glimpsed by black intellectuals at this time allowed for a discussion of the race's future. Hurston takes full part in the debate. As her writing proves, this historical horizon is again contested territory where opposed visions of African Americans' route to a new identity jostle each other in a fight for supremacy.

Hurston's perception of this historical horizon is shared, in various points, with other members of her generation. The eagerness to fly free of old restraints at times places Hurston and the younger writers of the Harlem Renaissance in conflict with the older generation of African American intellectuals. Hurston asserts her independence from the philosophies of race leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, rejecting certain aspects of their plan for the advancement of the race as too conservative, as arising from a former horizon that saw caution, respectability and accommodation as the formula for success. Hurston's aspirations pushed her toward a more aggressive strategy for moving the perception of American blacks forward.

The horizon also seems to be the point where unlike elements—the earth and sky—merge. As such, it figures as a contact zone "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery" (Pratt 7). Thus, opposites cannot be so easily categorized. Strategies of negotiation, adaptation, appropriation and rejection are always in operation. Therefore, it is possible for marginals to take parts from the metropolitan culture and with them create literary works that present new values, new resonances and new subject positions. It

introduces the possibility of hybridity, the artful combination of metropolitan (canonical) and marginal (in this case, African American) modes of expression that leads to a dramatic new voice.

The reliance on powerful metaphor that governs Romantic period writing finds an analogue in African American folk culture and leads to the stylistic richness of Hurston's writing. Hurston makes use of forms and genres that are conventionally used in western literature and enriches them with the energetic rhetoric of the African American speech community. She takes up the *Bildungsroman* and adapts the genre to reflect a black woman's perspective, which makes possible new interpretations, a new narrative arc and new conclusions. She answers the call of Emerson in "The American Scholar" in a voice inflected with African American folk knowledge. Hurston's work is full of the hybridization that arises from the horizon between the literary tradition and the young black author. Her artistic vision transcends the simple binary of black and white in seeking a new aesthetic.

Language itself becomes a contested horizon in Hurston's work. If the point of clear definition is always deferred, meaning comes to be negotiated through various strategies that are capable of overturning unbalanced power relations. Hurston is very familiar with African American verbal arts such as signifying and playing the dozens. Henry Louis Gates explains the West African origins of these verbal practices and their continued use in African American oral culture and literature in *The Signifying Monkey*. The word is multifaceted: it splits into different levels of meaning. The playful manipulation of many levels of meaning breaks down traditional structures and opens language to new possibilities. Monovocal discourse which seeks to privilege certain ideologies is broken down by the parodic tropes of West African rhetoric.

Hurston is an adept who demonstrates the richness of African American verbal strategies in creating powerful fictional representations and in offering subtle criticism of her rivals among the black intelligentsia. Her prominent work *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a remarkable accomplishment that epitomizes this subtle criticism and marks a new epoch in African American letters. Her story depicts the opposed visions of the black literati throughout the history of black letters from the Reconstruction on. Through the trope of signifying, Janie's story not only presents three different marriages with different characteristics, but metaphorically traces the sequence of visions and horizons of three generations of black literati.

Finally, the relationship between text and reader represents another horizon to be negotiated. African American texts can be challenging to an audience who does not share the cultural experience or the language arts of American blacks. Doris Sommer investigates this horizon and suggests strategies for dealing with the resistant text. According to her, the resistant text requires a "socially differentiated understanding" (Sommer 409) that positions the reader as an outsider. Therefore the ideal reader is the one who respects the limits: "I am arguing here that respect demands hearing silence and refusal without straining to get them. Strategic silence may itself be the message" (Sommer 416). Hurston's works are, as she defines it, feather-bed resistant texts: "The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 2-3). She intentionally keeps the reader as an outsider, and offers a story that entertains the reader; however, as she implies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, our own social positioning and rhetorical skill can determine whether we possess the understanding to see the difference between mink skin and coon hide: "Naw, 'tain't nothin' lak you might think. So 'tain't no use in me

telling you somethin' unless Ah give you de understandin' to go 'long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different from a coon hide" (19). This quality of double perceptions and split semantic territory is characteristic of a resistant text and constitutes a further aspect of the linguistic horizon toward which Hurston points the reader.

CHAPTER I

Hurston and The Signifying Monkey

1.1 The Signifying Monkey

The Signifying Monkey is a figure in African American folk tales, which was historically a part of the adolescent education of black people. This trickster figure has his origins in African mythology and his equivalent is *Esu* in Yoruba culture.

The Signifying Monkey is also known as Aunt Dicy, John and Brer Rabbit in African American oral literature, and as Anansi in African. These trickster figures originated in Yoruba Mythology under various names; such as, Esu-Elegbara, Exu, Echu-Elegua, Papa Legba and Papa Le Bas, and Esu-Elegbar. "The Yoruba trickster figure, by way of Nigeria, Benin, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and New Orleans…was the Afro-American tradition that generated the concept of Signifyin(g)" (Gates x).

Based on the archeological evidence that Gates unearths, there is a functional equivalency between the ritual of Signifyin(g) and Esu-Elegbara, the Pan-African cousin of the Signifying Monkey (53). The Signifyin' Monkey is distinctly African American and why the Yoruban trickster figure has been transformed into a *Monkey* is probably that Esu-Elegbara is depicted with a monkey next to him. When we acknowledge the rhetoric of Signifyin(g) as the written form of the spoken discourse, the function of the Monkey will lead us to his Pan-African cousin, Esu-Elegbara, which is the figure of writing in Ifa: "If Esu is the figure of writing in Ifa, the Signifying Monkey is the figure of a black rhetoric in the Afro-American speech community. He exists to embody the figures of speech characteristic to the black vernacular (Gates 53).

Roger D. Abrahams is the first scholar who defines Signifyin(g) as the particular verbal and gestural rhetorical strategy to imply, needle and cajole.

Signifyin(g), synonymous with allegorical representation, lays stress on "indirection" and "implication." According to Abrahams, the Monkey is beyond being just an animal, but the technique itself and the original source for black people of figurative language. Furthermore, the Monkey is not only a great trickster but a figure of the literary language of trickery: "The Monkey, in short, is not only a master of technique, as Abrahams concludes; he is technique, or style, or the literariness of literary language; he is the great Signifier. In this sense, one does not signify something; rather, one signifies in some way" (Gates 54).

The Monkey's literary identification also traces back to Esu. As Hermes in Western mythology, *Esu* is the messenger and interpreter of the gods: "Esu is the indigenous black metaphor for the literary critic, and Esu-'tufunaalo is the study of methodological principles of interpretation itself, or what the literary critic does," (9) a system of signification meant to "unravel the knots of Esu."[1] It "is the figure of the double-voiced, epitomized by Esu's depictions in sculpture as possessing two mouths (Gates xxv). As Gates emphasizes, the trope of Signifyin(g) is a crucial component in the rhetoric of the double-voiced Esu-Elegbara. A further literary trope that traces back to west African divination is "tropological revision," which is the repetition of a particular trope in other texts with a difference: "The metaphor of a double-voiced Esu-Elegbara corresponds to the double-voiced nature of the Signifyin(g) utterance. When one text Signifies upon another text, by tropological revision or repetition and difference, the double-voiced utterance allows us to chart discrete formal relationships in Afro-American literary history. Signifyin(g), then, is a metaphor for textual revision" (Gates 88).

The correspondence between double voiced Esu-Elegbara and the

[1] "Wole Soyinka coined this neologism for this book" (cited in Gates, 260).

Signifyin(g) utterance is that both, in their own ways, constitute the written form of rhetorical structures of black oral language, covering a range of meanings having no correspondence in Standard English. Therefore, the distinctive rhetorical devices of black narration constitute a vital linguistic horizon for some black artists in the course of the Harlem Renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston, in particular, designated a horizon that embraced all kinds of black rhetorical expressions and created works that distinguished themselves in the tradition of American letters.

By contrast, the use of the word "signify" in the western logocentric tradition dates back to the religious narration in the New Testament. "In the Bible, it is typically used to refer to prophetic, symbolic, ecstatic, apocalyptic utterance, thus to figured speech with ambiguous or elusive meaning" (Seaton 94). The hidden meaning would resist interpretation and remain ambiguous until the eschaton, or The Judgment Day, when finally all the encoded meanings are deciphered: "The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all" (*The Bible*, Luke 12:2). In this sense of the word, Signifying will have constituted the only vehicle harboring the hidden until the last day of the world. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston parodies this sort of "secret" knowledge by representing a church congregation made up of gossips and busybodies who expect a feast of information in the revelations of Judgment Day: "'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'"(16).

The idea of a hidden body of knowledge whose meanings are known only to, and protected by, an all-powerful being and his chosen servants—the characteristic of Christian exegesis—is subverted by this joke. Signifying practice in the tradition

of Esu and the Monkey is available to all within the rhetorical community. Meanings are created and multiplied even by its least powerful members, as long as they are skilled in its double-voiced articulation**.** Hurston demonstrates the two sides of this particular trope of Signifying in black people's life with another reference to The *Bible* in her anthropological work *Mules and Men*. One of the local settlers telling tales to Hurston stresses that there are special black expressions having double meaning just like The Bible: "I done heard my gran'paw say dem very words many and many a time," chimed in Larkins. "There's a whole heap of them kinda by-words. Like for instance: "'Ole coon for cunnin', young coon for runnin',' and 'Ah can't dance, but Ah know good moves.' They all got a hidden meanin,' jus' like de Bible" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 125). These speakers do not distinguish between sacred and profane; all speech is governed by the elastic quality of implication within the trope of signifying.

The Signifying Monkey may not exist just as a character, but rather as the means of narration itself, which is the significant literary trait of Zora Neale Hurston. The Trope of Signifying resists offering any information, and presents a reading or game in chains of signifiers concealing the doubled meaning, which distinguishes black narration from the canon's narration. In short, the Signifying Monkey is the great Signifier, who signifies particularly in his own way. Furthermore, as Gates stresses: "Signifying was also a way of expressing your own feelings," (Gates 73). Similarly, Hurston employs the ritual of signifying as her significant literary armor and weapon in order to express her ideas about how to represent blacks and to criticize, undermine and reverse the opinions of her contemporaries on depicting blacks in literature.

Even though the poems of the Signifying Monkey have slightly different variations, they essentially narrate the confusion generated from the relationship between literal and figurative speech, which is the significant applied element of these poems. In the poems, the Monkey repeatedly insults and outwits his friend, the Lion, through their mutual friend the Elephant. The Monkey asserts that he just conveys what the Elephant says, but that the Monkey speaks figuratively and the Lion takes his words literally makes the outraged Lion demand an apology from the Elephant, which results in the Lion's being soundly beaten. The Monkey's trick, however, relies on the incompetence of the Lion in mediating between the literal and the figurative speech.

As Roger D. Abrahams defines it, the Signifying Monkey "certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation" (cit. in Gates 54). Indeed, the Monkey, as a smaller and weaker animal compared to the Lion, tricks him and gets him badly beaten through the trope of Signifying. The verbal skills of the Monkey help him provoke his opponent and manipulate events. In other words, the Lion suffers from the literal-interpretation of the figurative speech of the Monkey in symbolic form, which results in the reversal of the stature of the Lion as the king of the Jungle. As we shall see, Signifyin(g) serves as a degrading literary tool that reverses power relationships.

Equivalently, we see the same reversal of position in the folk tales of "John and the Master", in which the John the slave outwits his master through his verbal skills to improve his intelligence. The reversal of power relations may only be temporary, however, as John is subjected to punishment in the end. Likewise, in

many versions of the tale, the monkey is beaten up after he panics and slips, then hits the ground:

> Now when you go through the jungle, there's a tombstone so they say,
> "Here the Signifying Monkey lay,
> Who got kicked in the nose, fucked-up in the eyes,
> Stomped in the ribs, kicked in the face,
> Drove backwards to his ass-hole, knocked his neck out of place."
> (Levine 379)

Signifying, the tactic engaged in verbal dueling, encoding indirect messages to constitute an alternative message form, is also termed louding, or loud talking and is commonly practiced by African American people. As Gates stresses "one successfully loud-talks by speaking to a second person remarks in fact directed to a third person, at a level just audible to the third person" (Gates 82). In the poem The Signifying Monkey, the events occur among the three characters; the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant. The Monkey clearly cannot match the Lion in terms of physical power, but the Elephant can; thus the "Monkey, a "rhetorical genius," and "a trickster figure, like Esu, who is full of guile," (56) uses the power of his rhetoric to make use of the physical strength of the Elephant, who is the real king of the jungle in the monkey narratives. Gates claims that the interpretation of the Signifyin(g) trope between the Monkey and the Lion cannot be reduced to a racial allegory, because, in that case the presence of the Elephant, or the significance and imperative of the third element, is overlooked and the meaning is narrowed into just two-term opposition:

> While other scholars have interpreted the Monkey tales against the binary opposition between black and white in American society, to do

> so is to ignore the trinary forces of the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant. To read the Monkey tales as a simple allegory of the black's political oppression is to ignore the hulking presence of the Elephant, the crucial third term of the depicted action. To note this is not to argue that the tales are not allegorical or that their import is not political. Rather, this is to note that to reduce such complex structures of meaning to a simple two-term opposition (white versus black) is to fail to account for the strength of the Elephant. (Gates 55)

Now that Signifyin(g) relies on repeating or carrying forward one's words about a third person to reverse the stature of the person, the Monkey cannot insult the Lion and play his game without the presence of the Elephant. In other words, the Signifying Monkey depends on the third person to outwit his opponent.

In her prominent essay "The Characteristics of Negro Expression," Zora Neale Hurston stresses the importance of the presence of a third agent in black rhetoric: "The community is given the benefit of a good fight as well as a good wedding. An audience is a necessary part of any drama. We merely go with nature rather than against it...Hence the holding of all quarrels and fights in the open. One relieves one's pent-up anger and at the same time earns laurels in intimidation. Besides, one does the community a service. There is nothing so exhilarating as watching well-matched opponents go into action" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 68). Therefore, *in Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when Janie engages in the ritual of insulting, Hurston intentionally lets Jody's friends witness the game of the dozens. Janie taints her husband's reputation by signifying his impotency before the eyes of Jody's assembled friends on the porch of the store. Janie confronts her oppressor through game of "the dozens" and "When she faces her oppressor she reverses the

seat of power" (King 691) The reversing of power, on the other hand, results in getting the mighty slap of Jody, but ironically Janie's rhetorical skills help her gain her voice on the store's porch, where she is not allowed in the conversations.

The Dozens is quite likely derived from the verb "dozen," meaning "'to stun, stupefy, daze,' in the black sense, through language" (Gates 71), and it is a verbal strategy that blacks, including the girls, start practicing in their childhood: "Some of the best dozens players were girls…. before you can signify you got to be able to rap…. Signifying allowed you a choice—you could either make a cat feel good or bad. If you had just destroyed someone or if they were down already, signifying could help them over. Signifying was also a way of expressing your own feelings" (Gates 44).

Hurston purposely chooses the game of dozens to expose the black leaders and express her feelings on literary quarrels about representing blacks in literature. She outwits her opponents as Janie outwits Jody in the significant scene on the porch when Janie plays the dozens and humiliates her husband in front of his friends: "But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 123). The stronger her discourse becomes, the weaker Jody's authority gets. The reason Jody is driven to a sudden towering rage is the presence of his friends; hence, the battle cannot be reduced to just a conflict between a wife and husband. It is, as Gates puts it, trinary forces, on which the ritual depends to celebrate its accomplishment.

Similarly, Janie depends on Phoeby to tell her story. By no means, does the third character take part as the Elephant does, but, as Gates states, Janie is able to achieve her goal through her perfect listener: "The tale of Janie Crawford-Killicks-Starks-Woods is narrated to her best friend, Phoeby, while the two sit together on

Janie's back porch. The whole story is Janie's quest and self-actualization, but the story also is a "tale-within-a-tale," proving us with "an emulation designed to produce the illusion of oral narration. Indeed, each of the oral rhetorical structures emulated within Janie's bracketed tale functions to remind the reader that he or she is overhearing Janie's narrative to Phoeby, which unfolds on her porch, that crucial place of storytelling both in this text and in the black community" (Gates 196).

Through the rhetoric of Signifyin(g), Janie, as a narrator, gains her voice on her own porch, which allows Janie her own literary space. "We, the readers, 'overhear' the tale that Janie narrates to her auditor, whose name we recall signifies the poet" (Gates 184). As the Monkey shows who the real king of the jungle is in the poem, Hurston tries to show what the true weapon of the black writer is in representing the black individuals in the literary jungle of Harlem.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, one of the major works on language and identity, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o expresses that the talent of a story teller is a significant factor that makes a story much more impressive. One story can be retold many times if the story teller has the rhetorical skills to keep the plot alive and effective: "There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be, fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones" (Thiong'o 10). Similarly, Gates emphasizes that the success of the re-narrated poems of the Signifying Monkey is contingent upon the artistic skills of the narrator. The events and the characters may change in the poem, but the verbal and phonetic skills make the retold poem, or story, repeated but different: "The artistry of the oral narrator of these poems does not depend on his or her capacity to dream up new

characters or events that define the actions depicted; rather, it depends on his or her display of the ability to group together two lines that end in words that sound alike, that bear a phonetic similarity to each other. This challenge is greater when key terms are fixed, such as the three characters' identities and their received relationship to each other" (Gates 60).

As Gates emphasizes one of the significant characteristics of black literary narration is "intertextuality," which is concerned with repetition and difference. It constitutes the keystone of black vernacular and formal literary traditions: "It is this principle of repetition and difference, this practice of intertextuality, which has been so crucial to the black vernacular forms of Signifyin(g), jazz—and even its antecedents, the blues, the spirituals, and ragtime—and which is the source of my trope for black intertextuality in the Afro-American formal literary tradition" (64). He exemplifies that each poem of the Signifying Monkey refers to the other poems. Thus, the Trope of Signifying constitutes an important agent for blacks to criticize the preceding works of other black intellectuals and express their own notions with their own rhetorical self-expression. Thus, black works in any genre offer a unique black cultural form, consisting of "tropological revision" (88) and pastiche covering the various meanings in contrast to Standard English usage.

While the ability to decode verbal signals is widespread with a speech community, not all speakers share the skill to the same degree. Hurston states "Everybody can't understand what they mean. Most people is thin-brained. They's born wid they feet under de moon. Some folks is born wid they feet on de sun and they kin seek out de inside meanin' of words" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 125). Some black folks are born with their feet on the Sun, which means that some are familiar with Signifyin(g) like Hurston and they can discover the hidden meaning.

Furthermore, I suggest that as John is "the personification of hope" (Gates, "Introduction" *ZNH The Complete Works*), Moses is the personification of the hope and effort of blacks in representing their identity from slavery times (as the liberator of the Israelite slaves) until the end of the Harlem Renaissance. The reason Hurston goes back to Ancient Egypt and narrates the biblical story of Moses is not that Moses is a leading figure and a savior for blacks. She rather uses Moses to elucidate that Signifyin(g), or double utterance, roots back to Africa, and it cannot be just confined to The *Bible*. He is, indeed, the messenger and interpreter of the gods as is Esu; therefore, he is "the black metaphor for the literary critic" and "the study of methodological principles of interpretation itself" (Gates 53).

One can also argue that Moses might represent the black leaders who were kind of messengers between white patrons and black intellectuals, not only in the course of the Harlem Renaissance but also from the Civil War until the Great Depression, when the Harlem Renaissance came to an end. Thus, they operated in the zone of the horizon, where signifying is the preferred verbal art form. In any case, Moses is either the personification of the endeavors of black intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance, or the messenger who leads blacks to the *Truth*, which is the verbal richness of the African Heritage.

It is true that Jesus Christ is a great signifier; however, before him Horus, the God of Sun, existed on the continent of Africa, the symbolic homeland for African Americans. Moreover, the African Diaspora widely broadcasts Esu as the deity holding the power to change fate, either good or bad. He "is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane" (Gates 6). Hurston, in all her works applies Signifyin(g), and follows the

path to her horizon with the guidance of the Signifyin(g) Monkey, or Esu.

1.2. Hurston's Feather Bed Resistance

In his article called "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," Jules Prown claims that "most of us are functionally illiterate when it comes to interpreting information encoded in objects" (Prown 133), so it requires for the expert some academic disciplines, such as in art history, archeology, anthropology, psycho-history, sociology, folklore, linguistics etc., to read the evidence leading to an interpretation of the artifact. Moreover, "The degree of understanding at this stage (the analyst's intellectual engagement) depends on the complexity of the object and the analyst's prior knowledge and experience" (136); however, is the same approach equally applicable to every African American artifact, or literary work? Will our prior knowledge and experience be sufficient to decode messages given in the work of another race? In her article "Resisting Heat," Doris Sommer claims that the failure to understand a text does not have anything to do with the reader's education, or knowledge, because an author can intentionally leave the reader outside the text and not let him grab the message right away, or not at all. In other words, every text has various encoded messages, but every reader does not have the competence, or the need to understand each one. According to Sommer, the traditional reader believes books must be hard enough to digest and challenging enough to overcome resistance: "The more difficult the book the better. Difficulty is a challenge, an opportunity to struggle and to win, to overcome resistance, uncover the codes, to get on top of it, to put one's finger on the mechanism that produces pleasure and pain, then to call it ours" (Sommer 407). The critics and the reader are always after the ultimate Truth. But is it possible to so completely decode a piece of writing? What would be wrong if we are positioned outside the text?

Contrary to the common opinion that books are to be conquered, some texts do not allow themselves to be understood; readerly incompetence is welcomed in a resistant text, which does not aim at telling what is relevant to tell and what is not; it just constructs "rather, the rhetoric of selective, socially differentiated understanding," which will "position the reader within limits" (Sommer 409). The reader is positioned as an *outsider* by the author, and his socially different background limits access to the text. The reader's social, racial, marginal etc. positioning becomes decisive in establishing the boundaries between the reader and the text; therefore, experience assists the reader in interpreting the information encoded in a resistant text. Moreover, for Sommer, the resistant text lets the reader construct himself. In other words, it helps the reader to build some knowledge, but it does not let the reader have conspiratorial intimacy, because the ideal reader is the one who cannot place himself within all the codes that create meanings and can stay a stranger, or outsider to the text: "'Ideal' or target readers for resistant texts are, then, hardly the writer's coconspirators or allies who putatively share experiences and assumptions, as we have presumed in our critical vocabulary. They are marked precisely as strangers, incapable of- or undesirable for- conspiratorial intimacy" (Sommer 422).

When we look at the slave narratives, we can clearly see that for instance, neither Douglass nor Harriet Jacobs expect the reader to identify himself with them. Both black authors build some knowledge for the reader about the "soul-murdering psychological violations" (Jacobs ix) of slavery. They do not expect the white man to replace himself within the experience of a slave; on the contrary, they expect him to be a stranger. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs makes the distance quite clear:

> Reader, I draw no imaginary pictures of southern homes. I am telling you the plain truth. Yet when victims make their escape from this wild beast of Slavery, northerners consent to act the part of bloodhounds, and hunt the poor fugitive back into his den, "full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness" (Jacobs 39).

The white reader is intentionally left outside the boundaries of the author so that as an outsider he can understand the crime he commits. She also addresses the white women directly and instructs them not to judge her choices, as they can't imagine what a slave woman undergoes:

> But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate; but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery." (60).

Jacobs uses all the patterns of female heroism that are typical of sentimental novels and uses these structures to enlist the sympathy of her readers. As we can see, Jacobs warns her readers off at certain points and marks parts of the text in which they cannot participate.

The tactics Zora Neale Hurston uses in her works in general position the reader as an outsider, but they still differ from slave narratives. In The *Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates states that "in the Afro-American narrative, realism as local color is perhaps the most consistent aspect of black rhetorical strategy from

slave narratives to *Invisible Man*" (Gates 231). The antebellum narratives and works like *Invisible Man* and *Black Boy* are biographical novels based on real experiences of the black authors; however, thanks to the trope of Signifying Hurston uses skillfully, she intentionally leaves the reader, especially the white ones, outside the text and does not even let him/her grab the message; thus, the reader is for the most part unaware of being treated as a stranger: "The theory behind our tactics:

> "We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feathered-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.
>
> The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writings but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 4-5).

When we look at the variety of the scholarly criticism on her works, we can be sure that her tactic works very well. She tells a story of a black woman in such a frame that can transcend the borders of race and allows a woman of any race to identify herself with the character; however, what she signifies upon with Janie's story is her experience and conflicts with the black authors of the Harlem Renaissance. Thus, Janie as a black Southerner living in Florida constitutes a resistant agent preventing the reader from having any conspiratorial intimacy with Hurston. It is Hurston who

decides whether the reader be *insider* or *outsider* in relation to the text. You, as a reader**,** interpret the text as Hurston leads you to, so you become the text's own reader, not a writer as Roland Barthes claims in his essay "The Death of the Author." In contrast to Barthes, here *Their Eyes Were Watching God* constructs its reader and achieves the goal of the resisting text: "It is the goal of respecting the distances and refusals that some texts have been broadcasting to our deaf still ears" (Sommer 407).

In his controversial essay, Roland Barthes claims that the reader is not the consumer, but the producer. He argues that the existence of the author ceases to exist with the interpretation of the text by the reader and "As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, outside function, the disconnection occurs - the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death and writing begins." For him, the Author is dead and always in the past of the text; whereas, the Writer is simultaneous with it. Writing always occurs now, in the act of reading it, enunciating it, unpacking its structure. Thus, when you finish a book, you actually finish reading your own interpretation of the text, so you produce your own version of the text.

When we apply Barthes approach to African American text, it seems all we have is our version of the text as he emphasizes, but indeed it is the toy given us to play with, because in a resistant text the traditional reader will attempt to decode the narrative and in a variety of ways engage with the toy given. The author watches the curious outsider take it and go away, and while the reader cherishes the toy he sings his own song as Hurston does. The reader constructs something as Barthes claims, but it is limited by his own experience. The African American author, who is familiar with the rhetoric of the dominant literary culture, has set some interesting bait to catch outsiders and hold them at a certain distance from the fiction. The

identification achieved by the reader outside the signifying system of African American letters may feel satisfying, but it does not allow a complete mastery of the text. The author is not "active" in this process other than through the rhetorical strategies she has employed in the writing, which are fully comprehensible to one kind of reader, but not to another.

Another controversial issue about decoding a resistant text is the experience of the reader. According to Frederick Douglass the variety of experience results in variety of interpretation and understanding on the same issue; thus, the free man "cannot see things in the same light with the slave, because he does not, and cannot, look from the same point from which the slave does" (cit. in Sommer 411). Moreover, when we compare Frederick Douglass and Zora Neale Hurston, we can see the distinct identity politics of the black race reflected in their works. Since Douglass was born in slavery, his narratives reflect a speaker seeking to prove himself worthy of freedom and thus personhood to a powerful group outside his limits of experience; on the other hand, Hurston grew up with the freedom to identify herself with a black community sharing a common experience as well as a less experienced audience beyond this. Even though they are both of the same race, the different experiences lead to different approaches and interpretations on the same issue due to the historical horizons they faced.

Sommer, as we have seen, states that in a resistant text, the author intentionally leaves the reader outside the text; however, she signifies that a prior knowledge may help one to get the meaning. Similarly Hurston emphasizes the resistance of the black narration that conveys meaning within a strategic resistance: "That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 4-5). On the other hand, she

also emphasizes the requirement of prior knowledge and experience to receive the signified message in black narration: ““Naw, ’tain’t nothin’ lak you might think. So ’tain’t no use in me telling you somethin’ unless Ah give you de understandin’ to go ’long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain’t no different from a coon hide” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 19). In order to understand a narrative, the listener must also have the code to make it understandable. There may be a play of words here linking the raccoon skin to the derogatory term for blacks; thus, the “coon hide” may refer to the hidden words of black narration, or the Trope of Signifying that is the significant part of black rhetoric. If this trope were not recognized, a black narration cannot be understood in its full significance.

Furthermore, Hurston as a member of the New Younger Negro generation brings the “monstropolous old thing,” or I assume the great old trope of Signifying, into life in her masterpiece—indeed, in all her works—as Janie starts telling, or signifying, her life experiences: “Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked” (19). Also Janie tells her story to Pheoby so that the whole of Eatonville knows what happened to Tea Cake and her: “Ah don’t mean to bother wid tellin’ ’em nothin’, Pheoby. ’Tain’t worth de trouble. You can tell ’em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just de same as me ’cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (17). Similar to the practice of oral tradition, the story is passed on other through the listener.

The Signifying Monkey is full of linguistic signs distinctive in black vernacular, and “The speech of the Monkey exists as a sequence of signifiers, effecting meanings through their differential relation and calling attention to itself by rhyming, repetition, and several of the rhetorical figures used in larger cultural language games” (Gates 53). The meaning of the signifier is not offered but deferred

or obscured compared to the transparent speech of Standard English. The contact between the act of speech and its comprehension is disconnected, or crooked as Hurston expresses it, by the Trope of Signifying. In her autobiography, when Hurston describes her hometown, Eatonville, she depicts the signifying skills of the local people with a well known black expression: "Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say. So you will have to know something about the time and place where I came from, in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life…Eatonville is what you might call hitting a straight lick with a crooked stick" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 1).

In her essay, Hurston also explains that in the black community making love is as important as the drama of fighting in public, and it is considered as high art to brag about their proficiency: "Likewise love-making is a biological necessity the world over and an art among Negroes. …It is all in a view-point. Love-making and fighting in all their branches are high arts, other things are arts among other groups where they brag about their proficiency just as brazenly as we do about these things that others consider matters for conversation behind closed doors" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 68-69). Indeed, that "love-making" is rendered as art is not limited to Hurston's works.

In his book *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, Lawrence Levine deals with how sexual relations are depicted with double meaning. "Sexual indirection and metaphor" has always existed in black folk songs, and has always been "incomprehensible to white audience" (244). Black people have always been very secretive, and their double utterance or their hypocrisy was their "two-faced survival mechanisms" (cit. in Levine 242) as Howard Odum asserts. He states "it is important

to reiterate that the physical side of love which, aside from some tepid hand holding and lip pecking, was largely missing from popular music, was strongly felt in the blues. In the early years of the century, black miners and railroad gangs near Lineville, Alabama, made fun of the different white and black depictions of love" (279). It was quite natural for blacks to depict sex openly and frankly, since it is acknowledged as part of their life:

> White folks on the sofa
>
> Niggers on the grass
>
> White man is talking low
>
> Nigger is getting ass (279).

Moreover, with the attitudes of black singers and storytellers, he emphasizes the resistant in folk music:

> …black singers and storytellers were often extremely self-conscious and self-protective in the presence of folklorists, white and black alike. Their attitudes and actions were succinctly expressed in a song sung by generations of Negroes:
>
> Got one mind for white folks to see,
>
> 'Nother for what I know is me;
>
> He don't know, he don't know my mind (xii-xiii).

I propose that in Hurston's works making love connotes "making high art," or the art of Signifyin(g), which she believes the only tool, or weapon they can use against the misinterpretation of blacks. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the men and women relationships refer to the black artist's relation with the art he creates in his works.

Since the marriage and love represents the art of Signifyin(g), that each meeting of the sea with the shore is repetition with a difference like in poems of Signifying Monkey: "One example demonstrates this clearly, especially if we recall that intertextuality represents a process of repetition and revision, by definition. A number of shared structural elements are repeated, with differences that suggest familiarity with other texts of the Monkey" (Gates, 60). Like in those poems, Hurston uses the similar events and characters, but in each work the events and characters have different functions. Therefore, Hurston compares literature to the sea. The Sea is a moving thing like the black folk in the making: "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 65). In brief, each work with the same subject or a person serves a different purpose within the featherbed resistance.

Certainly, the Rhetoric of Signifying allows a festival for the author. As Gates emphasizes, the black works written in this tradition, do not let readers arrive at one final explanation:

> So remarkably much about the black literary tradition remains to be written that no scholar can claim to have had the final word. The traditions of African, Caribbean, and Afro-American literature remain intact, to be explicated and theorized about again and again (Gates xiii).

The self- reflexive black tradition has its own principles and it should be interpreted within its own rhetorical frame. On the other hand, when he gives background information about the transformation of *Esu* into *The Signifying Monkey,* he mentions Esu as the first interpreter, who is "responsible for teaching or uncovering the art of divination to Oruba [Ifa] while accompanied by Moedun [the Monkey] and

the tree—a palm tree growing in the garden of Orungan [the midday sun]–as well as being the messenger of Odu, the divination seeds" (Gates 15). In Ifa divination, the Yoruba people have sacred texts, which are equivalent to *Bible* in Christianity; however, there are also commentaries on them similar to *Midrash,* which is an oral tradition of commentary used to supplement and reinterpret the Hebrew scriptures. In this system, sixteen palm nuts are dialed sixteen times and all configurations, or signs read into verses of the sacred text according to the number it signifies. Thus, "Its system of interpretation turns upon a marvelous combination of geomancy and textual exegesis." The dialed palm nuts and their visual signs are known as "signatures of an *Odu*," which can only be read by the *babalawo*, or priest:

> "These visual signs are known in the Yoruba as and each signature the babalawo, or priest, translates by reading or reciting the fixed verse text that the signature signifies. These verse texts, whose meanings are lushly metaphorical, ambiguous, and enigmatic, function as riddles, which the propitiate must decipher and apply as is appropriate to his or her own quandary" (Gates 10).

Hurston uses and revises the same characters and her stories as the dialing of palm nuts, and each time she comes up with a different configuration, or a work. Thus, is there a possibility that her essay "The characteristics of Negro Expressions" may constitute a "understandin' to go 'long wid," or at least a guidebook to that understanding. Can a knowledge of African American rhetoric decipher the Signifyin(g) writings of Hurston and provide an analysis for a scholar, and is there a chance for a scholar to be a literary *babalawo* who can read and interpret her works?

Any such enthusiasm felt by the curious reader outside the African American tradition must be tempered by our respect for the limits set by the resistant text. As

we have seen, the new approach to race and ethnicity eventually changes the approaches of the critics, like Doris Sommer, to a literary text. I agree with Sommer that the lack of understanding the text does not have anything to do with education. It is not even a failure at all. It is the matter of respecting the distance, or the difference between the author and the reader, as is required in a multicultural society. The reader should learn to recognize the refusal and should respect the distance desired by the author: "As readers we are invited to be with the speaker rather than to replace her" (Sommer 420). Sommer also states that in the course of feminist campaigns for self-empowerment, it is suggested that books are to break the silence; however, she argues that the books do not speak out, but keep the silence and refusal within as a strategy: "I am arguing here that respect demands hearing silence and refusal without straining to get them. Strategic silence may itself be the message" (Sommer 416). The silence should not be taken for acquiescence. It is a strategy that Hurston perfectly uses in her works.

CHAPTER II

The New Negro and the New Horizon: The Pursuit of Black Identity

The works of black intellectuals in the span of Harlem Renaissance constitute a pulpit, from which they speak to convey their messages on black identity and raise the question of how to represent it. They, however, are in total disagreement about whether they should use black folk culture and "The Negro Farthest Down," as Hurston defines the figure, as the subject of artistic works. While some of the black artists claimed that their African heritage would be the real source of their accurately represented black identity in a multi-cultural America, some assumed that their African American cultural identity and folk life would be an obstacle keeping them from getting respect as intellectuals due to the racial stereotypes associated with minstrel shows or misrepresentations in works written by white writers. As Kidd and Jackson assert, "Distorted representations, chiefly from White artists, led to a backlash by Black audiences, causing them to disdain any negative or nuanced presentation of Black life" (559).

Moreover, the sentimental slave narratives written by either the former slaves by themselves, or by white abolitionists were like rubbing salt in the wound in terms of representing blacks as helpless and dependent individuals in need; however, contrary to the racial stereotypes and overly sentimental blacks, actual black folks were smart and strong enough to deal with the problems they faced and skilled at using the tongue as a weapon in expressing themselves. Therefore, in order to represent the Truth about blacks and to revive the new spirit, which would be the new horizon for the New Negro, they turned their face to "The Negro Farthest Down," presenting real black folk life in all its aspects, and they promoted a new approach to racial self-expression. The writers of the same opinion contributed to the

compiled work of *The New Negro* under the leadership of Alain Locke. The complied anthology both gave a name to the New Negro Movement and led the way; however, even though The New Negro set off toward the same horizon that Locke rendered in his essay "The New Negro," they fell into a division of opinion in further years and the path they followed differed as time went by.

The new spirits of the Harlem Renaissance were of the same opinion about reclaiming their African Heritage, but how they would depict black identity in their works caused bitter criticism and distinctly different forms of representation. This chapter deals with the comparison of Zora Neale Hurston's works with the works of The New Negro literati like Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Marita Bonner in terms of representing blacks in literature.

In his essay "The New Negro," Locke states that a new Negro spirit is awake, and with the new psychology, a metamorphosis will take place in Negro works: "For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life" (Locke, "The New Negro" 3). This metamorphosis, however, would not be very fast, since the Old Negro, dealing with the bitter sufferings of slavery and the cruelty to which they were exposed on the plantation, became a "myth" rather than a "man": "His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality" (4). Slave narratives like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and *My Bondage and My Freedom* by Frederick Douglass are works that established the horizon for an earlier generation of American blacks in the direct shadow of slavery and dealing with the challenges and possibilities of claiming freedom for the race. As such, they

wrote in a voice borrowed from the "metropolitan" speaker from the center of power. Their language was patterned on that of white authors. Jacobs, for example, uses many of the tropes characteristic of the popular seduction novel in order to enlist her audience's sympathy in the plight of the slave girl:

> And now, *reader* (emphasis is mine), I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation. (Jacobs 59-60)

These narratives were certainly influential in the abolition of slavery, since they presented how slaves suffered and how slavery left deep wounds in their psychology, but as Locke stresses, these slave narratives promoted unjust stereotypes of blacks and they became set figures of historical fiction needing to be kept down in their place and helped up. Certainly, Locke does not overlook the significance of slave narratives in setting the ground for the future, but what he wants to achieve is a "spiritual emancipation" from their mythical and sentimental form of representation;

therefore, in his essay, he claims that the New Negro should shake off the sentimentality and psychology of inferiority, and he should get free from the unjust stereotypes, forced upon him: “It is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts” (Locke, “The New Negro” 5).

Thus, under the leadership of Locke, the New Negro disengaged with the old epoch of philanthropic instruction leading toward sentimental and protest writing, and turned his new face towards a new horizon, featuring the figure of the migrating peasant. The migrant black peasant, or the "man farthest down" would constitute the basis for the works of the new race radicals, since he was instrumental in establishing a new life despite all the difficulties and vain efforts in the South. Thus, in a sense the new approach brought about the reversal of leadership: “In a real sense it is the rank and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following. A transformed and transforming psychology permeates the masses” (7). To gain cultural recognition and a healthier race pride, the culture of the folk was to be raised to the level of art and freed from hatred and the old sentimental interest.

The gifted New Negro would mold a brand new American attitude, and he would be a collaborator and participant in American civilization, which would also prove a considerable improvement in race relations. The new black character that was free from self-pity and disdain took his place in the new works of the black literati. Instead of being caricatured in stereotypes, he was depicted with self-pride, which incited a curiosity and an urge to study him: “In the intellectual realm a renewed and keen curiosity is replacing the recent apathy; the Negro is being carefully studied, not just talked about and discussed. In art and letters, instead of being wholly caricatured, he is being seriously portrayed and painted” (Locke, “New Negro” 9).

Indeed, they paved the way in creating a black identity defined by culture rather than politics, but the change Locke promoted, or promised, took a different form in the progress of time, which would cause a great dispute between Hurston and Locke and led to mutual bitter criticism of each other. Locke was in favor of the aesthetics of folk culture, but only within the aesthetic rules of the canon, to which Hurston strictly objected. For instance, they were in contention about the structures of Negro spirituals. There were lots of shows where Negro spirituals were performed by famous black singers, but none of them met the expectation of Hurston, because "They were highly flavored with Bach and Brahms, and Gregorian chants, but why drag them in? It seemed to me a determined effort to squeeze all of the rich black juice out of the songs and present a sort of musical octoroon to the public" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 280). As an author, she was aware that she was not a singer, and was not seeking a reputation in the singing field, but as an anthropologist and a black person growing up in black culture, she knew how real spirituals sounded and felt. The new spirituals, which she called "Neo-Spirituals," were in the form and structure of classical white music. They were just "Beautiful songs and arrangements but going under the wrong titles" (279).

The representation of folk materials and of blacks Alain Locke favored did not celebrate the real and natural rural type of the African American. For example, Locke used spirituals as an example of folk material, but the way they were performed on the concert stages was lacking the characteristics of folk songs performed at black churches: "But on the concert stage. I always heard songs called spirituals sung and applauded as Negro music, and I wondered what would happen if a white audience ever heard a real spiritual. To me, what the Negroes did in Macedonia Baptist Church was finer than anything that any trained composer had

done to the folk songs" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 172)**.** As Hurston explains in her essay "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," the folk songs do not have a fixed structure, but "unceasing variations." They do not stay long in their first form. In each congregation, there can be considerable change, since the congregation does not conform to any fixed rules as in concert singing.

Moreover, "The harmony of the true spiritual is not regular. The dissonances are important and not to be ironed out by the trained musician" (Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo- Spirituals") The value of spontaneity, of improvisation, characteristic of all black verbal arts, cannot be reproduced in a musical performance that includes written orchestration. The free sense of play should be embodied in both form and performance. Spontaneous variations, "riffing," are as important in black musical performance as it is in the skillful use of language. In brief, Locke and Hurston were of one mind about using folk material, but they differed in the way it was to be used. In the very early days of the New Negro Movement, Hurston was enthusiastic about the **"**metamorphosis" to which Locke refers in his essay, but as time goes by, their perception of **"**metamorphosis" differed; thus, they engaged the artistic horizon facing black artists in different ways.

Even though Hurston differs on the use of formal structure, she expects the black artist to focus on *Beauty* as Locke suggests, to appreciate these values and to use them in their narratives. One of the hallmarks of Hurston's horizon is the notion of leaving the experience of slavery behind. The "Watcher" in the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* signifies upon Frederick Douglass, depicting himself in *Bondage and Freedom* as a black man enslaved in his thoughts. For Hurston, dealing with the issue of slavery does not serve the purpose of the Truth in representing blacks in the Arts; therefore, for instance, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she

does not offer Nanny a pulpit, from which she can speak. Nanny is used as a metaphor signifying the slave narratives of which Hurston disapproves:

> She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138)

Thus, Nanny parallels authors like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs who deal with outdated slavery issues: "But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps" (138).

Indeed, almost all her writings, Hurston lays emphasis on the importance of black expressions and folk culture, and encourages the black artist to focus on them instead of grief. According to her, African heritage is an asset that completes the 'African American people;' thus, her works are heavy with a great body of African American folklore representing her ethnicity, but not racial sufferings: "I see no reason to keep my eyes fixed on the dark years of slavery and Reconstruction" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 254). Instead of the profound effects of slavery, she rather focuses on her expeditions and research, the significance of which we appreciate and comprehend better today- and she keeps herself busy by sharpening her oyster knife: "I'm not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all […] No I do not weep at the world- I'm too busy sharpening my oyster knife" (Hurston, "How It Feels"). In other words, she sharpens her pen and processes "the pearls in the oysters" found in Florida, Bahamas, Hawaii and Jamaica, which shines out through the pages of her works.

Similar to Hurston, younger writers like Wallace Thurman, who was Hurston's close friend from the Niggerati Manor, and Marita Bonner were of the same opinion about weeping for the past. In his article called "Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life," published in 1928, Thurman argues that there were a few literature magazines aiming at offering an independent pulpit for blacks to express themselves, but they were supported by the philanthropic organizations and they rather promoted race prejudice. Black journals like *Opportunity* and *The Crisis* just became a weeping pulpit for the black intellectuals whom Thurman compares with the weeping prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament:

> In the past there have been only a few sporadic and inevitably unsuccessful attempts to provide the Negro with an independent magazine of literature and thought. Those magazines which have lived throughout a period of years have been organs of some philanthropic organization whose purpose was to fight the more virulent manifestations of race prejudice. The magazines themselves have been pulpits for alarmed and angry Jeremiahs spouting fire and venom or else weeping and moaning as if they were either predestined or else unable to do anything else (Thurman, *The Collected Writings* 216).

It is a fact that in the course of the Harlem Renaissance these periodicals played a very significant role for the black artist in establishing an aesthetic horizon, or goal, but as Thurman stresses, they also offered a weeping pulpit, which the younger black generation strictly opposed. As for Marita Bonner, whose works intervene between the class and gender issues of black females like Hurston's but with some individual differences, she shared the same opinion on the haunted memories of slavery, grief and anger. In her prominent essay, "On Being Young- a

Woman- and Colored," she touches on anger that is an impediment on the way to the horizon, or to their advancement. According to her, being angry all the time and trying to get revenge against white people will not bring any inner peace; on the contrary, it will ossify their way of thinking, which will limit their understanding:

> You long to explode and hurt everything white; friendly; unfriendly. But you know that you cannot live with a chip on your shoulder even if you can manage a smile around your eyes- without getting steely and brittle and losing the softness that makes you a woman.
>
> For chips make you bend, you lose your poise, your balance, and the chip gets into you. The real you. You get hard
>
> …And many things in you can ossify…
>
> And you know, being a woman, you have to go about it gently and quietly to find out and to discover just what is wrong. Just what can be done. (Bonner, "On Being" 111)

Thus, having "chip on their shoulder" will cause them to lose their poise and forget who really they are. Instead, they will be overpowered by a malignant thought ruining the rest of their lives and preventing them from viewing their horizon. Thus, it requires finding a gentle way to discover what to do. As Bonner suggests "You must sit quietly without a chip… But quiet; quiet like Buddha- who, brown like I am- sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing …Draw understanding into yourself" (112). It is quite obvious that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jeannie carries out similar tactics. She does not show her anger, but rather sits entirely sure of herself and quietly as Buddha. She makes summertime out of her lonesomeness: "Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen.

She had an inside and outside now and suddenly she knew how not to fix them" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112-113). I propose that the "inside and outside" refers to Hurston's feather- bed tactics, which helps her to hide her message within her narratives but offering something else on the surface**.**

When blacks lived in Africa, they had a shining culture; however, when they were taken to America they were to take up a new life and identity formed by the white master. Their African side had to be destroyed or hidden so that there would be enough room for the new slave identity; thus the black complexion became a justification for whites to form a new slave identity; however, some were able to keep their verbal arts, stories, musical forms, food ways, dress etc. Most importantly, in terms of narration and literature they were able to retain the African trickster figure "Esu" and generate the rhetoric of Signifyin(g).

The slaves in the West Indies were much more fortunate than many African Americans, since they were able to practice their customs more openly. The Slave Acts of 1820 enabled the slaves in West Indies to have rights and a more democratic life compared to that of American-born blacks, who were the minority in America. The reason American-born blacks were unable to publicly practice their inherited African customs points to the different slavery experiences they underwent. The very fact that in the West Indies the majority of the population was black offered them a social environment where they could cherish their customs and traditions (Light 38).

On the other hand, the lives of American–born slaves were kept under control by the slaveholders having mansions overlooking the shanties of the black slaves. Even the emancipation of slaves did not save African Americans from being swept aside in the community, which would cause for some black people an inferiority complex that would be a significant issue that black intellectuals would engage in

during the Harlem Renaissance. The experience they went through drove them to practice their traditions covertly, and to synthesize a unique African American culture in North America.

Places like Polk Country, Florida and the West Indies were places where collective African Heritage could be preserved in its earlier forms, which were exposed to less transformation. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston signifies upon the purpose of her folklore expeditions with the metaphor of the "jewel down inside herself." She states that God had created the black man with a great talent for singing and shining, but they were subject to assimilation by the force of the white master under the conditions of slavery; however, even though their culture was characterized by some as covered with "mud," which, I suggest, refers to using the black complexion as an justification to force a new slave identity. Thanks to the Harlem Renaissance they had a chance to shake off the mud and shine out the jewel inside:

> She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market-place to sell. Been set for still-bait. When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks make them hunt for one another, but the mud is deaf and dumb. Like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 139).

Although black souls were replaced with subservient souls and the glittering black culture was covered with mud, as Hurston metaphorically signifies, blacks were able to reveal the sparks within owing to the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston uses a lot of black expressions that stand as sparks and make her work distinctive from other works; for instance, "no breath-and-britches, (27)." "How come he couldn't hit that box a lick or two?"(232) Sam Watson, you'se mah fish."(117) "Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different from a coon hide" (19).

Moreover, the most cited scene when Janie raises her voice and humiliates her husband in front of his friends constitutes a perfect example of the dozens, which is a black contest of verbal art. Janie, who is excluded from the porch talks, shows that she is also skilled at Signifying: "You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (122-123).

Hurston is quite successful in using these expressions since she was familiar with them since her childhood. When she becomes a writer she gathers her findings from her folklore expeditions and puts them in the market of publishing in Harlem to sell. The market place is the publishing marketplace, where she sells her works and earns money for living. Her findings -which are as precious as pearls- are her source of pride, and she proudly uses them in her works. The trope of Signifyin(g) she uses in her works acts as a "still-bait" for readers to grab. As Hermese E. Roberts specifies, the aspect of Signifyin(g) is "making fun of" as a way of "baiting" or "boasting" (cit. in Gates, 68). The man covered with mud refers to the black man who is skilled at Signifyin(g). The black man is deaf and mute and cannot communicate with another unless the other knows the sign language, or the trope of Signifyin(g). Therefore, like all those "other tumbling mud-balls", or the other black

intellectuals endeavoring to show the sparks within blacks, Hurston, has to show her shine to not only America but to the whole world, and she is well aware that all these little sparks will light her way under the new horizon.

According to Hurston, the black artist should display all those sparks, folk culture and Negro expressions, in his works in order that he might represent blacks at their best. There were (are) so many distinguishing characteristics between black vernacular and standard English, which constitute the beauty of black art. In her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expressions," she explains that blacks, who also spoke English, did not introduce any African words to English, "but it is equally true that he has made over a great part of the tongue to his liking and has had his revision accepted by the ruling class" (62).

The way African Americans express themselves differs from standard English: "Language is like money. In primitive communities actual goods, however bulky, are bartered for what one wants. This finally evolves into coin, the coin being not real wealth but a symbol of wealth. Still later even coin is abandoned for legal tender, and still later for cheques in certain usages" (Hurston "Characteristic" 61). While standard English detaches ideas from direct experience of the world, black people have vivid metaphor to detach the ideas: "Now the people with highly developed languages have words for detached ideas. That is legal tender. 'That-which-we-squat-on' has become 'chair.' 'Groan-causer' has evolved into 'spear,' and so on. Some individuals even conceive of the equivalent of cheque words, like 'ideation' and 'pleonastic (61).

On the other hand, the black person exchanges his idea with descriptive words as actual goods being bartered for another meeting the need. Furthermore, "Everything is illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language

and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics;" For instance, instead of simply saying "the sun rose" Hurston states "All the little stars crept back into heaven and the sun rose" (Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* 26). She describes the disappearance of stars and sunrise figuratively and creates a picture of the sunrise on the reader's mind. In black vernacular, the relationship between action and the idea bears a great significance.

In black vernacular English words are revised and reinterpreted, which makes Signifyin(g) the trope of tropes. As Gates emphasizes, "Her typology of black oral narration, in addition to "picture" and "action" words, consists of what she calls 'the will to adorn,' by which she means the use of densely figurative language, the presence of 'revision,' which she defines as '[making] over a great part of the [English] tongue,' and the use of 'metaphor and simile,' 'the double-descriptive,' and 'verbal nouns'" (Gates 198). When Hurston likens words in black speech to hieroglyphics, she refers to "thought pictures" as she does in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to" (81). All these figurative descriptions are part of adornment of black vernacular and characterize the richness of African American rhetoric.

In her short story "The Gilded-Six-Bits," Hurston uses various types of coins as the central metaphor in addressing the issues of real value and authenticity. The luxurious feather bed she presents in this fiction is a comfortable lounging place for readers of all backgrounds. It borrows the tropes of the coming of age narrative and a structure of Edenic lapse and redemption. The story features a young newly-married couple who are innocently unaware of the riches they enjoy while living a plain and modest life. In addition to the gifts Joe buys Missie May out of his honestly-earned

silver dollars, a chief source of their wealth is the playful and rich use of language that gives them pleasure as it works in two directions. Their "banter … pretended to deny affection but in reality flaunted it" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 88).

A second form of currency is presented in the form of "gold" money sported by the showy Otis D. Slemmons. The pursuit of these greater riches introduces false values and throws the marriage into crisis, as Missie May is willing to risk adultery with Slemmons to get the gold for Joe. As it turns out, the gold money is fake and the value of the marriage comes to be worth less than when Joe's silver dollars and the "kisses" it purchased were the measurement of its value. Only the birth of a son declared "legitimate" redeems the marriage and returns it to the silver standard. In fact, Joe and Missie May, now adults and parents themselves, have increased the value of their marriage. Joe now throws fifteen silver dollars in the door: an increase from nine.

Hurston's story may be applied to young black people in general, those belonging to a generation that confronted a new historical horizon in the 1920s and 1930s. What values should such a rising generation hold? Clearly, the humble values of everyday folk life are the most desirable. These include the playful verbal exchanges that add savor to the relationship. Exotic ambitions introduced from strange places that are apparently more exalted temporarily reduce the marriage of the young couple to just a show, one that is false and empty.

"The Gilded Six-Bits" may also have more particular resonances that refer to the aesthetic choices of young black writers. When Joe returns from work on Saturday afternoon, he throws silver dollars through the doorway, and he and Missie May perform a ritual of foreplay. Based on my argument that marriage represents performing art, I propose that the silver coins and the ritual together signify upon the

way the black literati use the language and express themselves in literature. Sharon L. Jones states that "The title refers to money as a commodity of exchange, and the term 'gilded' suggests the illusion of prosperity and the precarious nature of the aspiring black bourgeoisie" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 86). The gilded coin represents an illusion that should be avoided by the aspiring black bourgeoisie.

I read this story as the illusion of black artist in claiming the true representation in art. In other words, a work written within the canon's language and not adding vernacular revision, or sparks, would be a work written in legal tender; thus it would not bear the *wealth* of the vernacular, but just function as the symbol of it. As in the story, these coins require an action such as the foreplay ritual to be completely a black work. Hurston as a writer who advocates folkways in representing black life, depicts Otis Slemmons, representing the black bourgeoisie, as a false horizon to follow; therefore, the gilded coin represents a false exchange. The works well-written in English do not render a service to exchange any black vernacular ideas. As Jones states "she worshiped a false prophet and sold herself to the highest bidder, one who paid her with false currency" (87). She is not able to barter what she expects. Therefore, the art created in accordance with the instructions and expectations of someone in power will be written in a language of gilded coins in terms of Hurston's approach, which means that the work exchanged with gilded coins will not bear any characteristics of the genuine or legitimate art of the Negro. As Hurston illustrates, black works written in golden coins, or the highly developed language of literary English, will sound like "chair" instead of "That-which-we-squat-on." Thus, works written in the canon's mode of expression are not the authentic way of representing blacks, but a "gilded" one that will prevent them from attaining their horizon.

Furthermore, in Missie May's relationship with Otis D. Slemmons, we do not see any rituals carried out between them, but just sex. In her relationship with Joe, however, they carry out rituals of foreplay before they have sex: "The two, like actors, reenact this ritual, with each person having his or her appointed role. After he throws the money in the doorway, Missie May and Joe engage in foreplay. The money serves as a type of foreplay, which anticipates Missie May's act of infidelity with Otis D. Slemmons, who also uses money to acquire power and affection from her" (Jones 86).

As Hurston emphasizes, acting out is part of black life: "Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatised. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out; unconsciously, for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 61). Even if the ritual between them is not impromptu but habitual, still it refers to real black work that is adorned with Negro characteristics. Also as Jones argues, "The ice cream becomes a metaphor for Otis D. Slemmons. Ice cream, like Otis, seems hearty and filling, yet as time passes, it melts away and lacks substance and gives no sustenance. The townspeople, like Joe, admire him for his experience in big cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Memphis, and Philadelphia and for his clothing and physical appearance" (86).

When all Hurston's works are read through, it is clearly seen that her characters often mirror others in her other works, which is a Signifying tradition: "repeated but still different." In this respect Sharon Jones claims that Missie May serves as a prototype for Janie and Otis D. Slemmons as Joe Starks. As for Otis D. Slemmons and Joe Starks, it can be argued that they are both used as a metaphor for

power, money, and class, but that Janie leaves Logan Killicks, and that Missie May has adultery with Otis do not serve the same purpose. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, marriages signify upon the literary tradition and race representation of three generations in art, while in "The Gilded Six Bits," the marriage and relationships refer to the commitment of the black artist to the task of true representation of blacks in the course of the Harlem Renaissance. When we take Hurston's linking of the open dramatization of sexual performance with the verbal art of the "Negro" into consideration, it can be argued that the disloyalty of Missie May is rather a temporary betrayal of the younger black artist who perceives a different horizon than do older black intellectuals.

That the younger black generation deals with its African Heritage, however, does not meet all expectations, since it is involved in a clash of ideas concerning how to use the collective African Heritage, whether in the form of "high art" or "humble folk art." One of the prominent essays of the Harlem Renaissance dealing with the true representation of blacks is "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" by Langton Hughes. In this essay, he criticizes the "Nordicized Negro Intelligentsia," who conform to the canon's traditions and feel an urge to write just as whites do: "But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the black race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (Hughes, "The Negro Artist"). According to Hughes, this urge stands as a mountain obscuring the horizon, and preventing black writers from progressing beyond.

Furthermore, although Hughes does not name the "Nordicized Negro" in his essay, it is quite clear that he signifies upon especially Countee Cullen, who Du Bois

gives as an example of a talented black poet in his speech at the annual conference of NAACP. According to Du Bois, Cullen is a perfect representative of the younger black intelligentsia since he prefers to depict his African heritage in the idiom of the literary canon, which makes him equal to the canon's poets. Even though Cullen's poems deal with African heritage in theme, he uses the Shakespearean sonnet and other traditional forms in his poems: "Stylistically, Cullen's poetry is conventional, relying on the lyrics, the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms, the Spenserian stanza, and the ballad" (Haralson 158). It is clearly seen that producing art on the level of the canon is the criteria to perceive the new horizon. On the other hand, for Hughes, black art should have more vivid colors than white poetry, and should not let these colors fade away in the canon's worn out standards; thus, he subtly criticizes Countee Cullen, who subconsciously believes that white standardization is the best:

> One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself (Hughes, "The Negro Artist").

According to Hughes, the urge towards whiteness stands as a big obstacle in creating real Negro art, or negotiating the artistic horizon, and it will prevent the Negro artist from discovering both himself and his people; therefore, black intellectuals should not conform to the standards set by the whites. They should be proud of their race and their values, and they should not be afraid of who they are: "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro--and beautiful!" They should not hesitate to "express [their] individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame"

(Hughes, "The Negro Artist"). Then, the black artist would be spiritually emancipated, and have enough courage to climb to the top of the mountain standing in the way of his Negro art.

The Negro artist should also not forget that when he enriches his art with his color, he would still have his own individuality in American multi-cultural society, which Hurston also advocates. Hurston and Hughes were very much soul mates in terms of having the same approach in representing blacks, even though they were in contention over writing a black folk play *Mule Bone* in later years. In other words, they parted ways and sought different directions to the horizon.

Another work dealing with the "Nordicized Negro Intelligentsia" is *Infants of Spring*, which is a satiric work of Wallace Thurman. In his novel, Thurman narrates a group of black intellectuals living in "Manor House" in Harlem. In fact, the characters of the novel signify upon the prominent figures of Harlem Renaissance, such as Alain Locke, Wallace Thurman (himself), Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Carl Van Vechten, Richard Bruce Nugent, Aaron Douglas, W.E.B. DuBois etc. Thurman makes his criticism about himself and other Niggeratti- the word coined by Thurman and Hurston- under the fictional names in his novel. The satiric novel opens with a stanza from *Hamlet*, constructing the tittle:

> The canker galls the infants of the spring
> Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
> And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
> Contagious blastments are most imminent. (cit. in Thurman *Infants of Spring* 6)

He criticizes the New Negro for conforming to the rules of white standard English and ironically warns them with a stanza from *Hamlet*, a significant work of canonical

literature. In *Hamlet*, when Leartes makes his farewell speech, he warns his sister Ophelia that Hamlet's affection for Ophelia is a temporary lust of youth, and she should not take it seriously: "Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood, A violet in the youth of primy nature, Forward, not permenant, sweet, not lasting, The parfume and suppliance of a minute" (Shakespeare 59-60)."

Similarly, Thurman believes that the interest of the whites in black art during the course of the Harlem Renaissance is something as temporary as Hamlet's affection for Ophelia, and it will eventually fade away. The art of younger black artists is just a curiosity that will not last forever: "We're a curiosity…even to ourselves" (Thurman, *Infants of Spring* 221). Therefore, not only does Thurman criticize the Harlem Renaissance, but also he warns younger writers against the temporary concern of whites. As Ophelia needs to be careful and keep her love under control, the younger black artists should not allow themselves to be the target or the victim of this lust. They are the innocent youth with the highest vulnerability on the grounds that their artistic vigor and zeal are most susceptible to being abused and damaged by the whites' temporary curiosity.

As Shakespeare states, worms prevent flowers from blossoming and, in this regard, the baby blooms end up with the worst damage. Certainly, one of the reasons Thurman makes a reference to Shakespeare is just to needle the black artist who mimics Shakespearean language: Cullen. It is early modern English, which is not even used by contemporary poets or writers. Thus, it seems that the horizon the black artist perceives does not prove any advancement for him.

When we compare Thurman's criticism and Hurston's, we see both similarities and differences. As for the similarities, they both agree that black expressions and rhetoric are completely different from standard English and these

values should be emphasized in black works; however, apart from satire, or needling and signifying, Hurston's works are much more rich in black expressions, including references to folk tales and characters, black vernacular language, rich metaphors, signifying, the dozens and all the colors of folk life. Moreover, one might also argue that Thurman criticizes the black literati in their Bohemian environment whereas Hurston criticizes the same literati with folk characters that seem to have nothing to do with Harlem and that Bohemian life, but her characters in general are inspired by real Harlem literati and, in contrast to urban artists, they are depicted as black folks who are as skilled at narration as the ones in Harlem.

Returning to Thurman's Shakespearian critique of Harlem, Ophelia is torn between her lover and family, and she cannot reconcile their unquestionably contradictory demands. No matter how hard she tries to maintain inner equilibrium, her dilemma and the mistreatment of Hamlet lead her to sheer madness. Similarly, the young black intellectuals are quite likely to become depressed due to the conflicting demands of writing in the mode of high art. Furthermore, if these demands become unquestionable ones forced by the white publishers and black leaders, talented black youth are destined to be torn between their literary goals and those forced demands; thus fail to meet the challenge of the literary horizon. In other words, the forced demands prevent them from visualizing their horizon, and lead them toward submitting to the views of others.

It is a fact that the younger generation, specifically the ones who contributed to *Fire!! Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists,* wanted to explore edgy issues like interracial relationships, homosexuality, bisexuality or color prejudice opposed the demands of black leaders, since they would rather have seen decent blacks in black artistic works. In his autobiography, Hughes states the goal of Younger Negro Artists

is “to burn up a lot of old, dead conventional ideas of the past, épater le bourgeois into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us an outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing, the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*- the first two being house organs of inter-racial organizations and the latter being God knows what” (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 235-236).

Hughes clearly states that the horizon designated in these black magazines is not meant for the younger generation. Similarly, Thurman deals with the same issue in his novel and warns the younger generation about misperceiving, thus, mistaking a horizon that has nothing to do with the one they yearn for. Therefore, in *Infants of Spring*, Thurman narrates his disapproval of the artistic endeavors of the Niggerati, who romanticize Harlem and the blacks who are overwhelmed with the expectation and demands for “high art.” According to him, the featured writers of Harlem are the outcome of the curiosity that came into leaf by the accepted glory of the Harlem Renaissance and are likely to be forgotten in later years. He stresses his appreciation for Jean Toomer, the leading writer of that era, and claims that the plenitude of black works will not help black writers to climb up the social ladder due to the fact that the older black writers, such as Du Bois, are obsessed with propaganda- which will lead them nowhere-, and the younger ones are lost and drunken most of the time in the bohemian life of Harlem. Moreover, as in the slavery years they work hard and produce, but the white publishers get all the benefits. It is just intellectual exploitation in the name of renaissance:

> I don’t expect to be a great writer. I don’t think the Negro race can produce one now, any more than can America. I know of only one Negro who has the elements of greatness, and that’s Jean Toomer.

> The rest of us are merely journeymen, planting seeds for someone else to harvest. We all get sidetracked sooner or later. The older ones become wrapped by propaganda. We younger ones are mired in decadence… None of us seem able to rise above our environment. We're a curiosity…even to ourselves (Thurman, *Infants of Spring* 221).

In short, Thurman does not see the Harlem Renaissance as a glory. It is rather a curiosity, even to black artists themselves.

According to Thurman, the most praiseworthy black work written in the course of the Harlem Renaissance is *Cane*, by Jean Toomer, because it was one of the first published books depicting black individuals and their and culture authentically. It rejects the old stereotypes and caricatured images and instead depicts self-reliant individuals; however, it does not get the praise it deserves: "*Cane* by Jean Toomer is the most unheralded and artistic book yet written by an American Negro, the only one so far which can sincerely be considered as a contribution to the high places of the nation's literature. It has had little vogue. Its author belongs to the left wing of American art and letters, and to date only the left wing critics have seemed to appreciate him. (Thurman, *Infants of Spring* 250). He is the most talented and intelligent writer, "relentlessly searching for some meaning in the meaningless universe," (Hughes, "The Negro Artist").

Thurman believes that the African Heritage, which is about to disappear, should be the essence of the Harlem Renaissance; therefore, similar to Hughes, Thurman criticizes the "Nordicized Negro Intelligentsia" with the characters Eustace and DeWitt. Eustace, for instance, does not want to sing spirituals, because he does

not relate himself with his African heritage, and he does not agree that every black person must dedicate himself to black values:

> "But I won't sing spirituals," Eustace declared…
>
> "Why won't you sing them?" Samuel asked.
>
> "They are your heritage. You shouldn't be ashamed of them."
>
> "What makes you think they're my heritage, Sam? I have no relationship with the people who originated them."
>
> "…Aren't there enough people already spurting those bastard bits of doggerel? Must every Negro singer dedicate his life to the crooning of slave songs?" (Thurman, *Infants of Spring*107)

Raymond tries to explain to Eustace that since spirituals produce the art of the Negro, it should not be considered an inferior art, but he fails because Eustace is so blinded by an inferiority complex, which Raymond is conversant with. Raymond, (or Thurman) does not have any sympathy for those who distance themselves from anything that has to do with their African Heritage. For him it is silly, unintelligent and indefensible to deny who you are, so in the novel DeWitt constitutes a much more significant character that Thurman parodies.

In one of the social gatherings of the New Negroes, Dr. Parker (Alain Locke) suggests that the Negro artist should go back their racial roots to create works based on African tradition. DeWitt (Countee Cullen) agrees that "The young Negro artist must go back to his pagan heritage of inspiration and to the old masters for form" (236); however, his words create a mental picture of the black poet who conjures up Africa in his mind with a Bible nearby on his desk, which is to say that their work contains black matters depicted with the norms of whites:

> Raymond could not suppress a snort. For DeWitt's few words had given him a vivid mental picture of that poet's creative hours-eyes on a page of Keats, fingers on typewriter, mind frantically conjuring African scenes. And there would of course be a Bible nearby. (236).

What DeWitt refers to as "the old masters" is represented by Raymond as a volume of Keats' poetry and The Bible in order to satirize how this black artist considers Western literary classics as a reference source to consult. Whatever is suggested in those works is regarded as "law," or divine commandments conveyed in the Bible. Briefly, through his character Ray, Thurman expresses his opinion of what is necessary for the renaissance to succeed. Moreover, another member of New Younger Negro generation Claude McKay also deals with the same issue in his novel *Banjo*:

> We educated Negroes are talking about a racial renaissance. And I wonder how we're going to get it… If this renaissance we are talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we will have to get down to our racial roots to create it … but you're a lost crowd, you educated Negroes, and you will only find yourself in the roots of your own people. You can't choose your models the haughty-minded educated white youths of a society living on its imperial conquests" (McKay, *Banjo* 201).

It is necessary that the Niggerati get down to their roots to negotiate the historical horizon. Because they had a completely different experience from whites, the new generation of the Niggerati was able to express an authentic black experience rooted in black life by way of a different horizon designated.

Marita Bonner, mentioned earlier, is another important member of the

younger generation of black intellectuals. She bases her horizon on mainly female black identity and the problems of the black women in her works. Although she did not live in Harlem as the other black intellectuals did, she left her mark on the Harlem Renaissance through her few but compendious works. Her association with Georgia Douglas Johnson's Saturday night gatherings in Washington DC plays an essential role in connecting her allegorical writings to the ones produced in Harlem to depict and represent blacks in art**.**

Similar to Langston Hughes, she deals with the racial mountain as an allegory in her prominent play *The Purple Flower,* which won first prize of the writing contest of *Crisis* in 1928. The play constitutes an example of expressionistic women's drama allegorizing African-American liberation and resisting gender discrimination. In *The Purple Flower,* Bonner satirizes black individuals who are trying to reach the purple flower, symbolizing the horizon, or the goal of the black intellectuals. The uncommon characters, indeed, refer to black intellectuals, striving to ascend the social ladder. Bonner, who is familiar with German literature, uses "blue-flower" to signify upon the blacks yearning for an equal life in American society. The German writer Friedrich von Hardenberg, also known as Novalis, uses the "blue flower" as symbol of hope, desire and beauty in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen.* Later the symbol becomes an emblem used in German Romanticism: "…the blue flower of Novalis and German Romanticism symbolizes longing, desire, and the search for artistic perfection" (Johnson *The Memory Factory* 85-86). I suggest that Bonner uses the same symbol, but changes the color to purple, which signifies the dark black skin: "Purple reflects the dark skin of the African American" (Biernacki 140) In his poem "Song of the Son," Toomer also uses the same connotation for black slaves: "O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums" (Toomer

14). In *The Purple Flower,* the characters are not ordinary black individuals but symbolic characters referring to the different generations of black intellectuals and to the white race; White Devils, Old Lady, Old Man, Young Us, Cornerstone, Average, Finest Blood etc.

Similarly Hurston signifies upon the different generations of black intellectuals in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but the difference is that while Bonner deals with the pursuit of the horizon, she puts a great emphasis on race; however, in Hurston's novel, just black characters accompany Janie on her journey to the horizon. She makes her criticism based on black individuals, not the race. While Bonner does not include any white characters in the dialogues, but puts a great emphasis on the existence of the white as the Devil, probably, to refer to the heavily influenced mind of the black artist by racial prejudice. "The White Devil" stands as a big impediment in the way of their advancement when she expresses the hot debates between race leaders, but we should bear in mind that Bonner is not hostile to the white race. She depicts the white race as "WHITE DEVIL" with a great emphasis to needle propagandistic literary endeavors.

I assume that Bonner is of the same opinion with Hurston and she criticizes that racial promotion alone will not help the black artist to reach "the purple flower," or the horizon she yearns for. Certainly, Du Bois does not call whites "white devils," and does not expect the black artist to call them that. It is quite possible that Bonner points out that too much emphasis on race could nourish hatred against whites. As she argues in her essay, it is not possible live "with a chip on your shoulder" and too much anger and hatred will just hurt everything around; either friendly or unfriendly. Moreover, the contention between the leaders prevents them from reaching "the purple flower," or the horizon they yearn for:

OLD LADY refers to Booker T. Washington, who advocates that blacks should learn vocational skills to work and earn money, in contrast to Du Bois, who believes that an academic education is a must in their advancement:

OLD LADY: But that's what the Leader told us to do. "Work," he said. "Show them you know how." As if hundred years of slavery had not showed them!

YOUNG US: What's the need of working if doesn't get you anywhere? …

AVARAGE. The Us will if they get the right leaders.

THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN- CORNERSTONE: Leaders! Leasers' …

AVARAGE. But they ain't led us anywhere!

CORNERSTONE. But that is not their fault! If one of them gets up and says, "Do this," one of the Us will sneak up behind him and knock him down and stand up holler, "Do that," and then he himself gets knocked down and we still sit in the valley and knock down and drag out!

AVARAGE. What is the need of talking!

CORNERSTONE. Better than not talking! Somebody might say something after a while

AVARAGE. Oh you all make me tired! Talk-talk-talk! And the flower is still up on the hillside!

OLD LADY: Yes and the White Devils are still talking about keeping the Us away from it, too. (Bonner, *The Purple Flower* 193-194)

Indeed, when the striking names of the characters are taken into account, as Esther B. Sullivan argues, the play seems a direct response to the call Du Bois made for black theatre in *Crisis* in 1926: "In what would seem a direct response to Du Bois's call for a new black theater, Bonner dramatizes the story of 'us' and propagandistically represents the struggle of a people oppressed by the institutionalization of racism. Without apology and in the boldly literal form of allegory, the play sets forth a context of unmitigated racial uprising, and calls for its audience to position themselves for the radical change to come" (cit. in Sullivan 366).

Now that "Negro Art" needs to be stripped of the stereotypes, black theatre must be "about us," "for us," "by us," and "near us" (cit. in Sullivan 366). It is clearly seen Du Bois portrays a racial horizon that is elegantly formed; however, when we consider Bonner's reflection of "The Talented Tenth" in the dialogue above, it raises a question whether it is an allusion to Du Bois or not. The whole play and the title suggest that the dispute among the black leaders leads them nowhere. Furthermore, their endeavor in climbing the social ladder is just "a collection of 'blue-flower' theories" (Bonner, "On Being 109), or unattainable dreams.

According to Bonner, the worm-eaten old ideas of Western culture that the black leaders advocate do not serve as the real dream that they should yearn for: "If they have not discovered how to use their accumulation of facts, they are useless to you in Their world" (111). Thus, instead of trying to be just like them, as Hurston warns, they should use their own culture they were born with:

> OLD MAN. There are the pipes of Pan that every Us is born with. Play on that. Soothe him-lure him- make him yearn for the pipe. Even

> a White Devil will soften at music. He'll come out, and he only come to try to get the pipe from you. (Bonner, *The Purple Flower* 198)

In her essay "On Being Young- a Woman- and Colored," she also refers to the leaders as the ones using the younger generation as a stepladder in their advancement: "Milling around like live fish in a basket. Those at the bottom crushed into a sort of stupid apathy by the weight of those on top. Those on top leaping, leaping; leaping to scale the sides; to get out" (Bonner, "On Being" 110). Bonner is aware that places like Harlem are areas where black people are concentrated, but that they are "Cut off, flung together, shoved aside in a bundle because of color" (109) does not indicate that they all have common sense and thoughts. They do not share the same belief in representing blacks. What is worse is that the leaders, or the Talented Tenth, disregard the thoughts that are not congruent with theirs. Therefore, the younger New Negroes lead their own way and they even collaborate in founding their own platform with the literary magazine *Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*. Even though their attempt remained as one single issue, it left a great mark on the Harlem Renaissance. Bonner did not collaborate in the *Fire!!,* but it is certain that she was of the same opinion about black leaders, as Thurman and Hughes and, especially, Hurston.

As for Bonner's short stories, unlike Du Bois's expectations, she rather portrays women who are not strong, independent, victorious and individualized. She is a well-educated woman, but she does not associate her own experiences with her works. She maintains realistic social issues engaged in violence and poverty in multi-ethnic Chicago daily life, and refers to the hazards caused by being both black and a woman. As Musser specifies, Bonner represents the impediments restricting the advancement of black women when they asked for education: "In particular, several

of Bonner's short stories reflect the often overpowering barriers that African women faced when they attempted to follow the Harlem Renaissance's call for self-improvement through education" (Musser 73).

According to Bonner, black youth are inexperienced, but they have high spirits and courage to seize the day like the "kitten in a catnip field" with other animals around. "Somehow you feel like a kitten in a sunny catnip field that sees sleek, plump brown field mice and yellow baby chicks sitting coyly, side by side, under each leaf. A desire to dash three or four ways seizes you. That's Youth" (Bonner, "On Being" 109). They dream about a world where there are no different ranks between either races or genders; however, by the time they make progress they are obliged to develop skills to endure life: "But you know that things learned need testing-acid-testing- to see if they are really, after all, an interwoven part of you. All your life you have heard of the debt you owe 'Your People' because you have managed to have the things they have not largely had" (109).

In her short story called "One True Love," she expresses the acid-testing dilemma of a black female's dream for education. Nora, the female character, is determined to study law, but her tiresome full-time work and color and class prejudice stand as barriers to her advancement. Furthermore, that she wants to be educated spoils the love developed between Nora and Sam, who is "a runty, bowlegged, dark brown janitor's helper… That is what Sam was to the world. And Sam was just that to Nora, too" (Bonner, "One True Love" 220). We cannot learn if they might bridge the gap between them, because the story ends with the death of Nora leaving Sam "wishing he had been elegant and wonderful to match the wonder in Nora" (227).

Thus, Bonner emphasizes that the education Du Bois advocates does not

serve the same purpose for every black individual, and as Sam states "And education ain't everything! You got to love folks more than books!" (222). She also fears that the intellectuals who are culturally above other blacks are likely to look down them and forget that once they were surrounded with the same coat of culture. A striking difference between Hurston and Bonner is the manner of portraying blacks. While Bonner depicts urban life and urban black characters having difficulties, Hurston portrays the black folks and folk life; however, since I propose that with folk life and folk characters Hurston refers to Harlem literati and intellectual life in Harlem, both writers indeed portray urban life with a great difference. While Bonner's literature expresses urban life, Hurston uses the rhetoric of Signifying and portrays a folk life based on her experience in urban settings. In other words both face towards the same horizon but the ways they follow differ.

Lastly, the other important black figure and activist helping in the formation of the horizon for the New Negro is W.E. B. Du Bois. In one of his essays "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," he deals with black identity and coins the term "double consciousness," which is "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* 5). He expresses a sudden racial consciousness that will constitute a veil shutting him out from the other students at his school: "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (4). This veil, however, does not constitute an inferiority complex for him, but rather a consciousness about the social limitations dictated by his color.

He is certainly conscious that he is both black and American. In his speech of the annual conference of NAACP held in 1926, Du Bois touches upon the talent of black people and denounces the preconceived opinion, that "blacks, who used to be slaves, do not have anything to do with art." According to him, the black man is as talented as the white man, and his work is not inferior: "But today there is coming to both the realization that the work of the black man is not always inferior. Interesting stories come to us" (Du Bois, ("Criteria of Negro Art").

It is quite interesting that Du Bois states "the black man is not always inferior," which means that he was not in favor of every black work produced by the black intellectuals, because he was in favor of Black Art that tends toward racial promotion. For him racial promotion is the Truth of the black art, and it is essential to the rise of the young black generation to be stripped of the distorted racial stereotypes that were originated by narratives of sentimental slave experiences like Jacobs's and Douglass's, white narratives and minstrel shows. According to Du Bois, whites are not able to portray the real black experience, so it was the responsibility of blacks to introduce to all of America, and hence to the world, who the real "Negro" is. For him, the way the black man perceives America was different from the white man, and it was the bounden duty of the black artist to express the 'beauty of the being black' to a white America that failed to see it.

Du Bois was a sociologist and activist who was in favor of social progress and the uplift of blacks through education, and art based on race pride would be a crucial tool for social change and progress. Therefore, he expects the black artist to use "propaganda" as the main tool in representing blacks "as human beings and not as conventional lay figures" (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* 107) and also to create works promoting the uplift of the race. It is necessary to emphasize that the

word propaganda Du Bois used had a different connotation than it has now, as Kidd and Jackson explain: “Historically, the word propaganda has held a neutral meaning that connoted persuasion” (560). Therefore, for Du Bois “all Art is propaganda and ever must be,” (Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art”) and black work should be able to persuade the people to think differently. Du Bois acknowledged that the life of black people was often “distorted and made ugly,” but “out of the evil came something of good,—the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes' social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress” (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* 10).

Similar to Hurston, Du Bois argues that the black artist should stress *Beauty* and in art, “especially the beauty of Negro life and character; its music, its dancing, its drawing and painting and the new birth of its literature” (cit. in Bloom *W. E. B. Du Bois* 43). They both believed that their art, or tongue as Hurston puts it, would be the weapon they could use in representing blacks; however, both were not pleased with the way blacks were represented due to different reasons. Therefore, they were both against the way Alain Locke led the renaissance.

As discussed earlier, Hurston was not pleased with ruining the asymmetry, one of the crucial characteristics of Negro expressions, and depicting folk material in standard English language. Du Bois, on the other hand, was not comfortable with Locke’s being captured by just Beauty but not all aspects of the life of blacks: “With one point alone I differ […]…Mr. Locke has newly been seized with the idea that *Beauty* rather than Propaganda should be the object of Negro literature and art....] If Mr. Locke’s thesis is insisted on too much it is going to turn the Negro renaissance into decadence’ (43). The only emphasis on *Beauty* would be simply art for the sake of art but not *Truth*: “We want Negro writers to produce beautiful things but we

stress the things rather than the beauty. It is Life and Truth that are important and Beauty comes to make their importance visible and tolerable…" (44).

Du Bois argued that, as artists, they were expected to face their past as people with dignity; therefore, it was the duty of the black artist to create aesthetic expression and narration dealing with the race's struggle to pursue an equal life in America. Due to the fact that art has a political and transformative role, it should be a socially committed representation, hence deal with racial politics: "Although he never explicitly said as much, he was advocating for a racially directed social realism. Du Bois was specifically interested in the role of art in the racial politics of the 20th-century US, but his writings reveal a broader theory that art is a powerful way of contesting the truth and challenging the social order" (Kidd and Jackson 555).

The horizon Du Bois sets for himself and for young black artists was to address the racial inequalities, and artistically pour out the "emotional wealth," acquired through slavery sufferings and the problems they faced, in their works. He also warns young black writers not to focus on just the good sides of black life but all, which is the "Truth" as he calls it: "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent" (Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art") The "Truth" he refers is to portray all the "Beauty" of black life and black characters with all sides of human life. Reclaiming the black identity with perfect and flawless heroes and heroines would be a critical mistake of the black artist: "We are seriously crippling Negro art and literature by refusing to contemplate any but handsome heroes, unblemished heroines and flawless defenders; we insist on being always and everywhere all right and often we ruin our cause by claiming too much and admitting

no fault" (cit. in Bloom 43). The black writer is welcome to write about any decent black individual as long as s/he is sincere and expresses the *Truth*.

In contrast to Du Bois's racial promotion, Hurston approaches the representation of race rather individualistically. "Race Consciousness," with which Hurston was familiar since her childhood, and other phrases like "Race Pride"—"Race Prejudice"—"Race Man"—"Race Solidarity" seemed her just "an imposing line of syllables, for no Negro in America is apt to forget his race" ("Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 179). She argues that there is no such thing as Race Solidarity among blacks in America, since attempts to define the nature of the black race, hence the way they represent themselves, may vary. While Du Bois expects black artists to use language in a way that directs a reader to a single meaning, Hurston prefers to express herself and blacks through Signifyin(g):

> "Race Solidarity"… is freely admitted that it does not exist among Negroes. Our so-called Race Leaders cry over it. Others accept it as a natural thing that Negroes should not remain an unmelting black knot in the body politic. Our interests are too varied. Personal benefits run counter to race lines too often for it to hold. If it did, we could never fit into the national pattern. Since the race line has never held any other group in America, why expect it to be effective with us? The upper class Negroes admit it in their own phrases. The lower class Negroes say it with a tale. (179)

Thus, Hurston and Du Bois cannot reach a common ground in terms of race. She prefers an individual approach to representing blacks in art. Focusing on race pride alone and putting every black individual in one scale is not possible. Unlike Du Bois, Hurston does not want to bear her complexion as a plea on her mind, but to

appreciate and cherish what comes along. Racial pride is, as she expresses it, "a luxury she cannot afford" (249). According to her, personal strength and courage are more important virtues than an individual's complexion. Skin color does not decide whether to praise or criticize Negro art. She celebrates the art of the Negro, since it deserves the praise, but not because it is done by a Negro artist. She believes that if she were to praise a good deed by a Negro just because of the race, she would have to feel embarrassed when a Negro did something execrable.

Rather than addressing the racial conflicts and accentuating race and race pride, Hurston offers a feather-bed, filled with cultural beauties like folk tales, the Rhetoric of Signifying and black vernacular expressions, and all these cultural values are the principal tools needing to take place in black narrations. It is quite interesting that, as Henry Louis Gates emphasizes, her language and expressions in her *Their Eyes Were Watching God* already creates a quite racial novel:

> The narrative voice Hurston created, and her legacy to Afro-American fiction, is a lyrical and disembodied yet individual voice, from which emerges a singular longing and utterance, a transcendent, ultimately racial self, extending far beyond the merely individual. Hurston realized a resonant and authentic narrative voice that echoes and aspires to the status of the impersonality, anonymity, and authority of the black vernacular tradition, a nameless, selfless tradition, at once collective and compelling, true somehow to the unwritten text of a common blackness. For Hurston, the search for a telling form of language, indeed the search for a black literary language itself, defines the search for the self (Gates 183).

Without emphasizing the *Race*, she still talks about her race, and what is more interesting is that the black female voice does not speak for just black women but for a woman of any race who goes through a self actualization. Her novel offers timeless parallel universes, one of which is black while the other is any of race. A female reader of any race can identify herself with this wonderful black female character. In other words, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* sets a perfect example of 1899 plea of W. S. Scarborough's for a great black novelist:

> Let the Negro writer of fiction make of his pen and brain all-compelling forces to treat of that which he well knows, best knows, and give it to the world with all the imaginative power possible, with all the magic touch of an artist. Let him portray the Negro's loves and hates, his hopes and fears, his ambitions, his whole life, in such a way that the world will weep and laugh over the pages, finding the touch that makes all nature kin, forgetting completely that hero and heroine are God's bronze images, but knowing only that they are men and women with joys and sorrows that belong alike to the whole human family. Such is the novelist that the race desires. Who is he that will do it? Who is he that can do it? 18 (cit. in Gates 180).

Hurston perfectly satisfies this plea, because her novel is both a black and universal work.

The worldview expressed by Gates, however, was not to be developed widely during the brief glimmer of the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston's fiction is now recognized as the chief artistic success of her generation, but her vision was often at odds with the critics and race leaders of her own day. For example, Du Bois and Hurston perceive folk material, specifically the Negro Spirituals, differently. Indeed,

he acknowledges that he knew a little about these songs, which could be the root of their different apprehensions. In his essay "Of the Sorrow Songs," Du Bois introduces Negro Spirituals as sorrow songs that are the cry of slaves: "Negro folk-song— the rhythmic cry of the slave— stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people" (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 253).

He states that these ancient songs are unhappy, sorrowful and heart-touching songs, and they cry out the messages of the slaves to the whole world: "In these songs, I have said, the slave spoke to the world. Such a message is naturally veiled and half articulate" (259). They are the songs of unhappy people and give utterance to issues like disappointments, death, suffering; however, they also express hope and faith in ultimate justice.

On the other hand, Hurston clearly makes a bitter criticism of the reference to the spirituals as "sorrow songs." She claims that these songs are not as ancient as Du Bois claims. They are in progress as are other forms of black folklore: "Contrary to popular belief their creation is not confined to the slavery period. Like the folk-tales, the spirituals are being made and forgotten every day" (Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals"). Even more, every congregation changes even the printed ones considerably, and performs them in a new version. According to Hurston, the only common ground description for these songs would be that they are religious songs performed by a black congregation. Also, as they cannot be confined to just the slavery period, it cannot be claimed that they are just sad songs, on the contrary, the

spiritual covers various issues: “The idea that the whole body of spirituals are "sorrow songs" is ridiculous. They cover a wide range of subjects from a peeve at gossipers to Death and Judgment.” Similar to folk tales, they bear hope instead of grief and sorrow. In brief, even if black intellectuals advocate using folk material in art, how they perceive this material is often in conflict.

In conclusion, the whole body of black literary works written in the course of the Harlem Renaissance bears the mission of how to represent blacks, which calls forth different responses from black intellectuals; thus, the horizons they set off vary. Even if, like younger New Negroes, they have similar ideas and the same horizon to follow, they still have conflicts within the group. There is not one single idea that black intellectuals hold; on the contrary, there is a clash of ideas providing them with different ideas helping to create a variety of works. As Hurston emphasizes, the clash of ideas was so monstrous that even possessing the same blood did not help them to overcome alienation within the race: “Most humans didn’t love one another nohow, and this mislove was so strong that even common blood couldn’t overcome it all the time” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138). Therefore, that Hurston consults the tradition of Signifyin(g) to criticize other black writers who see black values as an impediment in their literary advancement is quite important, since her signifying enriches her works with a vivid account of criticism, which makes her worthy of praise. According to Hurston, “the characteristics of Negro Expression,” which constitute a quite important part of folk culture, are necessary to accurately represent blacks in literature. At the end of her prominent novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the horizon Janie, her fictional counter, pulls like a fish-net over her shoulders is the successful attainment of an artistic goal in her works, which are full of not only folk life but also her own life experience hidden behind her feather-bed tactics. However,

we cannot ignore the contributions of the Harlem Literati, who formed the basis of African American Literature today. Those black works, including slave narrations, constitute the first platform on which African Americans express themselves. The ending of the movement with the Great Depression deferred the dreams of many for decades, but the reemergence of Hurston and a renewed interest in the Harlem renaissance authors in the late twentieth century contributed to the richness of African American Literature today.

CHAPTER III

Their Eyes Were Watching God: The Double-Voiced Black Text

In the course of the Harlem Renaissance, the black literati became prominent due to the works of art they created, but while they created their works, they all did not follow the same path. They adopted different aspirations and desires and different ways of representing, which can be called their personal horizons. All those works written by the Harlem literati to represent blacks provided them with a hopeful imagination seen in the far distance. Thus, the horizon represents a vision of how things can be, of events coming into the realm of possibility, and all were of the same opinion that Harlem was the black Mecca, where the new horizon would be conceived.

The concept of the horizon was either a topographical representation or a Signified representation formulated by black intellectuals, specifically by Hurston. She wanted to depict blacks in novels featuring black verbal expressions and denoting ways of meaning through Signifyin(g) along with a chain of events. Certainly, her works express wonderful themes appealing to anyone of any race, but what is much more prominent in her works is the way she narrates or conveys her ideas. For example, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* constitutes one of excellent example of black literary practice. As she implies in the end of the novel, this is the work, with which she accomplished what she intended in terms of representing real blacks and black discourse. Her protagonist expresses sentiments that Hurston herself might easily say after completing such a work: “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.”(Hurston, *Their Eyes* 284)

What distinguishes a black work from a white one is that they have different ways of expressing the meaning, or a different semantic axis as Henry Louis Gates defines it. He denotes the difference by means of a horizontal and a vertical axis. In order to clarify the difference, he calls white discourse *signification* and denotes it with a horizontal axis, and the black double-voiced discourse known as *Signification,* he denotes with a vertical axis representing its resistance to a work written and developed horizontally in standard English. While in English *signification* is figured as the connection between signifier and signified that forms a concept, in black vernacular *Signification* is affiliated with a concept that serves as a rhetorical agent, which is called "the trope of tropes that is Signifyin(g)…To Signify, in other words, is to engage in certain rhetorical games." It is the black art of "(re)doubling" (Gates 48). However, it is wrong to interpret the relationship between the two signifying systems as "parallel universes:" "Parallel universes, then, is an inappropriate metaphor; perpendicular universes is perhaps a more accurate visual description" (Gates 49). The text written in white discourse consists of the chain of signifiers which are constructed horizontally. The black discourse stands as a vertical resistant within the white discourse and does not allow the concealed meaning to become known: "Signifyin(g) concerns itself with that which is suspended, vertically" (Gates 50). Briefly, in white discourse, signification structures an order and coherence with excluded unconscious associations; however, in black double-voiced discourse, Signification enjoys being inclusive of affiliated rhetorical and semantic relations.

Gates argues that Signifyin(g) constitutes the Other of discourse in the Lacanian sense. As he emphasizes, it is quite ironic that black discourse cannot be fully emancipated from white discourse due to the symbiotic relationship between them, and "by the vertiginous relationship between the terms signification and

Signification, each of which is dependent on the other" (Gates 50). Thus, similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's double-voiced word, black discourse depends on the relation of signification and Signification, and as Gary Saul Morson asserts "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation" (cit. in Gates 50). Therefore, the audience of a double-voiced word can hear both versions of the utterance and conceive the word from a different point of view.

Clearly, the way meaning is created is quite different from that of white discourse. Hurston refers to the creation of meaning in black double-voiced discourse with a metaphor of the creation of the world. As mentioned earlier, Moses in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* refers to Signifyin(g), or black double-voiced discourse, and he is the messenger and interpreter of the gods as Esu, who is "the black metaphor for the literary critic" and "the study of methodological principles of interpretation itself" (Gates 53). In the novel, Moses learns how to communicate with animals from Mentu, the stableman. He interprets the noises in nature and what animals say. He is amazed by the skills of Mentu. The stableman represents a folk tale teller and he is the first person who introduces the animal figures in black folk tales to little Moses in the novel: "In fact, they were human by Mentu's interpretations. Tara the monkey, for example, was he not the smart-aleck person of no importance always trying to imitate his betters and making a mess of things?" (Hurston, *Moses* 39). Hurston here refers to black folk tales and tradition. With the monkey she refers to the Signifying Monkey poems, and thus to a playful bi-directional rhetoric. In the novel, Moses is impressed by the stories Mentu tells, and eventually, he develops a curiosity for everything around him. One of the significant questions he wonders

about is the first day, or the creation of the world. Thus, Mentu explains to him how the world is created:

> So Moses learned how God made that first day. He had ordered the covering robe stripped from the sun. Why had He done so? Well, you see, He had made the world and the firmaments. He had hammered out the great bowl of investing firmament and starred it with rivets. Then the company of heaven had asked to see the work of His hands and He had said, "Let there be light" and flung back the blanket from the sun and the world stood revealed. "Then why do we have nights between days?" Moses asked. "Well, He is still working on the world and He must hide His hand from us humans. That is why things grow at night. Most things are born in the mothering darkness and most things die. Darkness is the womb of creation, my boy. But the sun with his seven horns of flame is the father of life." (Hurston, *Moses* 38).

As it is clearly seen, the way the creation is depicted bears similarities with creation of the meaning in a black double-voiced discourse. The stars as rivets show the universe as something manufactured and the process is ongoing, as is the spontaneous quality of Signifying and other African American artistic performances. While God refers to the creator and so the black writer, with the daylight unfolds the wor(l)d before the eyes of the humans, in the night time he works on his deed that he hides from humans and keeps as a secret. I suggest that, with day Hurston refers to the visible part of the black discourse, which is the figurative substitutions of what is hidden in the "darkness". Darkness refers to the black double voiced utterance where meaning is created.

Thus, in the novel Horus, the God of Sun, refers to Signifyin(g): "Horus, golden god! Lord of both horizons" (Hurston, *Moses* 3). As Gates comments, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is a black text that reveals the nature of black discourse: "Both Hurston and [Ishmael] Reed have written myths of Moses, both draw upon black sacred and secular mythic discourse as metaphorical and metaphysical systems; both write self-reflexive texts which comment on the nature of writing itself; both make use of the frame to bracket their narratives-within-a-narrative; and both are authors of fictions which I characterize as speakerly texts" (Gates 111-112).

In another work *Tell My Horse,* concerning her voodoo expeditions, Hurston explains that in Haitian voodoo, Damballah Ouedo is the supreme Mystere (or spirit) and his signature is the serpent" and "Damballah identified as Moses whose symbol was the serpent. This worship of Moses recalls the hard-to-explain fact that wherever the Negro is found, there are traditional tales of Moses and his supernatural powers that are not in the Bible, nor can they be found in any written life of Moses" (116). Blacks associated Moses magical skills with Haitian voodoo and magic; thus, developed such a cultural link to Moses. Moreover, stories of Moses were reverent tales not only in Haiti but also in the Southern United States and in the British West Indies. In M*ules and Men*, in which Hurston depicts her folklore expedition in the South, she narrates one of her gatherings with black folks in Polk Country. One of the folks states that Polk Country is the right place to hear good folk tales and he goes on:

> "Zora," George Thomas informed me, "you come to de right place if lies is what you want. Ah'm gointer lie up a nation." Charlie Jones said, "Yeah, man. Me and my sworn buddy Gene Brazzle is here. Big Moose done come down from de mountain."[2] "Now, you gointer hear

> lies above suspicion," Gene added. It was a hilarious night with a pinch of everything social mixed with the story-telling. Everybody ate ginger bread; some drank the buttermilk provided and some provided coon dick for themselves. Nobody guzzled it—just took it in social sips (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 19).

In the footnote, it is explained that "Big Moose done come down from de mountain" means "[2]Important things are about to happen", but I suggest that "Big Moose" may refer to Moses due to reverent folk tales of Moses, and it is quite possible that one of the reasons why Hurston uses the Moses theme in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is his relevance black story narration, like "Big High John Conquerer." Big Moose" as the messenger comes down the mountain convey god's message to humans.

Signifyin(g) offers a chain of puns on words, of which the black artist takes advantage of "figurative substitutions," and, as Gates states, "These substitutions in Signifyin(g) tend to be humorous, or function to name a person or a situation in a telling manner" (Gates 50). I propose that Hurston takes the advantage of these "figurative substitutions," and creates a perfect example of black resistant texts. When the fact that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a black resistant text is taken into consideration, it can be argued that marriage, which Hurston defines as "perfect union," refers to the vertiginous and dependent relationship between *signification* and *Signification*, which enables her to develop a vertical resistant text in Janie's journey narrated in the horizontal axis both in standard English and black vernacular. When we look at the Janie's orgasm scene, everything narrated is related to what Janie feels under the tree and how she comes up with the idea of marriage. As discussed elsewhere in this study, the pear tree is a metaphor for black culture that bloomed in the course of the Harlem Renaissance: "From barren brown stems to

glistering leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 23). Thus, the black meaning just stands concealed behind the lines written until "the judgment day," or it is revealed.

Hurston develops an intentional silence and as a black author hides all saying behind Signifyin(g) story of Janie. Indeed, through her main character Janie, Hurston points out this strategy of silence: "She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. She bathed and put on a fresh dress and head kerchief and went on to the store before Jody had time to send for her. That was a bow to the outside of things" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112-113). This strategy of Janie helps her deal with her husband's oppression. She seems to bow to Jody, but on the contrary she cherishes her freedom inside: "Then one day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and clothes. Somebody near about making summertime out of lonesomeness (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 119). What people see is a loyal and subservient wife, but the Other Janie who nobody sees enjoys herself under the shade the tree. The only person who can recognize her making summertime out of lonesomeness could be another woman who goes through the same experience, similar to one's recognition of the rhetoric of Signifyin(g) in a black text. When we apply Janie's strategy to Gates's theory on black and white discourse axes, it can be claimed that the way she bows outside signifies upon Janie's story. The shadow presented in front of Jody is white discourse, upon which Hurston's black double-voiced discourse depends.

As a matter of fact, Hurston makes a reference to the dependence of black double-voiced discourse in the very beginning of the novel. Before Janie starts her story she states: "Pheoby, we been kissin'-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on

you for a good thought. And Ah'm talking to you from dat standpoint. Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked" (19). Pheoby is not just a character in the novel but a part of rhetoric of Signifyin(g) that Janie depends on. And this makes them old "kissing friends," which likely refers to rhetoric of Signifyin(g). Therefore, in the beginning of the novel, Hurston implies that the novel is written black double-voiced discourse, similar to the Signifying Monkey, or *Esu* as the African version.

Gates explains that "Signifyin(g) is the figure of the double-voiced, epitomized by *Esu*'s depictions in sculpture as possessing two mouths" (Gates xxv). *Esu*'s discourse is double-voiced, and he is the master of *ase*, or creating the meaning. In Yoruba sculptures, Esu holds *ase*, "the supreme deity of the Yoruba, created the universe," (7) and since it is used for creation of the universe, Gates translates it as "logos" referring to understanding. In poems of *Oriki Esu,* the sacred texts of Ifa, it says "He [Ifa] borrowed Esu's ase and put it in his own mouth to give a message to the supplicant."(cit. in Gates 9). Similarly in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* before Janie starts telling her story, she tells Pheoby: "'Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Pheoby. 'Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf'"(17). Thus, Hurston uses Pheoby as an agent to convey her message. In brief, Janie's story is like the upper side of an iceberg that is visible to anyone. While Janie cherishes the blowing wind and makes summertime out of her lonesomeness under the shade of a tree, Hurston enjoys the advantages of rhetoric of Signifyin (g) under the shade of her story. Briefly, what Janie says constitute the figurative substitutions of the meaning Hurston wants to create.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Hurston uses "figurative substitutions" that "function to name a person or a situation" in her own telling manner as Gates suggests. Although the characters and events seem to bear correspondences with events in Hurston's life, it is hard to call *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a biographical work, since it concerns the trope of Signifyin(g) itself or the way the events are narrated in black expressions, rather than what happened in Hurston's life. I would rather call it an *auto-bio-trope,* in which she offers a metamorphosis of experience in intellectual aspect rather than in clear sequences of events in time order. The novel serves as a trope of trope like –tale-within-a-tale. It is a fiction based on chains of metaphors, and requires "the methodological principles of the interpretation of black texts *Esu-'tufunaalo,* literally 'one who unravels the knots of Esu.'" (Gates 9). In terms of Signifiyin(g), she just makes use of some experience both to create a meaning and offer an excellent example of black double-voiced discourse. Therefore, the Everglades community Hurston creates in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* shares certain dynamics with the artistic circles she knew in Harlem.

When we consider the structural parallels between Hurston's biography, as related by herself and others, and Janie's narrative in Their Eyes Were Watching God, certain common themes emerge. One of these is the idea of fertility, whether it refers to the surrounding flora or to the intellectual climate. Janie describes the soil in Everglades as a fertile place where everything comes into leaf. Moreover, not only the soil, but also the black roads are so rich with humus that even a half mile of it will be enough to fertilize a Kansas wheat field:

> Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have

> fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too. (197)

As far as the pursuit of a social horizon, there are certain correspondences between the Everglades and New York. The muck, where Janie and Teacake stay, provides for them a haven that parallels that of Harlem, where Negro Art bloomed during Hurston's residence in New York. The Muck also embraces different kinds of people, as Harlem did in New York City. The black roads rich in humus correspond to the prolific Negro artist rich in cultural values. Furthermore, the wild cane on the either side of the road may refer to the work of Jean Toomer, *Cane*, which is the precursor of Black folk narrative and real black folk life having a chance to be published in New York.

Hurston, however, is quite different from Toomer, since Hurston does not include racial prejudice as a prominent theme. Both writers based their artistic practice on folklore, but Hurston deals with racial issues much more subtly than Toomer. Further, in terms of form *Cane* stands as a unique work. It includes examples of alternating prose and poetry. Moreover, both Toomer and Hurston experienced the urban and rural opposition as well as the north and south split, and they both depict folk life and folk culture, but the way they narrate their experiences differs. While in *Cane* the split is clear-cut, and they take place in separate parts of the novel, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the rural life of Eatonville and urban life of Harlem is rhetorically intertwined thanks to the black double-voiced discourse.

Another work of Hurston likely to signify Harlem as the fertile place where Negro Art bloomed is her short story "The Gilded Six-Bits." The story opens with the description of the setting: "It was a Negro yard around a Negro house in a Negro

settlement that looked to the payroll of the G. and G. Fertilizer works for its support" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories 86*). The male character, Joe, works at G. and G. Fertilizer and earns money for living. In the story, Hurston narrates that the abundance of flowers blooms merrily in disorder: "A mess of homey flowers planted without a plan but blooming cheerily from their helter-skelter places. The fence and house were whitewashed" (86). When we consider this Negro settlement as the figurative substitution of Harlem, the mess of the flowers bloom can be read as the mess of Black works expressing distinct identity politics bloomed merrily in no particular order during the Harlem Renaissance, or "when Negro was in Vogue". Briefly, both the Muck in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Negro Settlement in "Gilded Six Bits," the characters are pleased with their lives and doings.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, after Janie and Tea Cake settle in the Muck, they make new friends and start a brand new life there. While they work in the field in daytime, they gather with friends at their home in the evenings. They dance, play music and cooncan, which were common activities carried out at the jooks in the South as well as in Harlem in those years: "Tea Cake's house was a magnet. The unauthorized center of the 'job.' The way he would sit in the door way and play his guitar made people stop and listen and maybe disappoint the jook for that night. He was always laughing and full of fun too. He kept everybody laughing in the bean field" (197). That Tea Cake's house is a magnet for people on the Muck, is reminiscent of the little rooming house called Niggerati Manor, where Wallace Thurman and other young black intellectuals like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglass, Bruce Nugent etc, lived in Harlem: "The residents of Niggerati Manor are artist/ celebrities who bear the burden of black representation" (Herring 588).

One of the significant parallels in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the Muck, with which Hurston may signify upon Harlem. In the life of the Everglades Hurston depicts some resemblances to New York, where both male and female black artists had an opportunity to have a voice to represent themselves. In other words, with the life on the Muck, Hurston may signify upon the means by which black intellectuals collaborate in constructing their collective horizon. I believe that it is possible to read the Muck as a figurative substitution for Harlem, since in the course of the renaissance, Harlem provided black intellectuals a chance to produce art.

The townspeople in Eatonville contribute to the body of folk tales with their crayon enlargements and black expressions, which may be the reason why Hurston uses the real names from Eatonville. In the novel, they pass on their folk tales through oral communication on the porch:

> The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment (9-10).

On the other hand, as we shall see, they are the people who engaged in philosophical discussion about *nature* on the porch. When they are considered as figurative substitutions devised by Hurston, one can claim that they signify upon the Harlem literati, who contributed to the renaissance with their works. When Janie compares Eatonville to the Muck, she states: “The men held big arguments here like

they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she 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, *Their Eyes* 200). The "big stories" probably refers to the tall tales of black rhetoric, so that means here on the Muck, Janie has a chance not only to tell stories full of metaphors, but also from listening to them she can begin to create her own, which is a step toward Signifyin(g).

The nature of Signifyin(g) is revising and repetition of antecedents with a difference: "Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision and an intertextual relation, and because of Esu's double-voiced representation in art, I find it an ideal metaphor for black literary criticism, for the formal manner in which texts seem concerned to address their antecedents. Repetition, with a signal difference, is fundamental to the nature of Signifying(g)"(Gates 51). When Janie goes to the Everglades, she finds the life she has been searching for. She is not just a woman, but also an individual who has her own voice to tell stories. Telling her own stories without any expectations or oppression as in her marriage, she is free to live in her own world. The life of the Everglades lays a foundation for her a free and peaceful life of her own.

When Tea Cake, Janie and their friends gather around at their home, they tease each other by referring to their racial features: "Bootyny challenged. 'You getting' too yaller' … Sop said 'Aw 'taint nothin' tuh dat bear but his curly hair' … Ed looked around and and saw Gabe standing behind his chair and hollored, 'Move, from over me, Gabe! You too black. You draw heat!' … Ed laughed and said, 'Git off de muck! You ain't nothin'. Dat's all! Hot boilin' water won't help yuh none'" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 201). Similar to hot debates on boiling porch in Eatonville, here in the Everglades they have heated debates. I propose the heated debates that seem

quite casual talks may stand as "figurative substitutions" of heated debates of the Harlem literati. For instance, what Ed refers to with "You too black. You draw heat!" may be the main question of whether to use the body of collective African heritage or submit to the standard of white discourse. According to Hurston, focus on discrimination and hatred stimulates the racial prejudice, which will misguide them in the way to their horizon. Sometimes the game they play gets rough, but people do not get mad, because everything is done for a laugh. All these debates carried out in Tea Cake's house may signify upon the heated debates about black intellectuals' horizon carried at the Niggerati Manor. The debates may seem light-hearted bantering, but it should be born in mind that this black double-voiced discourse stands against white discourse and is concealed behind figurative substitutions. As a Southern black folk saying goes "The blacker the berry, The sweeter the juice" (Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* 12).

Furthermore, the fire that is kept on to cook or boil something reminds us the periodical called *Fire!!,* which Hurston and her friends Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman and some other young generation of black intellectuals published their articles:

> …*Fire*—the idea being that it would burn up a lot of the old, dead conventional Negro white ideas of the past, *épater le bourgeois* into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with the outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing, the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*—the first two being house organs of inter-racial organizations, and the latter being God knows what." (Hughes, *The Black Sea* 235-236).

As Hughes explains, they published their own works that did not have a chance to be published in the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger,* and "None of the older Negro intellectuals would have anything to do with *Fire."* Unfortunately, "*Fire* had plenty of cold water thrown on it by the colored critics" (237), because it included the favored topics of the Niggerati like sex, self-hatred, racism and color consciousness, which were not approved of by the older New Negro generation.

A second structural similarity between Hurston's life story and Janie's narrative is their emphasis on scale, scope and size. When Janie first arrives in the Everglades, the "big things" surrounding her impress her, and it calls to mind the first impression of a person from a rural area when he arrives in New York, the city of skyscrapers: "To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 197). I suggest that with the description of the Everglades, Hurston signifies upon New York. Everything is big like the big and tall buildings of New York, thus the weeds refer to the high buildings in New York. Moreover, one of the important metaphors she uses for the Great Depression in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the flood that destroys the whole Lake Okechobee area. In the end of the novel, Hurston describes the flood as a "monstropolous beast," which crushes everything around "on a cosmic scale":

> Ten feet higher and as far as they could see the muttering wall advanced before the braced-up waters like a road crusher on a cosmic scale. The monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed his chains. He seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass

> and rushed on after his supposed-to-be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses along with other timbers. The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 239).

The word "monstropolous," coined by Hurston, seemingly is an extension of monstrous, and I propose that the "monstropolous beast" refers to the "Great depression," which became a worldwide issue with the stock market crash on 29th of October. Hurston lays an emphasis on the effect of the economic depression with the metaphor of "the braced-up waters like a road crusher on a cosmic scale." It was not only America that suffered from the economic crisis but also other nations; therefore, she depicts the depression as a sea "walking the earth with a heavy heel." In the novel the monstropolous beast "woke up old Okechobee and the monster began to roll in his bed" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 234). Why Hurston chose Okechobee as the place where the flood initiated may not be just a coincidence, because the name of the lake is a Seminole Indian word meaning "large water" (Oeffner and Dunning 41). The local people in Florida refer the lake as "The Big O," and that connotes "The Big Apple," the nickname of New York, where the Great Depression commenced with Wall Street Crash.

The term Big Apple was popularized in the 1920s to refer to New York as the big city with big opportunities. John Fitzgerald, the sports writer who had a column named "Around the Big Apple" in the *Morning Telegraph,* initially used the name "The Big Apple" to refer New York City; moreover, later the jazz musicians adopted this denotation to refer to New York City, and especially Harlem. Harlem was the capital of jazz, or in other words it was the horizon where jazz musicians long and head for. "The name had appeal and cachet and decade later, jazz musicians came to

refer to New York City, and especially Harlem, as the Big Apple, meaning the center of the jazz universe, because, as the lore goes, they would say 'There are many apples on the trees of success, but when you pick New York City, you pick the big apple'" (Shapiro 226). Moreover, in the jive terminology Cab Calloway adds to his autobiography, Of *Minnie the Moocher & Me*, he defines "Apple" as "the big town, the main stem, Harlem" (Calloway 252). There was also popular dance called "Big Apple" in the depression-era and a popular nightclub with the same name at West 135th Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem:

> In 1976 conversation with the author, Mr. Calloway explained further that The Big Apple – The name of the Harlem night club in the mid 30s- was a mecca for jazz musicians. A dance that Life magazine in 1937 called "a loose- hipped, freehand combination of 'truckin' and the square dance" was named 'The Big Apple,' an appellation taken from the night club, according to Calloway (Safire 50)

Briefly, I believe that it is possible to read the "monstropolous beast" as the Wall Street Crush. In other words, the "monstropolous beast" destroying the whole Lake Okechobee area might signify upon the Wall Street Crush. It is indeed, the crush of "the Big Apple," or "the crush of the horizon" of the black Niggeratti, since the Depression led the depletion in trust funds for the blacks and it brought the opportunities for black intellectuals to a halt; thus, the New Negro Movement, introducing many talented black artists to the whole world, came to an end.

When Hurston makes a reference to how collective African heritage carried over to America in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she also makes a reference to black verbal skills, one of which is Signifyin(g). Through the rhetoric of Signifyin(g), blacks are able interchange the roles of characters:

> So they danced. They called for the instrument that they had brought to America in their skins—the drum—and they played upon it. With their hands they played upon the little dance drums of Africa…The great drum that is made by priests and sits in majesty in the juju house. The drum with the man skin that is dressed with human blood, that is beaten with a human shin-bone and speaks to gods as a man and to men as a God (29).

Similarly, Hurston uses her characters interchangeably. Similar to the Signifying Monkey poems, she revises her stories and uses them with a difference, she repeats the same characters, but they may not serve the same purposes. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the image of God may stand for a very specific purpose, and could be a figurative substitution for the white patron Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason, whom Hurston called "Godmother." She had a godlike power during the Harlem Renaissance period not just for Hurston but also for some other literati like Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglass, Richmond Barthé, Hall Johnson, Miguel Covarrubias and Claude McKay. All godchildren of Mrs. Mason were dependant due to her financial support both to create art. She was keen on indigenous art and culture; thus, she did not hesitate to spend her wealth until the outbreak of the financial crisis in 1929. She provided the finance for Hurston's expedition to the South to collect the body of African American folklore, which would be the main source of her future works.

Due to the decrease and finally the cessation of financial support from white patrons, the depression came out badly for the future of black intellectuals and for the Harlem Renaissance. Such a disaster may find a parallel in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the title of which possibly bears a hidden commentary on the desperate situation of the Niggerati in the early period of Great Depression. It could

stand as a reference to their being threatened financially by the depression. In his autobiography, Hughes also refers to the difficult situation of the black literati caused by the Great Depression: "So she was restless and moody, working in her manuscripts (mules and men). And we were both distressed at the growing depression—hearing of more and more friends and relatives losing jobs and becoming desperate for lack of work" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 320).

In the novel, when the hurricane, or depression, signals its arrival, Tea Cake, Motor Boat and Janie do not leave the muck; instead they stay in their shanty and play cards. In other words, they continue with their daily routine and they are not bothered about the "monster woke up the old Okechobee." They fail to heed the warning of the Seminole natives; however when they apprehend the mighty strong hurricane outside, they start questioning God: "They huddled closer and stared at the door. They just didn't use another part of their bodies, and they didn't look at anything but the door… Six eyes were questioning *God*."(235).

As Hurston emphasizes in her autobiography, Mrs. Mason was serious about sincere folk material of South: "I must tell the tales, sing the songs, do the dances, and repeat the raucous sayings and doings of the Negro farthest down. She is altogether in sympathy with them, because she says truthfully, they are utterly sincere in living" (145). Therefore, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she may refer to Godmother's expectation on sincere folk material with the African American folk figure High John Conquer. Just before the hurricane, the Indians leave the Everglades, and the rest of the people gather at Tea Cake's house. They tell stories about High John Conquer, but Hurston suggests that no matter how good John is playing harp, God wants to hear guitar: "Somebody tried to say that it was a mouth organ harp that John was playing, but rest of them would not hear that. Don't care

how good anybody play a harp, God would rather to hear a guitar. That brought them back to Tea Cake" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 232).

Guitar as the symbol of black folk music, the expectation of God may refer to expectation of Mrs. Mason on raw folk material. High John Conquer tales are associated with folk tales and they constitute an important part of black folk culture. They took an important place in their gathering, especially in slavery years, and as Hemenway states, the guitar was a must instrument playing along with the lying sessions of Marster and John on the porch: "The store porch produced a whole cycle of tales about Marster and John, a quick-witted, powerful slave. If someone brought a guitar, the story telling would stop, and the night would become haunted with the words of the blues, or reverberate with the rhythm of a railroad worksong learned from a 'singing liner'" (Hemenway 13). Thus, the guitar plays a very significant role that refers to the folk tales produced on the porch. That is why God, or Mrs. Mason, who is in favor of indigenous materials, wants to hear guitar.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, another important Harlem figure that Hurston might signify upon is Marita Bonner, who deals with some similar issues as Hurston does. When Janie's strategy of dealing with Jody's oppression is taken into consideration, it is quite likely that Hurston refers to, or is inspired by, Bonner's article called "On Being Young-a Woman- and Colored" published in 1925 in *The Crisis*:

> So-being a woman- you can wait.
>
> You must sit quietly without a chip. Not sodden-and weighted as if your feet were cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty.

> But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha-who brown like I am- sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing, a thousand years before the white man knew there was so very much difference between feet and hands.
>
> Motionless on the outside. But on the inside?
>
> Silent.
>
> Still…"Perhaps Buddha is a woman" ((Bonner, "On Being Young" 112).

In her essay, Bonner expresses how it feels to be a black female at the time of the Harlem Renaissance. She gives advice to black women about how to fight against the prejudice and overcome the weight of the oppressions of both race and gender. She suggests that black women remain in silence so that they can gain the knowledge to understand the matter, find the truth and then fight against it. Similarly, in *Their Eyes*, Janie develops a strategy, which reminds us of the Buddha-like silence in Bonner's article. In her marriage with Jody, Janie tries to raise her voice and tell her opinion, but it proves unavailing. Thus, she adopts a strategy similar to Marita Bonner's to deal with her husband's oppression. She learns "how to talk some and how to leave some" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 118). No matter what Jody says, she does not talk back, but grows a strong woman going silent rebellions inside: "Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and outside now and suddenly she knew how not to fix them" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112-113).

Thus, she creates her own way to deal with her oppressor. Indeed, Buddha's silence is not completely absent from words and it is not a speechless silence; on the

contrary, it is a quite eloquent and contains peace and joy, as Janie's "making summertime out of lonesomeness." It is a kind of religious ceremony providing the answer for those who are seeking for the Truth: "This silence is not negative; there is no "absence" of something. It is wholly positive, pervading the entire atmosphere around him, so that he can just sit without uttering anything and the people around him can receive wisdom" (Chandrakanthan). Buddha used to refuse to define and describe what Truth is, since the individual can comprehend it only by his own experience. As Chandrakanthan emphasizes, experience is the part of the individual's very being and "It cannot be communicated by words, but can only be shared with someone who possesses the right prerequisites for receiving it into his or her being," which reminds us the principle of the trope of Signifying. In order to understand a black work, one should have the right prerequisites to get the message lying within the text. In brief, while Hurston as a black writer hides her saying within black double-voiced discourse, as a character Janie develops a Buddha-like silence similar to what Bonner refers.

Needless to say that, as a narrative rich in double-voiced black discourse, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is embellished with victorious figurative substitutions that have led scholars a merry dance. The last figurative substitution I would like to dance around is Jody, the Mayor. It is quite possible that Hurston may signify upon a leader like Alain Locke, who Hurston was in contention on the way using folk materials in representing blacks during the renaissance.

In the novel, similar to Locke, Jody is the leader of a black community. Jody leads a way to establish an all-black community, which probably refers to the community of black intellectuals. When Janie meets Jody, she is impressed by him because "He spoke for change and chance," although he does "not represent sun-up

and pollen and blooming trees. Still she hung back. The memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 50); however, she agrees to run off with him. It is quite interesting that Janie does not directly refer him as her *horizon*, but a *change*. I suggest that it is quite possible that *change* could be a figurative substitute for the metamorphoses Locke emphasizes in his essay "The New Negro." "Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no; not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy" (Locke "The New Negro" 3). Similarly Janie emphasizes the lasting impact of Nanny that will take her time to shake off. Moreover, as she states, Jody does not promise the blooming trees but a *chance*. The blooming tree, as we shall see, signifies on black double-voiced discourse, and it does not associate with the way Locke promoted folk materials. He was "mindful of the universalist claims of high art" (Harris and Molesworth 175), therefore, he advocated alterations that prescribed using folk material in conventional white structures as in the spirituals, perhaps to elevate them to the level of a universal work.

Even if Jody starts an all black community and he is eager for a community established by just blacks, it is quite obvious that his way of living bears certain characteristics of white life. He voluntarily becomes the mayor, and builds a town in the center of which he places himself both physically and psychologically. The white house he builds in the middle of the town and the white manners he adopts clearly seem to show his recognition of and tendency for white form of life:

> Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with bannisters and such things. The rest of the town looked

> like servants' quarters surrounding the "big house."…And look at the way he painted it—a gloaty, sparkly white. The kind of promenading white that the houses of Bishop Whipple, W. B. Jackson and the Vanderpool's wore. It made the village feel funny talking to him—just like he was anybody else. Then there was the matter of the spittoons…And then he spit in that gold-looking vase that anybody else would have been glad to put on their front-room table. Said it was a spittoon just like his used-to-be bossman used to have in his bank up there in Atlanta. Didn't have to get up and go to the door every time he had to spit. Didn't spit on his floor neither. Had that golded-up spitting pot right handy (75).

However, what Jody overlooks is that he is the "big voice" of the community due to the respect that the townspeople have for him. The 'big voice' would mean nothing, if he did not have people around listening and obeying: "They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and again he was all of these things because the town bowed down" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 80). He is a leader and establishes a black town, which is something deserving praise, but also what makes him a leader is townspeople who follow his instructions.

One of the important scenes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the dozens ritual between Janie and Jody on the front porch of the store. It seems that this dozens scene constitutes a bitter literary criticism of Hurston for her mentor: "One day she noticed that Joe didn't sit down. He just stood in front of a chair and fell in it. That made her look at him all over. Joe wasn't so young as he used to be. There was already something dead about him" (119) It is a reference to Hurston's diminishing respect for Locke as a leader: "You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag,

but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (123).

Indeed, this most cited dialogue between Jody and Janie foreshadows Hurston's outpouring of feelings for her mentor in her subsequent unpublished response, "The Chick with One Hen," to Locke: Dr. Locke wants to be a leader. He felt sure that his degrees would guarantee that much at least. But the time has past when Negroes bowed down before mere letters on a piece of paper. And so far, Dr. Locke has offered nothing else to see. Up to now, Dr. Locke has not produced one single idea, or suggestion of an idea that he can call his own" (Hurston, "The Chick"). On Locke's bitter review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* she claims that Locke fails to recognize the characteristics of black expression, and he knows nothing about black folklore: "He has set himself up as an opinion-passer without having the material for the opinions. I will send my toe-nail to debate him on what he knows about Negroes and Negro life, and I will come personally to debate him on what he knows about literature on the subject. This one who lives by quotations trying to criticize people who live by life!" (Hurston, "The Chick").

This is particular marriage is part of a larger pattern of relationships in the novel that may be taken as a subtle commentary on the progress of African American people since the time of slavery. Janie's three marriages, important stages on her journey toward freedom in the structure of *bildungsroman*, also point out the distinctive dynamics faced by each generation of blacks in that time span.

Hurston believes that each generation goes through different experiences; thus, they perceive a different horizon: "I see no reason to keep my eyes fixed on the dark years of slavery and the Reconstruction. I am three generations removed from it, and therefore have no experience of the thing" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 254). This

notion constitutes one of the main themes Hurston deals with in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the novel, the three marriages of Janie parallel the three generations of black intellectuals; The Old Negro, The New Negro and The Younger New Negro.

Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks and Nanny's experience are similar to the narratives of The Old Negro heavy with Slavery sufferings. It is true that, the flight of slaves for the freedom bears the same kinds of incidents, but the way Nanny renders her flight is quite similar to Linda's in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs. It is possible that Hurston signifies upon her narration, as it constitutes an example of slave narratives of the older generation. Nanny states: "She flounced on off and let her wintertime wid me. Ah knowed mah body wasn't healed, but Ah couldn't consider dat. In de black dark Ah wrapped mah baby de best Ah knowed how and made it to de swamp by de river. Ah knowed de place was full uh moccasins and other bitin' snakes, but Ah was more skeered uh whut was behind me" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 34-35).

Similarly, Linda in Jacob's narrative takes a refuge and has to hide in a swamp full of snakes: "My fear of snakes had been increased by the venomous bite I had received, and I dreaded to enter this hiding-place. But I was in no situation to choose, and I gratefully accepted the best that my poor, persecuted friends could do for me" (Jacobs 125). Both Nanny and Linda find what they left behind much more dreadful than the snakes in the swamp: "I could scarcely summon courage to rise. But even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than the white men in that community called civilized" (Jacobs 126).

Janie's marriage to Jody Starks refers to the New Negro generation, which starts a new era as Jody stars a new all-black town. I propose that the *change* Jody

promises is a reference that Locke states as *metamorphosis* in his essay "The New Negro", which names the renaissance and provides a new horizon and new chances for the black artist: "He spoke for a change and chance" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 50) All the discussions held on the porch are a reference to the issues central to the New Negro Movement and "the New Negro."

Lastly, her marriage to Tea Cake evokes the spirit of the works of Hurston and her contemporaries, or The Younger New Negro, which is the horizon Hurston longs for and articulates in Janie's words: "The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories from listening to the rest" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 200). Thus, I believe that it is quite possible to read Janie, Tea Cake and their friends as signifying on the younger generation, who created their own voice, hence their own horizon.

In conclusion, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers many significant examples of black double-voiced discourse. Through Janie's story, she narrates a story appealing to a wide audience all around the world. She creates a female character that even a white woman of today can identify herself with. Hurston's criticism on the Harlem literati will continue its existence on the vertical axis of The Other black Signification, while appreciation of Janie's story will continue on the horizontal axis on the timeline. Ironically, the horizon in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a kind of rhetorical substitution that stands vertical in black discourse in terms of Gates's explanation, and in the end of the novel her horizon is no longer horizontal but takes a new form on the shoulder of Janie: "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"

(Hurston, *Their Eyes* 286). In brief, the horizon is Janie's mastery of a double-voiced discourse capable of expressing her self-realization, nestling so much meaning in its meshes.

CHAPTER IV

Crayon Enlargement of "De Nature"

By 1895, the difference between black vernacular and standard English used to be interpreted as "innate mental inferiority", however, today we acknowledge the difference as due to the unique rhetorical abilities of blacks. Primarily, Henry Louis Gates's prominent theory book *The Signifying Monkey* and especially Hurston's essay "Characteristics of Negro Expressions" provide an insight for the linguistic abilities of blacks. In her essay, she clearly elucidates that the reason why black vernacular expression differs from English is not a sign of "innate mental inferiority," but utterly a sign of the intelligence and wit of blacks. It is just a different *nature* of using the language.

Hurston states that one of the important characteristics of black narration is "the will to adorn." The way they embellish the narration does not meet the expectation of the canon, but it makes the creator's soul satisfied. The black people did not introduce any African words to the black vernacular, but they created a tongue to their liking and used their own revision that would be confirmed by the white people. Besides black terminology, the greatest contributions they made to the language are metaphor and simile; such as "Regular as pig-tracks," "You sho is propaganda," "I'll beat you till you: (a) rope like okra, (b) slack like lime, (c) smell like onions," "Syndicating-gossiping" etc., double description; such as "High-tall," "Low-down," "Top-superior," "Lady-people," "Kill-dead," "Hot-boiling," "Chop-axe," "Sitting-chairs" etc., and verbal nouns; such as "She features somebody I know," "Funeralize," "I wouldn't friend with her," "Uglying away," "Puts the shamery on him," "Jooking—playing piano or guitar as it is done in Jook-houses (houses of ill-fame)" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 62) etc.

All these expressions are like jewelry adorning black narration; thus it differs plainly from the phrases of canonical literary language. Furthermore, the black speaker's "idea of ornament does not attempt to meet conventional standards, but it satisfies the soul of its creator" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 62). In the Crayon Enlargement of "De Nature," nature takes a very significant place in black narration, which is a verbal form of crayon enlargement practiced by black story-tellers. Therefore, according to Hurston, the horizon a black artist determines should be based on black expressions in order that the work can shine as black jewelry among other literary works.

In every respect, Hurston's works constitute a great example of crayon enlargements, and they represent the tall tales narrated on the porch. Technically, the physical crayon enlargements were photographs printed on albumen and salted paper or canvas and wood supporters. The reason why Hurston makes such a comparison could be the process of making the enlargements. Solar cameras, used for making enlargements, were commonplace by 1865 and they were placed on the roofs or in the windows and gardens of photographic establishments. In those years, the camera was set up in a dark room with a window shutter, and a mirror to reflect the sunlight into the enlarger. The light passed through the negative in the enlarger concentrated by a condenser and then, the negative was projected on the photographic paper, canvas and wood supporters in a larger size (Albright and Lee 28). It is quite interesting that the process starts in a "darkroom," and through the reflection of sunlight by a mirror, the crayon art was projected on the photographic paper, which was sometimes a canvas.

I propose that similar to enlarging, or creating an art on the canvas through the solar cameras in a dark room, the black folk sitting on Starks's porch produce tall

tales and use a side of the world for a canvas where they orally print their exaggerated stories: “Lige or Sam or Walter or some of the other big picture talkers were using a side of the world for a canvas” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85). The porch where black folk gather is like the darkroom where the enlargement process starts and art is created; thus, Hurston compares one type of art with another to depict the black folks talking in hyperbole. While the “big picture talkers” embellish and stretch the truth like crayon enlargement of an image on the surface of the canvas, they depict another story behind it. Furthermore, in his book about the instruction of crayon enlargements Jerome A. Barhydt claims that it is not required to be a trained artist to deal with this art. Any one who is capable of learning to write can learn how to make crayon enlargements; however, even though it does not require having perfect drawing knowledge, some knowledge of drawing and some talent are still necessary:

> Making them over a photograph, that is, an enlargement, is a comparatively simple matter, as it does not require as much knowledge of drawing as do free-hand crayons…Some knowledge of drawing is necessary, though not a perfect knowledge. … To make a crayon from life undoubtedly requires considerable talent and some education as an artist…that it is now possible for anyone, who will carefully follow the plain instructions given in the following pages, to make a good crayon portrait by the aid of the different kinds of enlargements (Barhydt 15).

Briefly, to perform this art, one should have enough knowledge and talent to follow the instructions. As for the black folk, the body of folk knowledge is enough for them to recreate tall tales, or art of African American folk tales in newer forms. The folks

in Eatonville are not as literate and educated as the Talented Tenth, but they are talented enough to contribute black narration with folk life in hyperbole.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the porch talks play a significant role, since it is kind of starting point of the journey leading to the horizon. The boiling porch talks and hot debates bring to mind the Saturday night gathering in Washington under the leadership of Alain Locke. All these gatherings constitute a platform where intellectuals discuss racial matters and the issue of how to represent blacks in artistic works, and pass around their thoughts as Hurston implies in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to" (81). Indeed, all these discussions and "crayon enlargements" assist the black intellectuals in conceiving a new racial and artistic horizon.

Hurston also makes a reference to "the crayon enlargements" of the Niggerati in her story "The Bone of Contention":

> Ike Pearson had killed a six-foot rattler in a mighty battle that grew mightier every time Ike told about it; Walter Thomas had chinned the bar twenty times without stopping; Elijah Moseley had licked a "cracker"; Brazzle had captured a live catamount; Hiram Lester had killed a bear; Sykes Jones had won the soda-cracker eating contest; AND JOE CLARKE HAD STARTED THE TOWN!" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 210).

The Niggerati tell stories as skillfully as the porch talkers, and with the leadership of Alain Locke, like Joe Clarke's leadership in establishing the town in Hurston's story and Joe Starks *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, they started the Harlem Renaissance

and made a great contribution toward the recognition of black people's talents. As she signifies in her story, there was a contention about how to represent the race as a whole among the black intellectuals, and the clash of ideas caused a parting of the ways between the generations. The New Younger Negro, including Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Bruce Nugent, found a new porch, the Manor House in Harlem, where they made their crayon enlargements with their journal *Fire!!*. Therefore, the porch talks in her works become prominent, since they constitute a platform where ideas are exchanged and discussed. Further, they offer a model for the effective practice of African American rhetoric. Hurston offers us a world of metaphors, which reveals in her texts a double voiced discourse where black intellectuals' "high" ideas are interwoven with the "low" idiom of the folks.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* the porch in Hurston's work again constitutes the main platform from which black folklore springs. They masterfully tell folk tales and make crayon enlargements of life through the lively rhetoric in their narrations. It is the most pleasant place one could spend time as Hurston expresses in her autobiography: "For me, the store porch was the most interesting place that I could think of. I was not allowed to sit around there, naturally. But, I could and did drag my feet going in and out whenever I was sent there for something to allow whatever was being said to hang in my ear" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 46). Joe Clarke's porch was open to every kind of emotion like anger, love, kindness, or envy, and it was the place where they openly discussed, laughed at and mocked each other.

It was such an important place that it would shape Hurston's future career; therefore, in her works, especially in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* she deals extensively with the porch sessions, because the porch talks making crayon

enlargements of black folk life are the great contributors to the creation of the body of black folklore in the South. She refers to the skillful speakers as "Mouth Almighty," because they are blacks adept at figures of speech. The porch is like a performance center, where all perform to their abilities, narrative rituals are played out, and the distinct verbal practices of the African American community are carried out. After work, they sit on the porch and pass their stories around:

> The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 1).

After they are done with their work, they start their ritual tall-tale sessions, and become the lords of black narration.

In the novel, Matt Bonner's mule occupies a place in most of the porch talks. The crayon enlargement, or hyperbolic depiction of the mule becomes the center topic for the porch talkers. After Jody pays for the mule and frees him, it still occupies the tongue of the porch talkers: "New lies sprung up about his free-mule doings. How he pushed open Lindsay's kitchen door and slept in the place one night and fought until they made coffee for his breakfast; how he stuck his head in the Pearsons' window while the family was at the table and Mrs. Pearson mistook him for Rev. Pearson and handed him a plate" (92)

Similarly, Hurston deals with the crayon enlargement carried out on the porch of Mayor Joe Clark in her play *De Turkey and De Law:*

> LIGE Besides, Mrs. Simms ain't very large. She wouldn't weigh more'n two hundred. You ain't seen no big woman. I seen one so big she went to whip her lil boy an' he run up under her belly and stayed up under dere for six months. (General laughter)
>
> WALTER You seen de biggest ones. But I seen uh woman so little till she could go out in uh shower uh rain and run between de drops. She had tuh git up on uh box tuh look over uh grain uh sand… (Hurston, *De Turkey* 152)

No matter which work of Hurston's we consult, the place where the tall tales, or the crayon enlargements are created, is the same: *the porch.*

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jody Starks calls the porch talkers "trashy people," but they are talented enough to carry out a philosophical discussion. When "Mouth Almighty" presides at the porch talks, Sam Watson and Lige Moss have everlasting contests in hyperbole. In one of their heated debates Lige generates a discussion about the role of nature, which draws all the folks and then boils the porch. He asks: "Whut is it dat keeps uh man from gettin' burnt on uh red-hot stove—caution or nature?"(100) Lige claims that it is caution, not nature. According to him, babies do not touch the hot stove, because they are told not to; however, Sam claims that what protects the baby from any harm of the hot stove is nature, because nature makes the caution: "Naw it ain't, it's nature, cause nature makes caution. It's de strongest thing dat God ever made, now. Fact is it's de onliest thing God ever made. He made nature and nature made everything else" (101).

The discussion rotates around the hot red stove, but I suggest that with red-hot stove discussion Hurston addresses the main issue that is polarizing the Harlem Literati, which is "how to represent blacks." With "nature," Hurston signifies upon black life and folklore, or the African Heritage they inherited from their ancestors, and with "caution," she signifies upon the literary canon's traditions they have been taught. Thus, I suggest that Sam constitutes an example of the black intellectual advocating that the best way to represent blacks is to use black values; such as, dialect, folklore, and the rhetoric of Signifying. Lige, on the other hand, sets the example of the black intellectual consulting white rules in art so that their advancement can reach up to the level of whites.

As Hurston explains, the characteristics of black narration differ from those of the literary canon, and the black artist is required to exhibit his difference. One of the significant differences, according to Hurston, is that blacks speak in pictures: "His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act is described in terms of another. Hence the rich metaphor and simile… Action. Everything illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 61-62). Action and exaggeration are very important. They talk in pictures. Rather than just simply expressing an idea, African American speakers picturize, or illustrate it in their own way.

One striking example from Hurston's work illustrates this quality: "Every morning the world flung itself over and exposed the town to the sun. So Janie had another day" (Hurston *Their Eyes* 81). Thus the reader does not only hear the action but also sees it.

Like Hurston, Toomer also refers to nature in his imagery. In contrast to Hurston, Toomer deals with racial prejudice and lynching, but his works bear a lot of characteristics of the black rhetoric Hurston advocates. He uses a lot of similes related to natural events in his book *Cane*. The book opens with the story *Karintha,* which begins with these lines:

> Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,
>
> O cant you see it, O cant you see it
>
> Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon
>
> . . . When the sun goes down (3).

Similar to Hurston, Toomer uses simile to describe the complexion of Karintha. He draws an analogy between her skin color and a natural event, "dusk on the eastern horizon." In another story called "Blood-Burning Moon," he compares another female character's skin to leaves of a tree in the fall season: "Her skin was the color of oak leaves on young trees in fall" (30). Moreover, he uses the blues form in his both poems and prose. For instance, in his story "Karintha," he repeats his expression referring to her skin not only in poems but also at the beginning of each paragraph, which makes the prose like a blues poem. The paragraphs begin as follows:

> "Men had always wanted her, this Karintha, even as a child, Karintha carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down."
>
> "Karintha, at twelve, was a wild flash that told the other folks just what it was to live"
>
> "Karintha is a woman. She who carries beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down."
>
> Karintha is a woman. Men do not know that the soul of her was a growing thing ripened too soon. They will bring their money; they

> will die not having found it out... Karintha at twenty, carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. Karintha... (3-4)

Furthermore, that Toomer harmonizes verse, prose and drama in one work, which also makes *Cane* a unique work, reminds us of another characteristic of black art: asymmetry, which is its "abrupt and unexpected changes" presented both in prose and verse.

As Hurston argues for the black folk dance, the work of Toomer looks asymmetrical, but it has its own rhythm within each story, or segment: "There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry" (Hurston "Characteristics" 65). On the other hand, when we compare the language of Jessie Redmon Fauset, who was considered "the midwife" of the Harlem Renaissance to Hurston's, we can clearly see the difference between them. Based on Hurston's explanation, it can be claimed that her novel *Plum Bun* was written in cheque words:

> Yesterday! Even now at a distance of twenty-four hours she had not recovered her equilibrium. She was still stunned, still unable to realize the happening of the day. Only she knew that she had reached a milestone in her life; a possible turning point. If she did not withdraw from her acquaintanceship with Roger now, even though she committed no overt act she would never be the same; she could never again face herself with the old, unshaken pride and self-confidence. She would never be the same to herself. If she withdrew, then indeed, indeed she would be the same old Angela Murray, the same girl save for a little sophistication that she had been before she left Philadelphia, only she would have started on an adventure and would not have seen it to its finish, she would have come to grips with life and would have laid

down her arms at the first onslaught. Would she be a coward or a wise, wise woman? (Kindle Locations 2183-2186).

The way Angela feels and how she will deal with her problem are attached to pleonastic cheque words of canonical language like equilibrium, milestone, sophistication, onslaught, acquaintanceship etc. While Hurston illustrates "the next day," Fauset just describes "yesterday." Briefly, all three writers use the same language, but Toomer and Hurston differ from Fauset in terms of the black expressions they use. They would rather use vernacular expressions based on the *nature* phenomenon of black expressions. Therefore, while Sam represents the black artist like Hurston, Toomer or Hurghes, Lige represents the ones similar to Fauset.

It is obvious that the argument on nature versus caution (nurture) is far beyond what just the "trashy people" discussed on the porch. It is Hurston's crayon enlargement about the horizon of the black intellectuals. In other words, with this discussion, Hurston signifies upon the representation of black identity as she refers to some other white intellectuals such as John Locke and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Firstly, I suggest that Hurston likely refers to the thoughts of Locke, who is regarded as the first philosopher defining the "self" that is the contemporary conception of identity in that period. Locke compares the mind of a newborn child to white blank paper nothing is printed on; that is the mind does not have any built-in the materials of reason and knowledge. Babies are born with a variety of faculties like senses, memory, or ability to speak, and they can manipulate them, but they do not have any innate ideas and knowledge. They rather develop them through the experience they attain throughout their lives:

> Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper [*tabula rasa*], void of all characters without any ideas; how comes it to be

> furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From experience: in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring (Locke J. Kindle Locations 6303-6304).

Therefore, as Leige argues in the porch discussion, he believes in *experience*. Knowledge is founded by the years through one's experience. Thus, Hurston raises the main question that divided the Harlem intellectuals into two opposite poles: what is the best way to represent blacks? Should they use *black culture,* inherited or the canon's traditions founded in western thought? Locke also argues that ideas and knowledge are not innate; thus, "there was a time when the mind was without those principles; and then they will not be innate, but be derived from some other original" (Locke J. Kindle Locations 6001-6008).

Hurston also deals with the idea of the *original* in the "nature and caution" discussion by presenting the example of the picture of the dinosaur in the Sinclair Gas advertisement at Hall's gas station. When they argue about the existence of the dinosaur one states "De picture is right up dere where anybody kin see it. Dey can't make de picture till dey see de thing, kin dey?" (104) Since the varmint is up there, there should be the real one once existed; otherwise, one cannot make a picture of it.

Thus, the dialogue goes on with the origin of the dinosaur: "Dey caught him over dere in Egypt. Seem lak he used tuh hang round dere and eat up dem Pharaohs' tombstones. Dey got de picture of him doin' it. Nature is high in uh varmint lak dat. Nature and salt. Dat's whut makes up strong man lak Big John de Conquer" (104).

When we approach this dialogue with the Signifyin' theory, it can be asserted that here Hurston refers to the origin of black culture. She objects to the idea that the blacks in America do not have a cultural past: "It has been said so often that the Negro is lacking in originality that it has almost become a gospel" (Hurston, "The Characteristics" 67). It is a fact that the black slaves were forced to abandon not only their homeland but also their African cultures when black people were taken to America, however, especially in the South and in the Bahamas, the black people were able to preserve many aspects of their culture. Certainly, as Hurston emphasizes, the African Heritage underwent several alterations and adjustments, because it is both hard to get the original and it requires some modifications in new surroundings: "It is obvious that to get back to original sources is much too difficult for any group to claim very much as a certainty. What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. The most ardent admirer of the great Shakespeare cannot claim first source even for him. It is his treatment of the borrowed material" (Hurston, "The Characteristics" 67). One can argue that culture is not innate, but learned by the years. Certainly, black culture does not pass on to the next generation through DNA, but what Hurston stresses here is that black culture is *inherited*, and blacks should not leave aside these values and conform only to the white forms.

In the New World black people were subject to heavy physical and psychological brutalization to destroy their dignity; however, they managed to stand

against all odds through their faith and beliefs, one of which is High John de Conquer, whose origin roots back to Africa: "John de Conquer was a bottom-fish. He was deep. He had the wisdom tooth of the East in his head. Way over there, where the sunrises a day ahead of time, they say that Heaven arms with love and laughter those it does not wish to see destroyed (Hurston, *High John* 452). Similarly, in the novel it is claimed that the origin of the dinosaur dates back to old time and, like the African Heritage, originated with hieroglyphics in Egypt. That varmint is paralleled with John de Conquer, the African American folk hero. He was a hope-bringer, since the stories based on him helped the blacks to endure suffering in those slavery years on the plantation. According to the black folk legend, he came from Africa walking on the waves and then took the form of flesh, but when he had to meet the master he did not reveal his real character and introduced himself as Brer Rabbit, the laugh-provoking trickster figure on the plantation.

High John de Conquer was so good at hiding his real character that the white masters on the plantation were not aware of his tricks; thus, in a way, he was on the plantation all the time. He went back to Africa, but he left his power back in America to help the black folks to endure the troubles: "High John de Conquer went back: - to Africa, but he left his power here, and placed his American dwelling in the root of a certain plant. Only possess that root, and he can be summoned at any time" (452). In other words, the black folks possessing the spirit of High John de Conquer, or Signifying skills, can overcome any impediments in their lives by figurative expressions and laughter.

The root where the spirit of High John dwells is inherited, but not taught like "caution." It is in the nature of the black folks: "Nature is high in uh varmint lak dat. Nature and salt. Dat's whut makes up a strong man lak Big John de Conquer. He was

uh man wid salt in him. He could give uh flavor to anything…Me mahself, Ah got salt in me. If Ah like man flesh, Ah could eat some man every day, some of 'em is so trashy they'd let me eat 'em." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 104) The idiom of "to take something with a pinch of salt" means "to not completely believe something that you are told, because you think it is unlikely to be true," (Cambridge Dictionary) or exaggerated, so the salt within the African hero and also in the black folks may refer to the rhetoric of Signifying. What those people tell on the porch are exaggerated stories, or as Hurston defines them, "crayon enlargements" making African American literature tasty, but it should not be taken literally. All black narratives nestle double discourse within.

Another important inference we can make from the discussion on nature and caution is that it is quite likely that Hurston makes a reference to the "American Scholar," the cornerstone article of American Literature by Ralph Waldo Emerson. "The American Scholar", called an "Intellectual Declaration of Independence" by Oliver Wendell Holmes, was delivered by Emerson to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard, in 1837. Instead of complimenting the education at Harvard, he draws attention to the rise of British Romanticism, and argues that there is a new age of Revolution, and a new scholarly identity needs to come into being. That is, the *American Scholar.* Rather than being stuck in European literary traditions, the *American Scholar* should establish his own literary tradition, in which the old and the new can stand side by side:

> If there is any period one would desire to be born in, — is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old, can be

> compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it" (Emerson).

Moreover, the scholars, who are supposed to be "an university of knowledge," ought to spend their time wisely, and they must devote themselves to the novel identity they will acquire.

According to Emerson, *American Scholar* is "the delegated intellect," and he is expected to be a "*Man Thinking"* rather than a man parroting other people's thoughts: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe." The influence of the past for the future American Scholar is important, because in all forms of literature and art, the mind of the past is inscribed in books, so did the truth. The importance of the books is noble, since the scholar first learns about the world around him from books, then he arranges his knowledge in his own mind and then utters the same, which becomes the Truth for him.

As Emerson notes, life is transmuted into truth; however, Emerson argues that the American Scholar must write his own books instead of repeating the precepts of old times expressed in old books, because each generation differs from the other in terms of experience: "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this" (Emerson).

According to Emerson, the grave mistake of a scholar is to change "the thought" into chronicles of "records" in his new book, which results in a group of meek scholars growing up in libraries and embracing accepted thoughts as their task; thus, instead of being "Man Thinking," they just become bookworms without a view of the further horizon.

A similar idea is presented in *Orientalism*, in which Edward Said argues that the recorded and accepted thoughts of western scholars made a great contribution in misunderstanding the Orient: “Orientalism was fully formalized into a repeatedly produced copy of itself” (Said, 197) He elucidates this argument by consulting the unfinished work of Gustave Flaubert. In his novel, *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, Flaubert depicts the chronicles of constant and humorous failure of two middle-aged men, “in Charles Moraze's phrase—‘les bourgeois conquerants’"(cit. in Said 113). It is a literary work on the retrogression of knowledge and the inane efforts of the two main characters.

> Every attempt and enthusiasm of these two men turns into a tedious cliché and any discipline or knowledge meant to bring hope turns into a failure and a disappointment. In one of the discussions, Bouvard refers to “progress” as a humbug: “Hey! progress! what humbug!,” and Pécuchet replies that “The military art is better: you can tell what will happen—we ought to turn our hands to it” (Flaubert 186).

According to Pécuchet, borrowing ideas from previous theorists, like Napoleon did, will guarantee success; however, in the novel, every deed ends with failure and they do not come up with “a single well-balanced idea,” but the notion, that it is “necessary to have read all the histories, all the memoirs, all the newspapers, and all the manuscript productions” (Flaubert 186). In the end, they quit criticizing the subject and the need of finding the truth becomes just something enjoyable to do: “They abandoned the subject. But the taste for history had come to them, the need of truth for its own sake” (Flaubert 186). The novel ends with the depiction of these two enthusiastic men copying the ideas they like from the books onto paper. As Edward Said sums up: “knowledge is what gets passed on silently, without comment, from

one text to another. Ideas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become *idees regues*: what matters is that they are *there,* to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically (Said 116).

When we go back to the nature versus caution discussion on the porch, we see that Hurston also stresses that *idees regues* are nothing but humbug. Sam states that nature is the beginning of everything, so one can look for any answer and can find it; however, that caution is nothing but humbug that deceives people. It is not original, but just a copy of something else: "Dat caution you talkin' 'bout ain't nothin' but uh humbug. He's uh inseck dat nothin' he got belongs to him. He got eyes, lak somethin' else; wings lak somethin' else—everything!' Even his hum is de sound of somebody else" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 102).

Thus, in order to prevent misrepresentations and straighten out the real depiction of blacks in their writings, they should turn to the *nature* of black folk life, and write in their vernacular, expressions and rhetorical skills instead of to western guidelines, so they can create "the original." Moreover, the representation of blacks in the frame of "The Talented Tenth" cannot serve as the true, or real, representation of black folks. With only the fractional "exceptional" and the "quaint" portrayed, a true picture of Negro life in America cannot be. A great principle of national art has been violated" (Hurston, "What White Publishers").

In his prominent essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Homi Bhabha also deals with the "blurred copy" of the colonizer that turns into a spoiled image of the master. By all means, we should be aware that Bhabha discusses the "mimicry man" in postcolonial discourse, but we should not overlook that both African American and colonized people become the same as the "recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not*

quite" (Bhabha 126). This can happen in the works of the marginals themselves when they too exactly copy the culture of the master. Their desire of creating something authentic partially results in irony, because mimicry becomes just repeating rather than representation: "The desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry - through a process of writing and repetition - is the final irony of partial representation…Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (Bhabha 128). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Hurston considers mimicry as performance a very important characteristic of Negro Expression, but this mimicry differs from the one Bhabha refers to. With regard to authority, the mimicry of African Americans is parodic. When she suggests that black folks copy, she means that they imitate their surroundings, especially animals; moreover, they do it for love of imitation not for admiration of whites:

> But, this group aside, let us say that the art of mimicry is better developed in the Negro than in other racial groups. He does it as the mocking-bird does it, for the love of it, and not because he wishes to be like the one imitated. I saw a group of small Negro boys imitating a cat defecating and the subsequent toilet of the cat. It was very realistic, and they enjoyed it as much as if they had been imitating a coronation ceremony. The dances are full of imitations of various animals. The buzzard lope, walking the dog, the pig's hind legs, holding the mule, elephant squat, pigeon's wing, falling off the log, seabord (imitation of an engine starting), and the like (Hurston, "The Characteristics" 68).

The black person does not wish to be the one he imitates. Rather than copying or adopting the white culture, they adjust their culture to live in their new surroundings:

"So if we look at it squarely, the Negro is a very original being. While he lives and moves in the midst of a white civilization, everything that he touches is re-interpreted for his own use" (Hurston, "The Characteristics" 67).

In *De Turkey and de Law*, she expresses how this imitation ritual is carried out in children's games:

> HAWK Four! (He arises and imitates a hawk flying and trying to catch a chicken. Calling in a high voice.) Chickie!!
>
> HEN (Flapping her wings to protect her young) My chickens' sleep (137).

When we look at the works of Hurston, we clearly see that she turns "the records," the findings that she gathers in her folklore expeditions, into a piece of literary art. Besides, she uses the same records more than once, but still each work holds novelty within; thus, Hurston constitutes a perfect example of an American Scholar broadening a new horizon in American Literature.

In conclusion, even though each crayon enlargement produced on the porch seems like a copy of another tale, each one stands as an original work, since it is reproduced in a newer version. As the African heroes change into other forms, according to Hurston, African American folklore is still in progress and changes accordingly: "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 65).

For instance, Hurston used her story "The Bone of Contention" as the plot of her play *De Turkey and de Law,* and the same characters reappear in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* The male character John in "John Redding Goes to Sea" evokes Jeanie in terms of his longing for reaching the horizon and Tea Cake in terms of the

way he dies. Similarly she uses her story “The Fire and the Cloud” in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Briefly, as Henry Louis Gates states, Hurston’s stories constitute a ground that she builds on her novels or plays: “In these stories, Hurston demonstrates an exceptionally broad range of narrative concerns and skills. Some seem to be dress rehearsal for scenes that she would develop in her novels” (Gates, Introduction to ZNH The Complete Stories xxi).

Thiong'o also asserts retelling the same stories again and again is part of oral tradition in Africa, and what makes a story a good one depends on the skill of the narrator: “There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be, fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones” (Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* 10), so Hurston was a really gifted black writer skilled at black narration. She would rewrite a folk tale and change it into a work bearing another significant message.

CHAPTER V

The Tree and the Horizon: Natural Imagery in Hurston's Fiction

Hurston, as a folklorist growing up in the "mud" of black folklore, knows perfectly well the link between Nature and a black individual. As she states, mimicry is an art for blacks, and in this art should reflect nature or human experience. "If it is not, then all art must fall by the same blow that strikes it down. When sculpture, painting, acting, dancing, literature neither reflect nor suggest anything in nature or human experience we turn away with a dull wonder in our hearts at why the thing was done" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 67). Nature is interwoven with the *nature,* or *characteristics* of black art. For black people, to imitate the nature is an art itself, not nature its own. According to Hurston, rather than the natural phenomena itself, the way it is depicted is art. For instance, instead of saying *the next day*, which is prevalent usage in standard English, she illustrates it as "Every morning the world flung itself over and exposed the town to the sun. So Janie had another day" (Hurston *Their Eyes* 81). The reader does not only read the action but also "picturizes" it.

In black art, life is interwoven with nature. Specifically, their dances contain imitations of several animals or sounds they hear around them: "The buzzard lope, walking the dog, the pig's hind legs, holding the mule, elephant squat, pigeon's wing, falling off the log, seaboard (imitation of an engine starting), and the like" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 68). Black artists imitate their surroundings, but with an exaggeration and reinterpretation in their terms. In literary texts, animals can replace human beings. For instance, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Mrs. Pearson mistakes the mule for Rev. Pearson and puts a plate on the table; similarly, after the mule passes away, a kind of mock funeral is carried out as if a prestigious man died.

We can also hear animals talking as in folk tales, and even a river can tell a

brook a story as in *Magnolia Flower*. The story opens with the brook disturbing and asking the river to tell a story, so it tells of the conflict between ex-slave Bently and his daughter called Magnolia Flower: "Magnolia Flower they called her, for she came at the time of their opening" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 35). Bently is an ex-slave and now is married to a Cherokee woman and has his own family. He has his own farm and, due to his slavery years, he hates any one with light skin; however, when Magnolia Flower is "in full-bloom" (35), she falls in love with a man with light skin: "One day, as the sun gave me a good-night kiss and the stars began their revels, I bore a young Negro yet not a Negro, for his skin was the color of freshly barked cypress, golden with the curly black hair of the white man" (36). Here Hurston depicts the sunrise and its reflection on the surface of the river with a great analogy, and she compares the skin color of the lover to freshly barked wood. The metaphor she employs is all based on nature, and the while the metaphor of the sunset is embellished with the personification of the talking river, Signifyin(g) produces something open to different interpretations. Moreover, her descriptive words are added action. For example, when Magnolia Flower implies that she could kill anyone for her love, her mother pleads not to say such things: "'Say not such words, Magnolia,' she pleaded. 'Take them back into your bosom unsaid'" (38).

Certainly, the tropes Hurston uses also exist in the western canon, but her tropes constitute a figurative substitution that offers an implication of what she really wants to signify on, which makes it a trope within a trope as Gates states. For example, In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston uses personification in narration of the flood. The lake turns into a walking beast: "The monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed his chains. He seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like

grass and rushed on after his supposed-to-be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses along with other timbers. The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel" (239). The beast stands as a personification of the flood, but it also bears black Signification, by which Hurston rhetorically signifies upon something else. As discussed earlier, it is a possible reference to the Great Depression that affected the future of the Harlem literati. Thus, as Hurston claims, her art reflects human experience with the black rhetoric of Signifyin(g) directly appealing to a black audience by means of a trope that the white audience is familiar with.

The rhetoric used by Hurston reminds us of the term "autoethnographic expression," by which Mary Louise Pratt refers to human experience expressed in the oppressor's terms: "autoethnography" or "autoethnographic expression… refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's terms" (9). In other words, it is the way of blacks' expressing themselves within the terms of the dominant culture. Indeed, in terms of Hurston's works, this strategy is what Gates calls black doubled-voiced discourse. The rhetoric of Signifyin(g) existing vertically in the black text depends on the dominant discourse to create the black double-voiced text. We may acknowledge Hurston's works as literary "contact zones," as Pratt defines them, "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery" (7). This hybrid form of expression is a linguistic horizon, a place where two opposite elements appear to meet. Such areas are "contact zones" where local and marginal voices selectively claim parts of metropolitan speech in order to suit their own rhetorical purposes. Hurston joins a literary narrative style to a dialogue rich in

African American imagery and expressions, often even inflecting the narrative voice with the flavor of southern black speech. In other words, Hurston offers the reader a perfect union and the reconciliation of standard English and the black vernacular. What Pratt defines as a "contact zone" is the linguistic "horizon" within which Hurston works. As the sky meets the earth to create the image of the horizon, in Hurston's text white discourse meets with black discourse to create an autoethnographic expression.

The image of the "horizon" becomes most prominent in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the novel, the search of Janie ends when she reaches the horizon, which I assume refers to the entire book that reflects black folk life and represents an exemplary text making use of black discourse. Therefore, the image of the pear tree becomes quite important as it represents the inception of Janie's search for the horizon. I suggest that Hurston uses the tree metaphorically as a kind of "contact zone," where white discourse and black discourse meet and a beautiful African American work comes into bloom. Under the pear tree, Janie realizes the mystery as to how the barren stems give life to green leaves and then the snowy bloom. The barren brown stem, signifying black American culture, was the source of the blooming in the works of black literature and art. I suggest that by the orgasm scene, which figures in the notion of marriage, or the perfect union, Hurston possibly signifies upon her notion about how to represent blacks in art. That is African American rhetoric of Signifyin(g):

> 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 a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 24).

It is quite interesting that the expression "dust-bearing bee" has a resemblance with "incense-bearing tree" in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan.* In her autobiography, Hurston mentions that Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem and her English teacher Dwight O. W. Holmes in Baltimore provided awareness for her future plans. She describes Holmes as a *pilgrim to the horizon*: "He radiates newness and nerve and says to your mind, 'There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. Let's go see what it is.' He is a pilgrim to the horizon" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 123). Hurston mentions that she was a visual-minded person, and as she listened to the poem, pictures appeared in her imagination: "That night seemed queer, but I am so visual-minded that all the other senses induce pictures in me. Listening to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Kubla Khan for the first time, I saw all that the poet had meant for me to see with him, and infinite cosmic things besides" (123).

Though the Romantic Era does not apparently share many common features with the Harlem Renaissance, there is a stylistic similarity between this movement and Hurston's narration due to the fact that both make use of vivid metaphor and offer the reader a resistant text. Images of nature and natural phenomenon played a very significant role in the Romantic imagery, and works of that era were treated as pieces of art composed by a splendid imagination in emblematic language; therefore, symbolism and myth are prominent concepts in romanticism. According to the Romantic era writers, symbols are the artful endeavors of human beings corresponding to nature's emblematic language, and they are revered since they "simultaneously suggest many things, and were thus thought superior to one-to-one communications" (Introduction to Romanticism).

Similarly, Hurston believes that a characteristic use of metaphors is one of the key concepts in black narration: The "Negro's greatest contribution to the language is: (1) the use of metaphor and simile; (2) the use of the double descriptive; (3) the use of verbal nouns" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 62). Hurston, who always advocated that the best way to represent blacks should be a black narrative that engages with Nature, has offered us wonderful black works that are embodied with black expressions and replete with natural imagery.

It is quite clear that Hurston finds similarities between romanticism and black narration, because as she illustrates, symbols and metaphors are key elements in black narration. "Action. Everything illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics…His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act described in terms of another. Hence the rich metaphor and simile" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 61). Coleridge's narration is likewise adorned with beautiful images and metaphors. In his poem, he depicts the sunrise like "Enfolding sunny spots of greenery." We see the similar rhetorical pattern in Hurston's works. For instance, instead of just saying "time passes" she narrates: "The sun swept around the horizon, trailing its robes of weeks and days…Finally the sun's tide crept upon the shore of night and drowned all its hours… The sun, the hero of every day, the impersonal old man that beams as brightly on death as on birth, came up every morning and raced across the blue dome and dipped into the sea of fire every morning. Water ran downhill and birds nested" (Hurston, *The Completed Stories* 96).

The extended personification of the sun illustrates not just the passage of time but also shows the progress of emotional changes delivered by the narrative voice but reflecting characters' moods. It is a trope in progress, an action as much as a static

rhetorical device. At first we know the sun only from his robes, so the personification begins with a synecdoche. Next, the personification is developed to cast the sun as "hero," a full statement of the glory that was only implied by the trailing robes. Finally, a more ambiguous characterization of the sun as an "impersonal old man" implies the darker realities overseen by the passage of time. As we can see, a standard literary trope is put into motion, a characteristic of African rhetoric that Hurston believes is basic to developing an African American literary voice at a time when many young writers are tempted to accept more traditional models.

Some feared that the black culture shipped over to America from Africa through slavery was about to disappear, but it was given new life in literary works through folk tales and expressions before it completely vanished thanks to black intellectuals, especially Hurston. For example, "There was a general acceptance of the monkey as kinfolks. Perhaps it was some distant memory of tribal monkey reverence from Africa which had been forgotten in the main, but remembered in some vague way. Perhaps it was an acknowledgement of our talent for mimicry with the monkey as a symbol" (Hurston, *Dust Trucks*, 183). This remembrance is very important in terms of rebuilding the black identity during the Harlem Renaissance. That's why in the very beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* she addresses her female contemporaries and tells them to forget what male writers do not want to remember, which is the slavery sufferings, and remember what they do not want to forget, which is black culture. The pear tree stands as a metaphor for the beautiful and amazing black culture that needs to be remembered. Before Janie experiences her first orgasm under the pear tree, she develops a curiosity for the first bloom opened in the tree. "It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistering leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom.

It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in other existence and remembered again" (23).

Through the middle of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the tree image appears again as a significant metaphor in depicting how Janie loses her faith in Jody: "She wasn't petal-open anymore with him" (111). Even though the petals refer to the young pear tree fruit, the Buddha-like silence of Janie reminds the reader of the teachings Buddha and "the lotus flower," which is the symbol of love and devotion in Buddhism. It is possible that the pear tree metaphor is based on the lotus flower, and through the trope of Signifying, Hurston re-depicts the mystery of it with the pear tree. The reason she uses the lotus flower as the source for her metaphor is not only what it symbolizes, but also the way it blooms. The lotus is an amazing flower, which grows in shallow muddy waters, referred to as barren brown stems in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "Though it comes forth out of the mud and mire; it rises as a beautiful flower that lives in the water, without being affected by its origins and untouched by the murky waters beneath" (Arjuna).

Similarly, Hurston is not negatively affected by the "muddy waters," but rather sees them as the source of her literary works. She uses the black past and culture as the muddy water that is rich in material. In Buddhist beliefs, that you become a spiritual person does not mean "you … leave your prior life behind, but instead, you integrate, learn, remember, and respect what brought you to this point in the first place" (Arjuna), which is exactly how Hurston felt. Contrary to the black intellectuals who see black culture as degrading, Hurston sees it as the mud in which the beautiful lotus flower grows. Moreover, why Hurston names the place where Janie and Tea Cake go "the Muck" in the novel is to emphasize the idea of growth and fertility her characters undergo during their stay. It is possible that this

sojourn has symbolic parallels to Harlem as the mud where black literature bloomed and was nourished during the New Negro Movement.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston represents another tree image connected with the representation of black images and the notion of the horizon. Nanny, belonging to the Older Negro generation and representing slave times, chokes her to death with her piteous tales and out-of-date issues. She adheres to the memory of slavery sufferings, or scraps, as Hurston defines them; therefore, Hurston depicts her as a rotten tree likely to die. In the beginning of the novel, when Nanny witnesses Janie's first kiss, she gets mad and calls her inside the house. The first impression of Janie is her grandmother's face and hair that she compares to a tree destroyed by a storm: "Nanny's head and face look like standing roots of the some old tree that had been torn away by the storm" (26). It seems Nanny, who depicts black folks as a tree without roots, is destroyed by the storm of slavery; slavery has taken her dreams away and turned her into a ruin after a storm. The disheartened Nanny starts her own story conforming to just one comprehension: "You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways" (31). Because of the cultural disintegration under slavery she becomes a broken branch of a tree driven away. She accepts being a lost identity without roots.

For the generation born in slavery, life is managed within very narrow horizons. Nanny just knuckles down, exercising the caution that is meant to protect them from any harm in the future. When we assume that she represents the Older Negro and the sentimental narratives written under philanthropic guidance, it can be argued that Hurston sees these narratives as works devoid of the Rhetoric of Signifyin(g), because when she look at Nanny's face, she does not see a trace of

ancient power, which is her African Heritage: the "Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered… Her eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension" (26). The figure of Nanny suggests parallels to earlier literary attitudes. The authors of slave narratives and other works of previous generations felt constrained to write in the idiom of whites, from whom they sought help in ending a social evil. Contemplating a much different horizon, the young Harlem writers felt no such obligation. Rather, their goal was to tap into the living root of African rhetoric and reinvigorate the verbal arts cherished by black audiences.

As Gates *also* states, Nanny's story is a kind of slave narrative that falls into one understanding: "It is Nanny's "one comprehension" that suffocates, like the stench of the manure pile after a rain. Nanny is truly, as she later says to Janie in her own version of an oral slave narrative (pp. 31–32) delivered just after Janie's sexual experience under the pear tree, a branch without roots" (Gates 187). Although it takes Janie many years to find out that Nanny's guiding principles, or caution, cannot lead her, in the end she is able to take a "great journey to the horizons in search of people." She does not let Nanny pinch the horizon around her neck to choke her: "But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon—for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her" (138). In other words, the slave narratives written under the guidance of white authority do not serve as a model for Hurston. Their view of the world stifles aspirations and turns one's dreams into affliction.

When Hurston depicts Nanny as a rotten tree, she probably consulted her Vodou knowledge. In the yards of Haitian Vodou temples, there is often a huge tree whose branches are heavy with leaves. The trunk of the tree is tied with a white cord, which calls to mind the description of Nanny's face and head: "The cooling palma christi leaves that Janie had bound about her grandma's head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 26). The yard of the temple with a large sumptuous tree is the residence of 'Iroko,' a divinity and a "shielding spirit whose roots and branches represent the link between the spiritual and material worlds, as well as the connections between living human beings and their ancestors" (Harding). The Africans taken to the New World did not give up their past, and their values; on the contrary, they adopted them into the new life they have in America; therefore, they recognize a sacred tree as the residence of a protective divinity and a "symbol of their own relationship to spirit and to lineage" (Harding). That Nanny is depicted as a destroyed tree indicates that her connection to her spiritual source is destroyed. According to Charles H. Long, the meaning of Black religion in America "emerges from the process of 'wrestling' with the question of how to stay human in fundamentally inhumane situations: blackness as an essentially religious task" (cit. in Harding). The enslaved blacks in America had to cling to African values to be able to survive in the New World; however, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* we see Nanny as a superannuated character that is not able to offer an insight into the future of blacks and lead the way to a new horizon, and according to Hurston new methods must be devised to allow the race to flourish in new circumstances.

As seen clearly in Hurston's works, the tree constitutes a significant metaphor depicting black individuals, their expectations and the horizon they yearn

for. In one of her early short stories called "Sweat" published in 1926, we see a female character named Delia, who is physically and mentally abused by her husband Sykes. While she works herself to death to obtain some income, her husband spends the money on his mistress. One day, he brings home a rattlesnake in order to poison her, but he is hoist with his own petard. Delia arrives home only after Sykes is bitten by the snake and dies from its poison. Instead of walking inside to help him, she reaches the "Chinaberry tree" in the yard and listens to him moan and wail in the distance: "She could scarcely reach the Chinaberry tree, where she waited in the growing heat while inside she knew the cold river was creeping up and up to extinguish that eye which must know by now that she knew" (Hurston, *The Completed Stories* 85).

Thus, the chinaberry tree is revealed as a spot where she cherishes her freedom and a new promising life ahead. In her autobiography, Hurston explains that the chinaberry tree, on top of which she used to climb, is the place where the notion of the *horizon* originated: "I had a stifled longing. I used to climb to the top of one of the huge Chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 27). She had a longing for what was beyond their front gatepost; thus, she used to sit on top of the gatepost and "watch the world go by."

Once she and her friend even had a plan to slip off from their homes and to see the beyond of the gate. She could hardly sleep because of the excitement about what she would find. She knew very well about beginnings. The beginning was her

home, in fact her mother's room. Thus it was time for her to find out about the end and to be satisfied: "They were somewhere in the five acres that was home to me. Most likely in Mama's room. Now, I was going to see the end, and then I would be satisfied" (28). Hurston's autobiography suggests that her mother plays a very significant role in her career. There is no doubt that in her childhood, the porch talk at Joe Clarke's store opened the doors to her African American folk tales, but her mother's encouragement of Hurston's telling tall tales, and not scolding her as her grandmother did, had a significant role in her being skilled at making up stories and building an imaginative world of her own.

Another writer dealing with the significance of the chinaberry tree in African American literature is Albert Murray, who was jazz critic, novelist, essayist and biographer, and his autobiographical novel casts a light on the significance of this tree in Hurston's works, too. Similar to Hurston, Murray raised in black folk culture of South. In an interview made with Albert Murray, he states that his main character Scooter, in his novel *Train Whistle Guitar: A Novel,* is his fictional counterpart; however, the novel is not an autobiography giving the records of his life in particular sequences, but rather a literary reflection of his consciousness: "Scooter is a fictional representation of my consciousness. He is not, of course, a documentary image of me; rather he is a literary device for dealing with my consciousness" (Rowell and Murray 399). As Murray states in his interview, the main character Scooter, used to climb a tree and wonder about the world beyond the front yard of his house: "Scooter doesn't stay on the ground in Gasoline Point: he gets up in this tree and looks out over an expanse of the land; he expands his awareness of what's around him". He names his second book in the series *The Spyglass Tree*, because "it's an extension of the chinaberry tree in the front yard of the house in Gasoline Point" (399- 400). In his

novel, he transforms his experience into fiction as a coming of age story: "As a writer, you're trying to put together what is called a *bildungsroman*-that is, an education story, a coming of age story, a story about how a person's consciousness develops. That's what it's all about, and those various contexts are extensions of the original contexts." (400).

Barbara Baker notes the similarity between Murray's horizon and Hurston's, while noting that their use of the image varies in extent and artistic purpose:

> The childhood and morning of his chinaberry tree get extended into the whole of life, where the pure blue sky becomes a destination and, rather than a separate country, there is a blending of worlds. Only Zora Neale Hurston may rival him in associating the real-life chinaberry tree of childhood with seeing and seeking the far horizon. Hurston, however, credits her mother for the admonition 'to jump at the sun,' and the tree and the concept do not get so extended or so artfully transformed in her writings as they do in his. (Baker 187-188)

Like Murray, Hurston uses the narrative structure of *bildungsroman,* in which Janie develops consciousness and the tendency for knowing herself. Janie's journey starts with Taylor's kiss, but her longing for the horizon, or her realization of this longing, comes to a peak with the pear tree orgasm scene, which is the most discussed and cited part of the novel. Janie realizes that she wants to be a tree in bloom. She wants to bear fruit; thus she looks for the dust-bearing bees for her perfect union. She perfectly knows that the place she lives does not give her the answer where she can find one, so she goes down to the front gate and gazes over the world beyond her. Then she waits for a marriage that creates love:

> Oh to be a pear tree- *any* tree in bloom! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. 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" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 25)

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the horizon Janie aspires to is an attainable one. In the end of the novel Janie reaches her horizon; she pulls in her horizon that is like a great fishnet, the meshes of which are filled with life. "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" (286). What Hurston signifies with the horizon here is her literary destination, which is to write literary works embroidered with folk life and culture.

The image of the horizon illustrates how Hurston uses metaphor in the way unique to African American rhetoric. The horizon clearly stands for dreams of future accomplishments. It marks the limits of what can be imagined. But Hurston shows the image in motion, a progressive movement toward the realization of those dreams. In the action of gathering the horizon around Janie's shoulders like a net the image shows motion through time, rather than a static image of hope. This trope also exemplifies how African American verbal arts represent nature. The horizon is a trick of perception. While we can see it, we can't touch it or manipulate it. Hurston's representation of the horizon as a net that can be handled goes well beyond the

mimetic imitation of nature. The image is exaggerated, stylized and made cartoonish. Metaphor is fore-grounded and made concrete. Such imagery offers us the joy of verbally transcending the limitations of the world.

On the other hand, in her short story "John Redding Goes to Sea" we have instead a male character, John, yearning for the horizon. It is Hurston's first story, written when she was a student at Howard University. It was published in 1921, in *The Stylus* magazine, founded by Alain Locke, and republished in *Opportunity* in 1926. Both the novel and the story deal with the concept of the horizon, but the difference between the main characters is that in the former, Janie is able to reach her horizon, where she can identify herself as a black woman, whereas in the latter John's dream of travelling to the farthest land has been crushed by time and ends with his death, so he fails to reach the horizon he yearns for.

Indeed John is reminiscent of the "Watcher" in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* whose "dreams [are] mocked to death by time." In the story, John is an imaginative child who is fond of daydreaming. He is as concerned with illustrating his surroundings as Hurston was in her childhood. He fancies himself a prince, as a knight, or a captain having adventures, at the end of which he encounters the horizon: "No matter what he dreamed or who he fancied himself to be, he always ended by riding away to the horizon; for his childish ignorance he thought this to be farthest land" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 2*);* It is quite obvious that John is a character based on Hurston's own experiences, like Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston used to make up stories and imagine talking animals, or trees in scary shapes similar to John's personification in her short story: "There was a tree that used to creep up close to the house around sundown and threaten me. It used to

put on a skull-head with a crown on it every day at sundown" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 52). In her short story, her character is frightened of a pine tree as Hurston was:

> "Se dat tallest pine tree ovah dere how it looks like a skull wid a crown on it?"
>
> "Yes, indeed! It do look lak a skull since you call mah 'tention to it. You 'magine lotser things nobody else evah did, son!"
>
> "Sometimes, Pa dat ole tree waves at me just aftah th' sun goes down, an' makes me sad an' skeeered, too" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 3).

When John tells his fear about the pine tree, his father comforts him and tells it is because of the dark and his young age; however, although he gets older, he cannot get rid of the disturbing feeling of the tree. The tree not only scares him, but also "laughs at him like it had some grim joke up its sleeves" (10). As a child, it is quite natural to have these kinds of fears, but as one gets older, he gets rid of them.

One can raise the question: while Janie attains her goal, why can John not accomplish his? I propose that John is the Watcher who watches his dreams sail away: "For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 9). The main impediment in the way in John's progress is his mother. Like Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* John's mother Matty wants her son to get married and settled. While John is hampered by his mother in search of his horizon, Janie breaks herself free from the pinched horizon that Nanny kept under a cloak of pity. She is determined to take a journey "to the horizon in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her… It was all according to the way you see things.

Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps." (138).

Similar to Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Matty is a downcast person who enjoys self-pity: "Mrs. Redding promptly went off into a fit of weeping but the man and boy ate supper unmoved. Twelve years of married life had taught Alfred that, far from being miserable when she wept, his wife was enjoying a bit of self-pity" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 4). As Nanny pinches the horizon around Janie in the name of love, Matty does not allow John to fulfill his dreams, and she does not consent to her son's sailing away: "Matty always took refuge in self-pity and tears. Her son's desires were incomprehensible to her but she did not want to hurt him. It was maternal love that made her cling so desperately to John" (5). Since John conforms to the rules of his mother and meets her expectations, the horizon remains beyond him. Only when he dies, his dead body floats down the river to the end of the world, or horizon: "Out on the bosom of the river, bobbing up and down as if waving good-bye, John Redding floated away toward Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world-at last" (6-7). As Hurston emphasizes when "the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon" is absent "no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138).

In his essay "Projecting Gender: Personification in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston," Gordon Thompson compares *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *John Redding Goes to Sea,* and argues that Hurston hesitates to represent herself in her early years and replaces herself with a male character:

> We need take only one example to acknowledge Hurston's struggle with presenting herself, and therefore women, as storytellers. In her earliest published piece, for instance, in order to camouflage her

> private (female) concerns with telling tall tales and travel, Hurston purposely uses a male rather than a female character to dramatize these concerns and their interrelatedness in Hurston's universe. (Thompson 749)

Thompson also clearly claims that in the early years of her career, Hurston was not confident enough to reveal her gender as an author: "it is almost as if Hurston, being female, felt that storytelling was a taboo and decided to allow a male character to represent this aspect of herself" (Thompson 753).

As black person who grew up within a world of tall tales and became very skilled at story-telling, Hurston very actively opposed this gender discrimination. I propose that the gender prohibition itself established the horizon wherein she could see herself assuming narrative authority. She makes her intentions quite clear in the very beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* where the narrative voice addresses women. Janie represents the writer who forgets slavery's sufferings and yet still remembers the African Heritage in her writings, but John represents the one who needs to "act and do things accordingly." With John, Hurston quite likely signifies upon black intellectuals who feature race prejudice and hatred in their works rather than folk tales, black wit, the blues and other folk materials. I suspect that the reason John dies signifies Hurston's criticism that race prejudice and hatred should not exist in a black literary work.

On the banks of the St. John River, the little John watches the floating dry twigs that he imagines as his ships sail away, and grows a strong desire to follow them till the end. One day his father finds him crying over his imagined ship being swept in among the weeds, and he tells his father that the weeds deter his ships from progressing. The father tells his son not to cry over his ships, because there are a lot

of people who cannot progress due to the things holding them back, so he has to get used to it.

We can see that scolding the weeds for stopping his ships from going to the end of the world does not help; besides it makes him more furious. Writings heavy with hatred and anger will set darks clouds looming on their horizon; as a result, they will not make any progress toward achievement. John is a free man and should not let self-pity be a ghost after him. As Hurston emphasizes, each individual is responsible for his own sufferings: “When I have been made to suffer or when I have been made happy by others. I have known that individuals were responsible for that, and not races” (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 248).

Both Janie and John yearn for the horizon, but they do not follow the same path to their destinations. Without a specific reason, John just wants to quench his curiosity about what is at the end of the world: "Pa, when Ah gets as big as you Ah'm goin' farther than them ships. Ah'm going to where the sky touches the ground" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 2). His horizon is quite literal. He is talented in making up stories, but his stories keep fading away; thus, he does not make any progress on his way to the horizon: "Oh, yes, I'm a dreamer. I have such wonderfully complete dreams, Papa. They never come true. But even as my dreams fade, I have others" (10). In brief, while John just wants to reach and see the end of the world, Janie wants to reach there and shine the jewel inside her to the whole world. In other words, Janie offers us a true coming of age story whereas John is stuck is his dreams and speculations.

The Chinaberry tree appears in “John Redding Goes to Sea,” too. After supper, John sits under the Chinaberry tree in their big yard, and then his father joins him. Matty and Stella sit on the front porch. Hurston describes the scene as the two

separate factions taking up opposite sides: “The family was divided into two armed camps and the hostilities had reached that stage where no quarter could be asked or given” (11). The father and son are under the Chinaberry tree, with its connotations of dreams and the horizon. Both John and his father yearn for the journey to the farthest land, for which they really strive. On the other hand, the mother and the wife sit on the porch, which is part of house, or an established life. In contrast to the males in the house, they are against the changes in an established life.

Apart from Hurston, another black woman writer who deals with an unattainable horizon like the one in “John Redding Goes to Sea” is Marita Bonner. In her play *The Purple Flower*, she criticizes the black Harlem Literati, struggling to prove that they are as talented as the whites, and they can produce art at the same level. In the play, she uses the image of “the purple Flower-of-Life-at-Its-Fullest” as the symbol of their yearnings, so what Hurston symbolizes as the point of observing the horizon, which is either the Chinaberry tree or the pear tree, is transformed into a flower in Bonner’s play. In the play, the characters are divided into two groups: White Devils and Us. While the white people are represented as one type of character, the individuals of The Us vary in both complexion, from light to dark skin, and character type. The White Devils, representing white people, live on the hill, atop of which grows “the purple Flower-of-Life-at-Its-Fullest” whereas, the Us, representing African Americans, live in the valley and set as a goal reaching the Purple Flower on top. The White Devils, on the other hand, have the blacks build roads and houses for them, but they do not let the blacks live with them in peace and harmony; moreover, the White Devils use their power to prevent The Us from attaining their goal.

It is quite likely that Bonner named her play due to her engagement with German literature. That she excelled in German literature suggests that she was familiar with Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg), the prominent author of German Romanticism and his unfinished novel *Heinrich and Ofterdingen*, which was published in Germany in 1802. In *his novel*, Novalis narrates a young man's search for a Blue Flower he sees in his dream, and he longs and yearns for it ever since: "The young man lay restless on his bed, thinking of the stranger and his tales. 'It is not the treasures,' said he to himself, 'that have awakened in me such unutterable longings. Far from me is all avarice; but I long to behold the blue flower. It is constantly in my mind, and I can think and compose of nothing else" (Novalis, Kindle Location 215). One of the distinctive characteristics of romanticism is yearning for something that is distant and hard to reach: "…the blue flower of Novalis and German Romanticism symbolizes longing, desire, and the search for artistic perfection" (Johnson, *The memory Factory* 85-86), which describes a literary horizon. The novel constitutes the corner stone of the romantic era, and the term "Blue Flower" became a symbol of hope, desire and beauty; thus, it represents striving for the unreachable in romantic narratives:

> …the blue flower is primarily an object of desire. It is, however, a highly mobile object, whose shape shifts throughout the novel. In its mobility, the blue flower is actually a symbol not of a goal that Heinrich has to reach, but of the process of striving itself. (…) But it is even more important to notice what happens when Heinrich decides to approach the flower. It metamorphoses right before his eyes, becoming even more compelling object of desire. (Newman 65)

Thus, I propose that Bonner intentionally uses this image of desire in order to depict the artistic endeavors of black intellectuals, and especially the avarice of those black intellectuals that are obsessed with it, but changes the color to purple identified with blacks. In other words, the purple flower on top of the mountain is the symbol of the horizon that black intellectuals try to reach in the course of the Harlem Renaissance. The symbol of the blue flower changes color in this depiction, but stays the same in terms of representation.

In the play, Bonner criticizes the black intellectuals and their attempts in climbing up the Racial Mountain. When The Finest Blood attempts to get the White Devil in the bushes, he seizes a piece of rock, but the Old Man stops him and tells him that hitting him with a piece of rock is not the clever thing to do. Because the White Devil is full of tricks, they should act wisely and differently:

> OLD MAN. No! No! Not that way. The White Devils are full of tricks. You must go differently. Bring him gifts and offer them to him.
>
> FINEST BLOOD. What have I to give for a gift?
>
> OLD MAN. There are the pipes of Pan that every Us is born with. Play on that . Soothe him-lure him- make him yearn for the pipe. Even a White Devil will soften at music. He'll come out, and he only come to try to get the pipe from you. (Bonner, "The Purple Flower" 198)

"A New Man," referring to the New Negro, is being created and "dust, books and gold," are called for to be put in the pot for his creation. It is quite likely that dust refers to the remains of African Heritage, books to the knowledge the young intellectuals gained from education, and gold to the money they get from their white patrons.

The last thing to put in the iron pot is blood: "Old Man: You got to give

blood! Blood has to be let for births, to give life" (197). The Finest Blood goes into the bushes to get the blood, but while the curtain closes every one is left waiting in silence. The play ends with a question: "Is it time?" The play does not offer a clear-cut ending, but when we take the title into consideration, one can argue that Bonner finds all these intellectual efforts of blacks a hopeless desire. According to her, the leaders use other intellectuals as a stepping stone in their careers, and the works they create do not reflect the real black individuals of America. Furthermore, as she states in her essay, what is written and discussed in canonical literature, especially in the ancient works, are worthless for the blacks claiming their hybrid identity in America:

> Old ideas, old fundamentals seem worm-eaten, out-grown, worthless, bitter, fit for the scrap-heap Wisdom.
>
> What you had thought tangible and practical has turned out to be a collection of "blue-flower" theories.
>
> If they have not discovered how to use their accumulation of facts, they are useless to you in Their world. (Bonner, "On Being" 111)

Moreover, their works will be just a mime and a copy-cat: "An empty imitation of an empty invitation. A mime; a sham; a copy-cat. A hollow re-echo. A forth, a foam. A fleck of the ashes of superficiality?" In her play, Bonner also refers to the speech of W. E. B. Du Bois, the "Criteria of Negro Art." Du Bois states:

> You and I have been breasting hills; we have been climbing upward; there has been progress and we can see it day by day looking back along blood-filled paths. But as you go through the valleys and over the foothills, so long as you are climbing, the direction -- north, south, east or west -- is of less importance. But when gradually the vista widens and you begin to see the world at your feet and the far horizon,

> then it is time to know more precisely whither you are going and what you really want.

As Du Bois states, blood is given on the way up to the mountain top. When you get on top of the mountain it is time to know whether you have made some progress or not. Thus, Bonner questions the progress of the black intellectuals climbing up this racial mountain. Now is it time to know if they have what they want and to make real progress? That the mountain has a "purple flower" on its top suggests that all these efforts are just a collection of unattainable dreams. The far horizon they see on top of the mountain does not embrace black women who do not have a chance to get education as the Talented Tenth did, so when those on the top depict the black individual, the representation lacks truth in terms of real folk life in rural settings – as Hurston demonstrates—and the uneducated black females in urban locales—as Bonner does.

All in all, according to Hurston, "De Nature" of folk life is the most important tool that blacks should use when they express themselves. When we look at Hurston's life, we see that she grew up in "De Nature" of Southern life and became familiar with black expressions and folk tales in her early years. Moreover, the key role of her mother in her being skilled at telling stories should not be disregarded. She had always encouraged Hurston in making up stories. At her mother's deathbed she realizes that she should be the voice of her mother, who appreciated her own values. She rejects western rituals like taking the pillow from under her head and covering the clocks and the mirror after her death: "That day, September eighteenth, she had called me and given me certain instructions. I was not to let them take the pillow from under her head until she was dead. The clock was not to be covered, nor the looking-glass" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 64).

In rural areas, when a black person dies clocks and mirrors are to be covered; however, although these traditions are carried out by blacks, their origins are English: “While many white informants believed these ideas stemmed from black traditions, few contemporary African Americans knew of the beliefs. Newbell Puckett, in his study of African-American folklore in the South, ultimately concluded that both beliefs arose from English origins” (Coggeshall 114).

That Hurston cannot carry out her mother’s last wishes incites an urge for her to be the voice of her mother, and for genuine black culture in general: “But she looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice.” Thus, with the death of her mother, her spiritual journey to the horizon begins: “But life picked me up from the foot of Mama’s bed, grief, self-despisement and all, and set my feet in strange ways. That moment was the end of a phase in my life. I was old before my time with grief of loss, of failure, of remorse of failure… That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as in spirit.” Her journey to the horizon is not narrowed down in geography like John’s in her short story, but like Janie’s in spirit. “Unlike so many of her contemporaries, Hurston frequently commented explicitly on the nature of figurative language, as well as on the process of fiction-making” (Gates, Introduction *The Complete Stories* xi). Her works adorned with the *nature* of black folk life are her intellectual destination and self-fulfillment.

CHAPTER VI

Zora "The Bone Collector": The Horizon Built on Bones

One of the important tasks of the Harlem intelligentsia was to reverse the stereotypical misconception of blacks. They were aware that there was no true representation of themselves in American letters, so they were annoyed by the misinterpretation and stereotypical caricatures of blacks. With the emergence of racial pride, they made a dramatic shift in the perception of black identity; however, their artistic endeavors in representing blacks in literature resulted in contention among the black intellectuals. As stated previously, the black intellectuals went through an influx of new and divergent ideas; thus "The New Negro" promoted folk culture and tried to accurately reflect black folk life in their works counter to the stereotypes in whites' works.

They were not pleased with the stereotypical representation of blacks in minstrel shows performed by whites wearing black face make up, as Hurston remarks: "Speaking of the use of Negro material by white performers, it is astonishing that so many are trying it, and I have never seen one yet entirely realistic. They often have all the elements of the song, dance, or expression, but they are misplaced or distorted by the accent falling on the wrong element. Every one seems to think that the Negro is easily imitated when nothing is further from the truth;" furthermore, it was even worse when blacks put that make up on: "Without exception I wonder why the black-face comedians are black-face; it is a puzzle—good comedians, but darn poor niggers" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 72).

Therefore, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes agreed to collaborate on a play called *Mule Bone, A Negro Folk Comedy* to reflect the accurate depiction of black folk life. Both conceived of a horizon where they could see truly represented

blacks, so they aimed at showing how black folks were rich in black expression and idioms and how they were skilled at metaphors and playing with words in their own vernacular form of the language, as opposed to misrepresented blacks in white works, minstrel shows and even blacks' own works that presented just well-educated middle class blacks. Both tried to rebuild black identity on the remaining bones of collective African heritage in order to demonstrate real black narrative and the considerable skills of black folks in using figurative language. In this chapter, I will examine how Hurston set a horizon to depict real black folks with black folk expressions that carried over and revived in a new form in the New World from the bones of African heritage.

The minstrel shows that flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century were not only a misinterpretation of blacks but also agents in establishing the stereotypical image of "happy-go-lucky Nigger." In these shows white performers used to imitate black people by wearing black face make up; however, the origin of this mock performance dates back to 1840s and a quite different interpretation was assigned it by whites. In fact, the slaves would imitate and make fun of their white masters by slapstick performances called "puttin' on ole massa" (cit. in Hill, *Harlem Stomp! 8*). The white performers, on the other hand misperceived those "puttin' on ole massa" as authentic black culture; thus, "The irony of minstrel shows is that whites would put on black faces to imitate blacks imitating whites" (Hill, *Harlem Stomp!* 8). Hurston argues that black folks do not imitate due to the feeling of inferiority. They love to mimic and it is just the way of life for them no matter how well educated they are. It is just in their nature and the educated black individual appreciates and acknowledges it as part of his culture:

> Moreover, the contention that the Negro imitates from a feeling of inferiority is incorrect. He mimics for the love of it. The group of Negroes who slavishly imitate is small. The average Negro glories in his ways. The highly educated Negro the same. The self-despisement lies in a middle class who scorns to do or be anything Negro. "That's just like a Nigger" is the most terrible rebuke one can lay upon this kind. He wears drab clothing, sits through a boresome church service, pretends to have no interest in the community, holds beauty contests, and otherwise apes all the mediocrities of the white brother (Hurston "The Characteristics" 67).

Those middle class blacks rather imitate the life and cultural values of their white brother similar to "Mimicry Man" in Homi Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man." Furthermore, although Hurston states that "The truly cultured Negro scorns him," as Langston Hughes notes in his essay "The Negro and The Racial Mountain," some black intellectuals have a desire of writing like a white poet or writer. Presumably that she uses "truly" indicates that some of those, who are also educated, may not fall into this category. Black intellectuals like Countee Cullen, whose poems are reminiscent of the Shakespearean canon, and Alain Lock promote folk culture, but only executed within traditional white literary structures.

On the other hand, younger black literati like Hurston and Hughes devoted themselves to the collective African heritage both in content and diction. They were confident that they were orienting themselves according to the new horizon, thus standing firm. In other words, they were as assertive as the "Negro 'farthest down,' [who] is too busy 'spreading his junk' in his own way to see or care. He likes his

own things best" (Hurston "The Characteristics" 67). That is to say they have already established their own horizon in their own settlement and do not yearn for another.

Unfortunately, the "Laughter" that black folks used as a coping strategy was misperceived and attributed to black folks' inferiority; thus it became a sign of a low character. On the other hand, as Mikhail Bakhtin states in his prominent work *Rabelais and His World,* "Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man." (66). Though usually suppressed in cultures that privilege the high and serious, laughter is always available as a tool for contesting unbalanced power relations. "Laughter was as universal as seriousness; it was directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology. It was the world's second truth extended to everything and from which nothing is taken away. It was, as it were, the festive aspect of the whole world in all its elements, the second revelation of the world in play and laughter" (84). The Culture of laughter reverses the high-low opposition and the power relations that support it, freeing voices that had been suppressed by seriousness, ceremony and social hierarchy.

Laughter played a key role in works of authors, such as Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare. It was recognized as a positive, creative and regenerating trait of expression… It developed separately from the high ideology of literature. Due to its unofficial existence, it allowed "exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness" (71) and used all these privileges widely outside of the official sphere. It did not create any dogmas and did not convey any feelings of fear, but strength. Bakhtin also states "One might say that it (laughter) builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.

Similarly, in her works Hurston represents the black world standing as a

whole and separate from the official sphere. She creates a world of her own based on her folk culture with a sense of humor. Black humor penetrates into the black world of its own, then frees all characters from the ossified tone of seriousness in "high literature." As Janie creates an inner world to liberate herself from submission to the strict norms of Jody, Hurston's works constitute another world that stands outside the official works of the Harlem Renaissance.

According to Bakhtin, laughter was a free weapon for medieval parodies, (94), and similarly Hurston makes a reference to black vernacular language as a weapon in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 275). Hurston uses laughter as a weapon and interweaves black humor and tragedy, because she was aware that the virtue of laughter is the most precious property of human beings.

Likewise she, claims that laughter is something innate black folks lived by:

> It was an inside thing to live by. It was sure to be heard when and where the work was the hardest, and the lot the most cruel. It helped the slaves endure. They knew that something better was coming. So they laughed in the face of things and sang, 'I'm so glad! Trouble don't last always.' And the white people who heard them were struck dumb that they could laugh. In an outside way, this was Old Massa's fun, so what was Old Cuffy laughing for? (Hurston, "High John" 450-451).

In the course of slavery, laughter was a defense that helped the slaves endure the problems they faced. Owing to the folk character High John de Conquer and his tales the slaves found "something worthy of laughter." Laughter was "the sign of this

folk character, (Hurston, "High John" 450) and he helped the slaves feel strong enough to endure the sufferings of slavery: "Old John, High John could beat-the un-beatable. He was top-superior to the whole mess of sorrow. He could beat it all, and what made it so cool, finish it off with a laugh. So they pulled the covers up over their souls and kept them from all hurt, harm and danger and made them a laugh and a song" (450).

Therefore, Hurston had a completely different approach to the laughter of the black folks from those who believed that the laughter was a sign of low character. In her works, she deals with how black folks use it as a defense mechanism and a source to get the strength they need. For instance, in her short play called "Jook," posthumously published, she refers to laughter in an entertainment along with a blues song:

> Say, look here sweet baby, you sho don't know my mind,
> When you see me laughing, laughing just to keep from crying.
> If you ever been down you know just how I feel.
> I been down so long, down don't worry me. (Hurston, *Collected Plays* 123)

In "The Gilded Six-Bits," when Joe finds out about her wife's adultery, even if he has a chance to kill Slemmons, he does not take any action, but just laughs: "He was assaulted in his weakness. Like Samson awakening after his haircut. So he just opened his mouth and laughed" (93). Thus, Joe uses "laughter" as a strategy to endure, and Hurston as a reference to a folk character. He is a character who is faithful to his folk culture, and he finds the strength he needs in his culture. In order to deal with the adultery, Joe consults a culturally developed defense mechanism, which helps him deal with the problem.

Missie May, on the other hand, keeps crying due to feelings of guilt: “Missie May kept on crying and Joe kept on feeling so much, and not knowing what to do with all his feelings, he put Slemmons's watch charm in his pants pocket and took a good laugh and went to bed” (94). I believe that it is possible to read these two characters as Hurston’s notion and criticism on what black narration should deal with. As she always claims, crying over the past, or narratives based on weeping and moaning do not have any promises for the future of blacks, because these writings contain tragedy that is too serious.

Black narratives, on the other hand, need to be witty and should contain black folk expressions as the manifestation of the verbal skills of blacks, so they can find all the freedom and strength they need. Bakhtin asserts that laughter offers a different point of view in recognizing the world compared to the serious official standpoint. The language of laughter frees the narration from domination of gloomy and darksome categories like absolute, and unchangeable, and displays gay and joyful aspects of the world with change and renewal. Therefore, Joe constitutes an example of an intellectual, or the way of narration to be followed. As for Missie May, I propose that she signifies upon the intellectuals who promote a way of narration that is misguided, as explained in the second chapter.

In “The Gilded Six-Bits,” Hurston also makes a reference to how laughter is misperceived by the white people. At the end of the story, after Joe buys some candy and leaves the candy shop, the white clerk in the shop turns the next customer and states: "Wisht I could be like these darkies. Laughin' all the time. Nothin' worries 'em" (98). It is quite clear that even if Joe is a regular customer, the shopkeeper is not able to know him very well. That the shopkeeper knows little about black folk life and folk culture makes him prejudge Joe and come up with his own answer that

satisfied only himself. The shopkeeper makes his comment about Joe based on an absolute and unchangeable truth in his mind. Now that the racial prejudice bearing ossified perceptions about black folks does not allow him to comprehend why black folk laugh at everything.

Moreover, the fact that Joe laughs at troubles has a further significance in the story. As Hurston states, blacks know that problem will last not last forever and something better will happen. Similarly, in the end of the story Joe and Missie May have a baby, who is a spitting image of Joe. If we assume the story expresses Hurston's criticism on black narratives, that they have a baby can be a reference to a product, or work of (literary) art bearing the characteristics of folk culture, life, language and expressions, as Hurston compares "love-making" with making art: "It is all in a view-point. Love-making and fighting in all their branches are high arts, other things are arts among other groups where they brag about their proficiency just as brazenly as we do about these things that others consider matters for conversation behind closed doors" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 69).

Similar to the biological necessity of "love-making," the cultural practices of folk culture are a necessity and part of their life: "Likewise love-making is a biological necessity the world over and an art among Negroes. So that a man or woman who is proficient sees no reason why the fact should not be moot. He swaggers. She struts hippily about. Songs are built on the power to charm beneath the bed-clothes. Here again we have individuals striving to excel in what the community considers an art. Then if all of his world is seeking a great lover, why should he not speak right out loud?" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 68). Thus Joe is a great lover, so is a great artist, and that the baby is the spitting image of Joe indicates the future hopes for blacks, since the child, as the signification of the next generation,

carries the features of the father who is loyal to his culture.

Hurston perfectly knew the function of laughter in folk culture and its applicability to her objectives in representing blacks. Contrary to those who believed laughter was sign of inferiority, Hurston expressed it as a significant folk characteristic, and, therefore, she used it as a means of representing blacks as a tool used for her work, a most significant element that lay with in her artistic horizon.

Therefore, she wanted to write a comedy based on "Negro folk-lore", which "is still in the making," (Hurston, "Characteristics" 65). Just like in stories, black folklore and folkways needed to be staged in order to represent blacks accurately, hence to wipe out the stereotypical image of blacks. In other words, she wanted to depict "the Negro farthest down," with ingenious improvisation, wit and rhyming ability as opposed to the stereotyped figures in minstrel shows, who were too ignorant to understand the long words. "In April 1928, she shared with Hughes her plans for a culturally authentic African-American theatre, one constructed upon a foundation of the black vernacular" (Gates, "A Tragedy of Negro Life" 9), and Hughes agreed to collaborate.

In another letter to Hughes, Hurston clearly expresses her annoyance about the misinterpretation of blacks: "It makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it. I am almost sick—my one consolation being that they never do it right and so there is still a chance for us" (cit. in Kaplan 172). Moreover, in one of the Players' Guild gatherings, Hughes met Theresa Helburn, a member of the Players' Guild, and Helburn expressed her disfavor with the plays submitted to the Guild, because they were not real Negro comedy, but more variations on minstrel shows.

Thus, Hurston and Hughes, who shared the same ideology, decided to make a contribution to the Negro Theatre with a collaborative comedy that would be embellished with black folklore and present an accurate depiction of black folk life: "April of 1930, their intention was to present black folk characters in a humorous but true-to-life manner, a counter image to stereotyped presentations" (McLaren 19). The play was based on a folk tale, "The Bone of Contention," which Hurston had collected in one of her expeditions in Florida: "Together we also began to work on a play called *Mule Bone, A Negro Folk Comedy,* based on an amusing tale Miss Hurston had collected about a quarrel between two rival church factions. I plotted out and typed the play based on her story, while she authenticated and flavored the dialogue and added highly humorous details" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 320).

Although "The Bone of Contention" was collected as a folk tale, Hurston adorned it with her double utterance in collaboration with Hughes to veil their thoughts about representing blacks. The story forms the basis not only for *The Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life* but also for *De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts.* Hurston and Hughes worked on *The Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*, but they were not able to publish it as co-writers, since, as Hughes mentioned on his copy, "the authors fell out" (cit. in Gates 10). As a result, Hurston decided to write her own version of "Negro comedy" which she called *De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts.*

"The Bone of Contention" tells the story of two hunters who quarrel over a turkey they simultaneously kill. One of the hunters knocks the other unconscious with the hock bone of a mule he came across at the scene of the fight. Later the townspeople bring the issue to trial, and they discuss whether the mule bone should be considered a lethal weapon and whether the hunter must thus be charged with

assault. In all three products, the weapon used in the assault is a bone of an already deceased mule.

As we have seen, Zora Neale Hurston refers to biblical stories and uses them as a cover story in her works, which makes her works an iceberg with Christian beliefs on top and messages adorned with pagan ones underneath. "The Valley of Dry Bones" in *The Bible,* to which Hurston seems to refer, expresses the prophecy of the rebirth of Israel. She does not directly refer to it, but she makes an allusion to express her claim that black works constituting the horizon they aim at should be built on the bones or the remnants of African Heritage in order that the black culture can be revived in the New World. In *The Bible*, the vision of the dry bones that God provides for Ezekiel is considered as a sign of the rebirth of a nation. In the vision God takes Ezekiel to a land full of dry bones and asks him to tell the bones that God will make breath enter the bones, then the bones will come to life. When Ezekiel does what is commanded, the bones come together, flesh and skin cover them, breath enters and they stand up as a vast army:

> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army (Ezekiel 37).

In *The Bible* the revival of the dry bones signifies national restoration, and in *The Mule Bone,* it represents the revival of collective African Heritage. The bones do not come into being as in the biblical story of "The Valley of Dry Bones," but the mule bone raising contention between two main characters signifies upon the black

culture, which is the body to be revived with the renaissance. As the mule bone causes a fight between the two characters, the black culture was a "bone of contention" among the black intellectuals.

"The Bone of Contention" lays the basis for both plays, and the plays constitute examples of real Negro comedy Hurston and Hughes dreamed about, since they are cloaked with elaborated and figurative black imagery, which Henry Louis Gates emphasizes in the works of Hurston in general: "Rereading Hurston, I am always struck by the density of intimate experiences she cloaked in richly elaborated imagery. It is this concern for the figurative capacity of black language, for what a character in *Mules and Men* calls 'a hidden meaning, jus' like de Bible...de inside meanin' of words,' that unites Hurston's anthropological studies with her fiction" (Gates, Afterword, *Mules and Men* 292).

However, although both plays seem quite similar, there are some significant differences between them. As for the similarities, we have the same cast, the bone as the weapon of assault and two different churches. The course of the events and the focus on some characters changes but the bone as a weapon of assault does not change, because it represents the black folk culture that parted the Harlem Literati into two separate poles. The mule bone has a very significant role in both plays, as it represents black culture and black rhetorical practice: "The elders neglected his bones but the mule remained with them in song and story as a simile, as a metaphor, to point a moral or adorn a tale" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 210).

Even though black culture seemed to have disappeared in the New World, blacks were able to retain their culture, and thanks to the Harlem Renaissance, black art bloomed in company with a controversial debate among the Niggerati: " dat ol' mule been dead three yeas an' still kickin'!" (220). Some black intellectuals

advocated folk culture while some others believed folk culture in black art would sustain the misrepresentation due to the engrained stereotypical image of blacks. Moreover, the ones embracing the collective African heritage were also in contention about how to use it in their works. Some, like Hurston, preferred no alteration whereas some, like Alain Locke or Countee Cullen, preferred to use it in combination with a "high" literary diction.

I suggest that in all three works, two churches, Methodist and Baptist, represent the two opposed sides that are in contention about folk materials. The argument caused by the mule bone seems to concern social values, but when the opposed sides are taken into account, it can be argued that the dispute is both religious and political, and it signifies upon the disagreement of the Niggerati on the representation of blacks in art during the course of the Harlem Renaissance. Folk life, religion and culture are so intertwined that using folk material in black art is, therefore, both a religious and a political act in a way: "It was evident to the simplest person in the village long before three o'clock that this was to be a religious and political fight.

"The assault and the gobbler were unimportant. Dave was a Baptist, Jim a Methodist, only two churches in the town and the respective congregations had lined up solidly" (214). Both sides take their places, and they are solidly for what they advocate. Furthermore, as in Hurston's other works, the court represents the decision-making mechanism. Whether Jim committed a crime with the mule bone and whether it can be considered as a weapon are brought to the court to be decided. Now I suggest that the mule bone represents the *remains* of the collective African heritage, the trial signifies on whether to use black folk in literature or not, or in the event that the folk culture is used in a work how it should be used. Should the raw

folk culture be used to represent blacks, or should the raw folk culture be adorned with traditional English literary language.

Regarding the differences, the most significant difference between the two plays is the body of rural vernacular used. Both plays have features of double meaning expressing the clash of ideas in depicting blacks during the Harlem Renaissance, but Hurston's version *De Turkey and De Law* is better adorned in terms of black vernacular language, since it is quite rich in figurative imagery and black vernacular expressions. Robert Hemenway argues that *The Mule Bone* is a play expressing black folk life with humor, and the play stands against the minstrel tradition: "It rejects the stock comic types of minstrel tradition, replacing them with real human beings who get a good deal of fun out of life, but who unconsciously order their existence and give it special meaning with elaborate verbal rituals. The play's effect depends largely on the devices of cabal improvisation--sounding, rhyming, woofing-- that are central to Afro-American folklore (Hemenway 148); however *Mule Bone* is paler in comparison to *De Turkey and De Law* with regard to vernacular expressions and dialect.

Like Hurston's other works, *The Bone of Contention, De Turkey and De Law* and *The Mule Bone* emphasize the significance of the porch talks and the talent of the black folks in "crayon enlargements", but when we compare the same scene in both plays, it is clearly seen that the dialect is much more salient in *De Turkey and De Law*. One of the porch scenes goes like:

> HAMBO Well, y'all done seen so much—be y'all ain't never seen uh snake big as de one Ah seen down round Kissimnee. He was so big he couldn't hardly move his self. He laid in one spot so long he growed moss on him and everybody thought he was uh log layin' there; till

> one day Ah set down on him and went to sleep. When Ah woke up ah wuz in Middle Georgy (General laughter…). (152)

The same tall tale on the big snake is narrated with a blend of standard English and "proper" spelling in *Mule Bone:*

> LIGE: (Continuing the lying on porch) Well, you all done seen so much, but I bet you ain't never seen a snake as big as the one I saw when I was a boy up in middle Georgia. He was so big couldn't hardly move his self. He laid in one spot so long he growed moss on him and everybody thought he was a log, till one day I set down on him and went to sleep, and when I woke up that snake done crawled to Florida (Loud laughter.) (75).

While in the former, the reader can almost hear the accent, the latter feels weaker. Rather than narrating a tall tale in vernacular, it looks as though black expressions are just interspersed with standard English. In other words, *De Turkey* seems a better example of *speakerly text*, as Henry Louis Gates names it. He enunciates *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the first work written by Hurston, but just in terms of vernacular black language, *De Turkey* preceding her novel:

> Hurston's text is the first example in our tradition of "the speakerly text," by which I mean a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed "to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the 'illusion of oral narration.' "19 The speakerly text is that text in which all other structural elements seem to be devalued, as important as they remain to the telling of the tale, because the narrative strategy signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to

> be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 181).

As Gates points out besides what is spoken, in "the speakerly text" how it is spoken is also important. Certainly, since *De Turkey* is a play written in direct speech, and it does not concern free indirect discourse as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* but in terms of "Negro expressions" and oral language in written form *De Turkey* is one of the early steps on her way to her literary horizon, through which she attains her mature style in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

In her novel, Hurston mediates between the direct speech of the black vernacular community of Eatonville and the standard English of the narrator to establish a double-voiced narrative mode of "the speakerly text," but in the *De Turkey*, she uses just direct speech in vernacular, since the whole play concerns a black speech community. It is direct discourse, which does not require a mediator between. While we can regard *Their Eyes Were Watching God* partially as a representation of oral narration, *De Turkey* stands primarily as a representation of oral literature, rooting back to Africa. She puts this oral tradition down on paper and represents black folks in a kind of hieroglyphics: "Hurston's narrative strategy seems to concern itself with the possibilities of representation of the speaking black voice in writing" (Gates xxv).

Needless to say that the way she deals with black vernacular in *De Turkey* confirms her preference in representing black folks in a black work, and therefore, one of the reasons she falls out with Hughes could be lack of vernacular used in *Mule Bone*. As Hughes states in his autobiography, he was responsible for the construction and plotting the play, and Hurston was responsible for flavoring the play with rural

vernacular and authentic Florida expressions. Due to the fact that she had a chance to observe the folk life firsthand, she was a perfect choice for artistic collaboration.

In his book *Langston Hughes, Folk Dramatist in the Protest Tradition*, Joseph McLaren states that "Unlike *The Gold Piece*, with its flat language devoid of vernacular expression, *Mule Bone* fully presents black vernacular, most likely as a result of Hurston's contribution to the collaborative work" (18). It is a fact that both Hurston and Hughes did not have any fear that rural vernacular would lead to any negative image of blacks' depiction in literature, but as McLaren states, Hughes's works are much more plain compared to Hurston's in terms of black vernacular. In one of the letters Hurston wrote on August14, 1931 to her Godmother, she complains about the changes made to her show *Fast and Furious: "*Perhaps he (the producer) and I shall disagree about changes in my material. Godmother, they take all the life and soul out of everything and make it fit what their idea of Broadway should be like. It's sickening at times" (Kaplan 224).

Similarly, Hurston could not have been content with the pale form of their collaborative work. On the other hand, in one of her letters to Hughes she claims that both plays are her versions: "Now Langston, I have not wanted to grab things for myself. I don't want to thrust you forth or anything like that. It was just self-preservation…PS: .. You say over the phone "my version of the play". Are not both copies my version? I don't think that you can point out any situations or dialogue that are yours. You made some suggestions, but they are not incorporated in the play" (Kaplan 203). Even if she claims that both versions are her version, I propose that *De Turkey and De Law* sounds much richer when compared to *The Mule Bone.*

Another important and striking difference is that the significance of the swamp is much more distinct in the *De Turkey and De Law* than it is in "The Bone of

Contention." "The fallen gladiator was borne from the arena on his sharp back, his feet stiffly raised as if in a parting gesture of defiance. We left him on the edge of the cypress swamp and returned to the village satisfied that the only piece of unadulterated meanness that the Lord had ever made was gone from among us forever" (209). Similarly, the swamp comes into prominence in *De Turkey and De Law,* since it is the place where the "bones of black culture" revived, and upon which the horizon of Harlem is built. The mule bone found in the cypress swamp is a reference to Everglades Cypress Swamp in Polk County, Florida, where black culture was concentrated and preserved and where Hurston collected folklore for *Mules and Men* (59). When Hurston went to the South for the folklore expedition, she stayed for a short time in Eatonville and then drove to the quarters of the Everglades Cypress Lumber Company. She did not hesitate to live in the same conditions with her informants in the quarters, because she was conscious of the cultural significance of her mission: "Zora had come to think of herself as a woman with a mission: she would demonstrate that 'the greatest cultural wealth of the continent' lay in the Eatonvilles and Polk Countries of the black South" (Hemenway 113).

The laborers and their families in the lumber and turpentine camps of Polk Country maintain the black traditions and experience in isolated communities. These "camps were natural repositories of folk tradition" (111). In her autobiography, she mentions the life in Polk Country and she emphasizes the significance of jooks where the body of black folklore flourished: "Polk County. After dark, the jooks. Songs are born out of feelings with an old beat-up piano, or a guitar for a mid-wife. Love made and unmade. Who put out dat lie, it was supposed to last forever?" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 149). Briefly, the cypress swamp where the mule was dragged signifies upon the place where the mule bone, or remains of African Heritage lays.

Another difference-which seems unimportant- between the two plays is that even though we have the same main characters: Jim and Dave, Dave especially is represented with different characteristics. In *Mule Bone*, Jim Weston, "Guitarist, Methodist, slightly arrogant, aggressive, somewhat self-important, ready with his tongue**,"** represents blacks skilled at black expressions. That he plays guitar, or "boxes," refers to folk music blues; thus, I suggest that Jim is quite possibly a reference to the black writers using folk rhythms like blues in their works, hence he represents black intellectuals advocating folk culture in literary works.

Dave, on the other hand, is "Dancer, Baptist, soft, happy-go-lucky character, slightly dumb and unable to talk rapidly and wittily," and represents blacks lacking black expressions, or black intellectuals avoiding black expressions in their works. Thus, these two characters represent the black literati using black folk culture but differently. While Jim refers to artists using folk materials quite skillfully, Dave refers to those either avoiding folk materials in their works or not skilled at black narration as Walter states: "Dave ain't' got as much rabbit blood as folks thought" (Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* 96). Despite the difference, they are very good friends, and they make a living from their show, in which Jim plays and Dave dances. They have performed for white people, but now they want to perform it for their people:

> DAISY: (Giggling) I see you two boys always playin' and singin' together. That music sounded right good floating down the road.
>
> JIM: Yeah, child, we'se been playin' for the white folks all week. We'se playin' for the colored now (85).

Jim does not say that they completely stopped playing for white people, but what he states may refer to the decision of younger black generation that is to publish their

own magazine, instead of writing for white publishers and periodicals supported by white philanthropic organizations, which will enable them "to assert their artistic independence against both W.E.B. Du Bois's didacticism and Alain Locke's prescriptive cultural pluralism," (Singh and Scott 98). Furthermore, while Dave and Daisy dance, Daisy wants to show new steps she has learned in the north and then suddenly Jim stops playing and puts his guitar aside, but this is interpreted as jealousy:

> DAISY: Look here, baby, at this new step I learned up North.
>
> DAVE: You can show me anything, sugar lump.
>
> DAISY: Hold me tight now. (But just as they begin the new movement JIM notices DAISY and DAVE. He stops playing again and lays his guitar down.)
>
> VOICES IN THE CROWD: (Disgustedly) Aw, come on, Jim.... You must be jealous....
>
> JIM: No, I ain't jealous. I jus' get tired of seein' that ol' nigger clownin' all the time. (Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* 93)

Indeed, Jim is not jealous. He just does not want their show tainted by this new figure. In "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Hurston remarks that the folk material obtained in the South was changed into new form with a new construction that wipes its authenticity: "Gershwin and the other "Negro" rhapsodists come under this same axe. Just about as Negro as caviar or Ann Pennington's athletic Black Bottom. When the Negroes who knew the Black Bottom in its cradle saw the Broadway version they asked each other, "Is you learnt dat new Black Bottom yet?" Proof that it was not their dance" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 72). As she states, black folks in the South were aware that the new version had nothing to do with their

culture, but was just something *new*. Therefore, the reason Jim stops playing is that he does not want their practice of folklore, or the bone of his culture, infected and spoiled by outer detrimental influences as in bone taint, which ruins the flesh. Certainly, as Hurston explains, black folklore is not a complete action but always in progress, but she prefers the alteration within the folklore and black tradition. For instance, the alteration of spirituals in every congregation or, as she does, using the same theme and characters within another work- same but still different.

As for the two main characters in *De Turkey*, while Jim is still arrogant and aggressive: "Jim Weston: A young man and the town bully (A Methodist)," Dave has good qualifications as opposed to the one in *Mule Bone*. Unlike the dumb and happy-go-lucky character who is unable to use black rhetoric, Dave is "The town's best hunter and fisherman (Baptist)." While in *Mule Bone* Jim and Dave represent the Niggerati differing in using folk materials in black letters, in *De Turkey,* we have two characters fighting over a turkey, which, I propose, constitutes another significant event. The gobbler, or the turkey, causing the contention in the story was previously dropped in *Mule Bone,* and now reappears in *De Turkey*.

Cole and Mitchell claim that *"De Turkey and De Law* appears to be largely Hurston's work, and constitutes her attempt to excise Hughes's contributions and return the play to the spirit of 'The Bone of Contention,' which was centered on a fight over a turkey rather than a fight over a girl" (133). I suggest that rather than just excising Hughes's contributions, the turkey might refer to the play itself, *Mule Bone*, which brought Hurston Hughes into conflict. It is quite likely that Hurston attributes another meaning to her characters, and rewrites the play with a different purpose. When one reads *De Turkey* as Hurston's feather bed concealing their conflict, it can be argued that the *turkey* signifies upon their collaborative play *Mule Bone,* the result

of which was that “the writers fell out.”

Robert Hemenway explains that *The Mule Bone* was originally titled “The Bone of Contention,” and as he claims it “turned out to be truer to its title than to its purposes” (154). When we approach the “The Bone of Contention” as a story signifying upon the intellectual conflict among the Niggerati, we can assume “the gobbler” as the aim, or horizon of the black intellectuals they argue over. It is a fact that the goal of theirs was to produce art representing the race at its best; thus, I read the gobbler as their artistic horizon. Therefore, the reason Hurston puts back “de turkey” is that the turkey still serves the same purpose. As *Mule Bone* caused a contention between Hurston and Hughes, “De turkey” seems to symbolize works and efforts of Niggerati to represent themselves, which also constitutes the horizon they try to attain. Moreover, I believe that it is possible to read the title *De Turkey and De Law* as the Signification of the horizon. If we assume “de turkey” as a reference to black work, “de law” possibly refers to the criteria the black intelligentsia argue over. There were different criteria, or “de laws” to write a black work suggested by the black intellectuals, and *De Turkey* sets an example of a work featuring “de laws” Hurston recognizes.

In addition to the specific function of the turkey in the play, another thing that is worth regarding is the narration of how they kill the turkey. Dave tells that he has been watching the flock of wild turkeys in the cypress swamp where they roost for a year: “DAVE Well, jus lak I toleyuh, Sat'day night, I been watchin' dat flock uh wild turkeys ever since way last summer roostin' in de edge of dat cypress swamp out by Howell Creek, where Brazzle's ole mule was dragged out. It was a great, big ole gobbler leadin' de flock” (Hurston, *De Turkey*176) Dave watches the turkey nowhere else but in the cypress swamp, where Brazzle’s old mule was dragged. When we

assume the turkey as the literary work representing the horizon of the younger generation of black artist, the swamp is the most appropriate place for hunting, since that place signifies upon the source of concentrated and preserved folk culture, which will be the main material to create art. Thus, that Dave goes hunting for the turkey refers to the author searching for folk material to write a work embellished with black folklore. Unfortunately, Jim arrives at the swamp and simultaneously fires his gun for the same turkey:

> DAVE: Ah know jus' where dat ole gobbler roost at. Soon's he hit de limb an' squatted hisself, Ah let 'im have it. He flopped his wings an' tried to fly off but here he come tumblin' down right by dem ole mule bones. Jim, he was jus' comin' up when Ah fired. So when he seen dat turkey fallin', whut do he do? He fires off his gun an' make out he kilt dat turkey. Ah beat him tuh de bird and we got tuh tusslin'. He tries tuh make *me* give him *mah* turkey so's he kin run tuh Daisy an' make out he done kilt it. So we got tuh fightin' an' Ah wuz beatin' him too till he retched down an' got de hock bone uh dat mule an' lammed me over de head an' fore Ah could git up, he done took mah turkey an' went wid it (157).

I propose that Hurston uses the verb *fire* purposely, because it was metaphorically used to refer setting *fire* or *burning away* the old and dead ideas of older generation by the younger black intellectuals. Furthermore, the reason why Hurston, Hughes, Thurman and the other residents of the Niggerati Manor called their quarterly *Fire*!! was based on this same idea as Hughes states in his biography: During the summer of 1926. Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, John P. Davis, Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, and I decided to publish “a Negro

quarterly of the arts" to be called *Fire*—the idea being that it would burn up a lot of the old, dead conventional Negro white ideas of the past, *épater le bourgeois* into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with the outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing, the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*—the first two being house organs of inter-racial organizations, and the latter being God knows what" (Hughes *The Big Sea* 235-236).

This new experimental magazine would be devoted to younger black writers and would present their works free from propaganda and the social problems of the race. Instead of incorporating middle class individuals and their lives, it would deal with black folk who are proud of their culture and at peace with their complexion. The younger black artists that contributed to this experimental magazine with writings centering upon folk life rather than middle class life, and like Hughes's poems:

> "Fire!!, like Mr. Hughes' poetry, was experimental. It was not interested in sociological problems or propaganda. It was purely artistic in intent and conception. Its contributors went to the proletariat rather than to the bourgeoisie for characters and material. They were interested in people who still retained some individual race qualities and who were not totally white American in every respect save color of skin (Thurman, *The Collected Writings* 196)

Thus, in the play, the verb *fire* is not incidental; on the contrary, it reaches significance suggesting writing a work that just serves the expectations of young writers rather than those of the older generation. As Thurman states, their works should not spill out hatred and grief, but must be like like Toomer's prose that "is

warm, mellow, pulsing with fire and passion" (250). Therefore, I suggest, both Jim and Dave claim they kill the turkey and *fire* at the same time quite likely refers to two writers claiming authorship for the same work: *Mule Bone*. Both Hurston and Hughes aimed at creating a black folk comedy that would fire or burn out engrained stereotypical images of blacks, but unfortunately they failed to reach their aim. Still when we look at both works, they are excellent works written by accomplished authors which admirably aspire to their horizon.

Although Hurston places importance on the turkey in her own version *De Turkey,* and makes it the main reason for the fight between Jim and Dave, in both plays Daisy provides another reason for Jim and Dave to fight. Both main characters try to court Daisy, and while they are trying to win over her, they show their verbal skills:

> DAVE: I'd come down de river riding a mud cat and leading a minnow.
>
> DAISY: Lawd, Dave, you sho is propaganda.
>
> JIM: I'd make a panther wash yo' dishes and a 'gator chop yo' wood for you (Hurston *De Turkey* 185).

Moreover, the character of Daisy reappears in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, possibly with the same purpose:

> Daisy is walking a drum tune. You can almost hear it by looking at the way she walks. She is black and she knows that white clothes look good on her, so she wears them for dress up. She's got those big black eyes with plenty shiny white in them that makes them shine like brand new money and she knows what God gave women eyelashes for, too.

> Her hair is not what you might call straight. It's negro hair, but it's got a kind of white flavor. (105)

Both in *Mule Bone* and the novel, Daisy also serves as an example of a daily folk ritual: "The girls and everybody else help laugh. They know it's not courtship. It's acting-out courtship and everybody is in the play" (105). As Hurston states "Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatised. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 61). Thus, the courting ritual between Jim and Dave is a reference to black art and dramatization.

Daisy is a person who knows how to use the color white as an adornment to her black body; however, at the end of the play, both Jim and Dave turn Daisy down and decide to go back to Eatonville and continue their life as it has been before. They do not make any concessions to their way of life and what they believe is true:

> DAISY (Jumping into his arms) And lissen, honey, you don't have to be beholden to nobody. You can throw dat ole box away if you want to. I know where you can get a *swell* job.
>
> DAISY (Almost dancing) Yard man. All you have to do is wash windows, and sweep de sidewalk, and scrub off de steps and porch and hoe up de weeds and rake up de leaves and dig a few holes now and then with a spade—to plant some trees and things like that. It's a good steady job.
>
> JIM Well, I wasn't brought up wid no spade in my hand—and ain't going to start it now (Hurston, *De Turkey* 188)

The reason why Jimmy plays guitar, or "boxes," is that he signifies upon the black writers using the rhythm of blues, like Hughes, in their works. As Hurston states "In past generations the music was furnished by 'boxes,' another word for guitars" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 69).What Jim does is called "joking," which is singing and playing in black folk style. ""Jook is the word for a Negro pleasure house…Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as blues, and on blues has been founded jazz" (69); Therefore, both Jim and Dave do not make concessions about the life they lead.

The last difference to mention is the different opening of the plays. In both plays the opening scene setting is the same place: that is, the raised porch of Joe Clark's store where the villagers gathered for Saturday afternoon porch sessions. In *Mule Bone,* the play opens with Mrs. Roberts' begging some food for her children, and soon after the talk about Brazzle's deceased mule is brought to porch on account of its the hock-bone that Joe Lindsay has found while he is hunting for partridges. The bone draws attention of everybody on the porch, and they start to talk about it and how stubborn it was: "JOE: (Standing the bone up on the floor of the porch) Dis is a hock-bone of Brazzle's ole yaller mule. (General pleased interest. Everybody wants to touch it)… BRAZZLE: Dis mule was so evil he used to try to bite and kick when I'd go in de stable to feed 'im"" (53). The mule, as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, refers to an unpleasant past familiar to all members of the community, but rather than evoking their suffering it refers to the body of collective African heritage that was synthesized in social rituals; therefore, the bone refers to the cultural remains of African heritage that continued to cause contention between black intellectuals in the course of the Harlem Renaissance. In short, *Mule Bone*

opens with a reference to the crucial argument of the renaissance, hence the principle reason to write the play. The play, therefore, constitutes their horizon as the exemplification of how to accurately represent blacks. As for the opening of *De Turkey*, it starts with children playing games. This ritual that children carry out constitutes an important part of folk life and Hurston enriches her play with another ritual.

One of the important characteristics that can be attributed to Hurston's story telling skills and strategy is intertextuality. As Gates asserts intertextuality is essential in the practice of Signifyin(g): "It is this principle of repetition and difference, this practice of intertextuality, which has been so crucial to the black vernacular forms of Signifyin(g), jazz—and even its antecedents, the blues, the spirituals, and ragtime" (Gates *The Signifying Monkey* 64). For Hurston, however, intertextuality is not confined just to other people's texts, but her own previous works. She tells the same events, or uses the same characters, modifying them to render a new or updated argument. In her works, readers come across reinterpretations and modifications of her own previous writing, as we see in *Mule Bone* and *De Turkey*. For instance, in *De Turkey,* she offers a perfect "Negro play" depicting black folk life by signifying upon her other play that constitutes a metaphor and an example of the signifying ritual of text within text in a different dimension. The message is conveyed through an animal, which is also a perfect fit for black folk tale tradition. She signifies upon her own preceding text just as Gates suggests "repeated but still different." Moreover, "The Bone of Contention" not only forms the basis for *De Turkey and De Law* and *The Mule Bone*, but also constitutes the groundwork for the Mock funeral in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

In the novel, the criticism about bleaching folk materials is conveyed through a mule. The mule reappears in the novel, but with a slightly different significance. Still it refers to the slavery experience; however, in the novel rather than a piece of bone, signifying the remains of folk culture, the whole body of the mule is used to represent the *body* of folk culture. That the tale starts with the mule talking, then proceeds to the mock funeral and lastly to the pulpit that is left to the buzzards for their performance is, as Gates states, a "tale-within-a-tale-within-a-tale" (200). This is a very good example of how black narration interacts and is interwoven with nature. As the turkey in *De Turkey*, a meaning is attributed to the mule, and the narration is finalized with the buzzards.

As discussed earlier, the swamp and the mule serve a very significant purpose in *De Turkey*, and they have the same inference in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* too. The mayor, Jody Starks and the folk of Eatonville organize a funeral for the deceased mule. After the mule was dragged to the swamp, Jody stands on the body of the mule and gives a speech:

> Out in the swamp they made great ceremony over the mule. They mocked everything human in death. Starks led off with a great eulogy on our departed citizen, our most distinguished citizen and the grief he left behind him, and the people loved the speech. It made him more solid than building the schoolhouse had done. He stood on the distended belly of the mule for a platform and made gestures (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 95).

While in "The Bone of Contention" and the other two plays the bone represents folk culture, in the novel it refers to the body, or the structure of folk culture. Thus the mule tale within the Janie's story not only represents an example of the folk tale, but

also it is Hurston's own crayon enlargement of her criticism about leaders using folk materials in accordance with their own horizon. As the dead body of the mule constitutes a platform, on which Jody the leader of the community, makes a speech and shows off, according to Hurston, folk material just serves for the leaders a chance to create a big voice of their own.

Therefore, the body of the deceased mule becomes a platform comprising a basis for leaders to achieve their goals. Hurston was not comfortable with the alterations done to the structure of folk materials, specifically spirituals. According to her, spirituals were an important part of folk culture, and that they are bleached with standard English would mislead the Niggerati on the way to the literary horizon. The spirituals, so the characteristics of "Negro Expressions," must on no account be changed into the pale forms of white culture. Therefore, I believe that it is possible to suggest that Hurston gives Jody the surname *Stark*, meaning *simple without decoration,* for a reason: "The stark, trimmed phrases of the Occident seem too bare for the voluptuous child of the sun, hence the adornment" (Hurston, "The Characteristics" 63).

Furthermore, Hurston deals with the whitening, or bleaching of "Spirituals" in *De Turkey*, too. Lindsay says that the mule bones are picked by the buzzards and whitened by *the elements*: "He wuz—bet he fought ole death lak a natural man. Ah seen his bones yistiddy, out dere on de edge of de cypress swamp. De buzzards done picked em clean and de elements done bleached em" (9). It is not clear what *the elements* are, but I propose that it refers to *rules or structure of English language*, which bleach raw folk material and change the soul of "Spirituals," according to Hurston.

The mule story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* bears a significant purpose in terms of criticizing the alteration of raw folk material, but also it has another important significance for Janie. The reason why Janie marries is that Jody speaks for change, or proposes a promising new horizon: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 50); however, she is disappointed with him, since he tries to silence her and keep her from the mule talks conducted on the porch.

As in both plays, the mule constitutes the main topic that the big picture talkers *jive* about. The mule baiting in the novel is very important in terms of Janie's becoming conscious about her desire to be a free woman. Her husband insists on Janie's obedience, and constantly tries to keep her off the porch, which completely deprives her of the beauties of her black culture. Whenever Janie wants to join the mule's baiting, she is hustled off into the store, where she kills the time: "When Walter Lige and Sam or some of the other big picture talkers were using a side of the world as a canvas, Joe would hustle her off inside the store to sell something. Look like he took pleasure in doing it" (85). The more Jody asks for submission, the less faith Janie has in her marriage; thus, her faith gradually fades away: "The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor" (111).

When we assume that the mule refers to the body, or structure of black folklore, it can be argued that Jody's trying to keep Janie off the porch and out of the mule conversation refers to Hurston's disapproval about changes not being recognized. When the New Negro set off for a "metamorphoses" as Locke refers to in his essay, or "change" and "horizon" Janie connotes, they were all of the same opinion, but disagreements among the literati lead to an awareness of unlike tactics

in approaching the horizon. Similarly in the novel, that Janie is not given right to give a speech on the opening night of Jody's store, the porch of which is the site of the *lying sessions*, and specifically her being excluded from the mule baiting, leads to a stream of consciousness, which will make her recognize that she is after a false horizon.

In conclusion, Hurston, the leading Harlem Renaissance writer, was skilled at building her horizon on her ancestors' bones through her narration. Contrary to the leaders whose narrations were bleached with white norms, she made the best of her talent and folklore knowledge. She did not confine herself to the life of the black middle class, but the "Negro farthest down" and folk culture, which gives breath to accurately represented black characters. She "followed her own road, believed in her own gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from 'common' people" (Walker 92). She was convinced that the only thing would light the way to the literary horizon was folk culture, revived on the bones, or remains, of the collective African heritage. She was a genius who appreciated her culture and used it proudly. As Alice Walker puts it, she was an example of a black writer to be introduced to the next generations: "We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. If they do, it is our duty as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children. If necessary, bone by bone" (Walker 93). Besides, she is not a writer whose importance must be recognized by just blacks, but the whole world. She sets a perfect example for an anthropologist, or as I call her "a bone collector," who did not let "the bones of her mule" fade away, but built her own bodies of a literary nation over them. Creating works based on her folk culture was her response to the prevailing literary horizon and the realization of her own Truth that she would never give up.

CONCLUSION

Zora Neale Hurston was an intelligent and talented African American writer who wrote great works representing the collective African heritage. As a writer she designated a literary horizon which would enable her to introduce real black characters who are gifted enough to create a colorful world of their own; thus through her narration, she twisted the meaning of "black," used to refer to ignorant and rural Southern types, into gifted and witty black individuals who offered the reader a life full of colorful crayon enlargements. She was like a "griot," a storyteller in African culture, and through her works, she tried to hand down her collective African heritage, which she believed the only guide that will lead the black literati toward the horizon they yearn for in the course of Harlem Renaissance.

Hurston had a unique horizon that stands for its own. In contrast to black intellectuals who consider dialect a literary trap, she used a considerable amount of black dialect and many vernacular expressions. In order to represent African Americans best, she used black expressions without any hesitation, because she acknowledged that black expressions such as fore-grounded metaphor, exaggerated simile, reinterpretation, revision, stylized imitation, verbal nouns etc. are characteristics of the black vernacular that will distinguish a work from another written in standard English. As a cultural researcher, Hurston also carefully depicted the conventions of song, dance and narrative that are unique to African American people. Thus, she emphasized all these characteristics in her works, and came up with beautiful examples of black works representing American blacks and black folk life: "Southern black rural folk life was grist for her writer's mill, the primary source of her imagination, and the most influential part of her creativity" (Krasner 536).

Moreover, contrary to the works of some of her contemporaries, her works are free from race prejudice and race pride. She rather focused on her cultural values and used her language as a weapon against stereotypes to develop her characters, hence to represent blacks. Thus, her works do not offer the reader any "passing" stories or stories of blacks who are suffering overtly from racial injustice. Certainly she was aware of the problems that blacks were going through in those years, but she did not make it her main point to convey them. Her characters are rather portrayed as cherishing life or dealing with their own personal issues, which often have nothing to do with race relations. Hurston took an individualistic approach to racial matters and was against generalization. According to Hurston, the virtues of the individual make him/her superior to another, not skin color.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she expresses her view on race through Tea Cake. After the flood, Tea Cake is urged to go with white people to bury the dead bodies. He was asked to identify if the dead person is black or white because they will be buried in separate graves. Since the dead bodies are covered with mud, it is hard to decide whether the dead person is black or white; thus, Tea Cake reacts: "Shucks! Nobody can't tell nothin' 'bout some uh dese bodies, de shape dey's in. Can't tell whether dey's white or black" (253). As she also emphasizes in her autobiography, skin color does not determine whether to praise or criticize Negro art. She celebrates the art of the Negro, since it deserves the praise, but not because it is done by a Negro artist: "I found that I had no need of either class or race prejudice, those scourges of humanity. The solace of easy generalization was taken from me, but I received the richer gift of individualism" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 248).

It is true that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a prominent and very successful novel, but Hurston's accomplishment cannot be confined to just this

novel, but all of her works. She is the Signifying Monkey playing tricks intertextually and revising her previous works quite skillfully. Even though she depicts black folk characters, the issues she handles appeal to the taste of a reader of any race. Certainly the double course she uses and the rhetoric of Signifyin(g) offer the reader "feathered-bed resistance," but her works are also like a time capsule enabling the reader travel in time. For instance, when we put the black expressions aside, what Janie goes through attracts any women all around the world and the reader may end up identifying herself with the main characters in terms of men and women's relationships.

In the interview in *Crisis* about her work *Wrapped in the Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, Valeria Boyd mentions what had motivated her to write another biography of Hurston: "There, Robert Hemenway, gave a talk in which he candidly critiqued his book. Then he made his bold statement: 'It's time for a new biography to be written, and it need***s*** to be written by a Black woman'" (Boyd, "Writing the Life" 30). Thus Hemenway emphasizes the role of race and gender in understanding and analyzing a person and her works; however, that Boyd makes a connection with the vulture when she sees it in "Zora Neale Festival of Arts and Humanities" held in Orlando raises a question mark in some minds: "And you could feel Zora's presence almost tangibly. In fact, a huge bird hovered over that first festival so persistently that everyone started calling it 'Zora.' That lone black crow appeared to be a vulture, which disturbed me at the time. I didn't know then that vultures are considered sacred in many African countries because they can eat death and not die – which, when you consider her legacy, is exactly what Zora Neale Hurston did" (30).

It is quite logical to compare Hurston to a vulture when we consider that Hurston piled up her works owing to the folk culture kept alive by her deceased ancestors. Besides it is part of folk tradition to imitate in games; however, would Hurston have agreed to be compared to a vulture, which also symbolizes an opportunist? Is Hurston's horizon based on exploiting her culture for her own use? When we look at the mule funeral, it is clear that Hurston uses these animals as the personification of an opportunist. As she states "Out in the swamp they made great ceremony over the mule. They mocked everything human in death" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 95). She just engages in irony and depicts people exploiting others. Thus, I do not think that the buzzards she depicts inspire such a horizon, leading the dead body of the mule and leaving any legacy behind for their next generations.

In conclusion, though Hurston and her Harlem compatriots would not oversee the attainment of all the social and artistic revolutions that appeared so clearly on their horizon, her influence was powerfully felt in the next two generations when her work was rediscovered and, in many cases, introduced for the first time. Her research into African American folkways, especially, contributed a rich resource for younger writers. Zora Neale Hurston, the "Genius of the South" (Walker 107), was a leading Afro-American woman writer from whom other black women writers of today, such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison were inspired to develop a rich contemporary Afro-African Women's Literature. She was a torchbearer for the next generations. She was brave enough to stand against the bitter criticism of her contemporaries, and follow the path or the horizon to which she was dedicated. As Florence Edwards says; "she was not afraid to swim against the tide; […] Whenever Zora Neale Hurston spoke or wrote about herself, she came through loud and clear, black and

proud, and a few light years ahead of many of her contemporaries" (Edwards and Hurston 90).

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