

**UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY**

**In Search of Afro-American Identity: Zora Neale Hurston
and Race Politics of the Harlem Renaissance**

RIGORÓZNÍ PRÁCE

Zpracovala:
Mgr. Magdalena Koucká

Praha, září 2006

I declare that the following rigorous thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Prague, September 1, 2006

Magdalene Konche

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my thanks to Prof. Dr. Martin Procházka, Csc. and Dr. Hana Ulmanová, M.A. for their stimulating comments which they provided me during the writing process. Also, my thanks go to the representatives of The Mobility Fund of the Charles University whose financial support enabled me to do research at Freie Universität and Humboldt Universität in Berlin. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and Mgr. Ludmila Sazimová for their ongoing support.

Permission:

I have no objections to the rigorous thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Theoretical Points of Departure	1
1.2. Sources	2
1.2.1. "Voices from the Harlem Renaissance"	2
1.2.2. The Life and Work of Zora Neale Hurston in the Critical Perspective	2
1.3. Political Background	3
1.4. Socio-Cultural Background	4
1.5. Introducing Zora Neale Hurston	6
2. Harlem Renaissance: The Awakening of a Dormant Culture	7
2.1. Historical Conditions	7
2.1.1. Resettling Harlem	9
2.1.2. The Beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance	9
2.2. "New Negro"	11
2.3. The Discussion over the Role of Black Art: A "Black ARTIST" or a "BLACK artist"?	13
2.3.1. The Ambiguities of the "Afro-American"	16
2.4. The Paradox of Harlem	18
2.5. Zora Neale Hurston and Her Position within the Harlem Renaissance	19
2.5.1. Hurston versus White Patrons, Publishers and Audience	20
2.5.1.a. The Minstrel	22
3. Hurston in Search of Black Identity	24
3.1. "Characteristics of Negro Expression"	24
3.1.1. The Role of Sex and Gender	26
3.1.2. Negro Spirituals	28
3.2. "Something . . . that is our own": Collecting Folklore	29
3.2.1. The Method of Collecting	30
3.2.1.a. Literary Ethnography	31
3.2.2. "From the earliest rocking of my cradle": <u>Mules and Men</u>	32
3.2.2.a. The "lies" from Eatonville	32
3.2.2.b. Exploring Louisiana: Hoodoo in New Orleans	35
3.3. Fortifying the Afro-American Self-Confidence	37
3.3.1. Dialect: The Mark of the Afro-American Genius	38
3.3.2. The Recognition of Neo-African Religion	39
4. "On Refusing to Be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design": Hurston's Race Politics	40
4.1. The Nurturing Bosom of Eatonville	40
4.2. In the Light of Boasian Anthropology	42
4.2.1. Cultural Relativism	43
4.2.2. The Concept of Race	44
4.3. "Not tragically colored": Politics of the 1920s	45
4.3.1. Seeing Oneself in the Mirror of Society	46
4.3.1.a. Black Racism	47
4.3.1.b. "Color Struck"	48

4.3.2. The Invisible Discrimination	49
4.3.3. A Fragment of the Great Soul	51
4.4. The 1940s and 1950s: Radical Voice	52
4.4.1. The Diseased Society	52
4.4.2. Race versus Individuality	55
4.4.3. The Negro Stereotype	57
5. Hurston and Other Harlemites	58
5.1. The Divided Self of the Black Psyche	58
5.2. The Hurston-Hughes Relationship	60
5.2.1. The Common Perspective on Black Art	61
5.2.1.a. The Color: "They'll see how beautiful I am"	64
5.2.2. "Mule Bone": An Attempt at Vernacular Theater	65
6. Conclusion	67
Résumé	76
Bibliography	84

1. Introduction

1. 1. Theoretical Points of Departure

The aim of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of the Harlem Renaissance as not only an artistic but also a socio-political movement in American history. I shall try to trace its historical conditions, its ideology and accomplishments.

Introducing its main intellectual leaders--scholars as well as men of belles-lettres, I will take an insight into the ambience of cultural events and discussions that they created and comment on the diversity of attitudes toward the role of the African American in American society that they launched. Among the most prominent and influential intellectuals who fathered the Movement were Alain LeRoy Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson and Charles S. Johnson.

The second target of this thesis is to examine one of the outstanding literary voices of this period. Out of the many artists who began their career during the Harlem Renaissance--and one should name at least Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer--I chose the personality of Zora Neale Hurston as a representative of the unconventional black female artist of this time.

In my focus were Hurston's artistic aims to ground the Black identity as opposed, and sometimes even parallel, to some of her contemporaries. Hurston's former friend, later a rival, Langston Hughes would probably be her best-balanced counterpart. What connected Hurston with Hughes was their common endeavor to make the black vernacular speech a form of art.

An essential part of the thesis will deal with Hurston's view of the race issue as she developed it under the influence of the anthropologist Franz Boas. I will explain Boas's cultural relativism and its implications for Hurston's work.

The thesis aims to grasp and interpret the theme of the Harlem Renaissance and the role of Zora Neale Hurston in it mainly in the scope of literary history but also some concepts of literary theory—especially these dealing with the vernacular theory--and concepts of modern American anthropology will be taken into account.

1. 2. Sources

1.2. 1. “Voices from the Harlem Renaissance”

Of the contemporary historians and critics, Nathan Irvin Huggins represents the most distinguished voice which attempts to interpret the phenomenon of the Harlem Renaissance. His monography Harlem Renaissance as well as his anthology Voices From the Harlem Renaissance provide first-rate material to grasp the character of this Movement.

As to the primary sources of this period, I will consult the extensive seven-volume anthology The Harlem Renaissance by the contemporary historian C. D. Wintz which includes some of the most important articles from this period. An equally essential volume is Locke's anthology The New Negro. To understand the artistic viewpoint of some other Harlem artists, I will consult the selected texts by Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes in the Norton Anthology of African American Literature, (ed. H. L. Gates, Jr.).

1. 2. 2. The Life and Work of Zora Neale Hurston in Critical Perspective

As Mary H. Washington points out, before the seventies, there was no objective critical analysis of Hurston's work (I Love Myself 7-8). Earlier critics—exclusively male—evaluated Hurston's work on the basis of her controversial personality. The new era of Hurston scholarship began only in 1975 with the publication of Alice Walker's essay “In Search of

Zora Neale Hurston,” in which Walker described her finding and marking Hurston’s abandoned grave in Florida. The major act in launching Hurston’s revival was Walker’s 1979 anthology I Love Myself When I am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean And Impressive. The complete edition of Hurston’s novels was initiated in the nineties by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who also became the series editor.

The secondary works on Zora Neale Hurston were chosen with the regard to Hurston’s treatment of the race issue. The works of the literary historians Deborah G. Plant, Susanna Pavlovska and Lynda Marion Hill represent contemporary interpretations of Hurston’s race politics. To grasp modern American anthropology as it was shaped under Boas, I will consult the only work now available that treats the total range of Boas’ anthropological endeavor, A Franz Boas Reader, edited by the contemporary American anthropologist George W. Stocking, Jr. The indispensable guide to understanding Hurston’s life and work is Robert E. Hemenway’s biography as well as the briefer yet equally vital critical work of Mary E. Lyons.

Consulting a significant work of African-American literary criticism, Henry Louis Gates’ The Signifying Monkey sustains the thesis’ argumentation of the role of the black dialect for the Harlem Renaissance authors, namely Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, who searched to find in it the “authentic” black voice. Gates argues for the decisive role of black vernacular speech in shaping the tradition of Afro-American literature: “It is in the vernacular that, since slavery, the black person has encoded his private yet communal cultural rituals since slavery” (xiv). He suggests that this “blackness of the tongue” has been “the black person’s ultimate sign of difference” (ibid.).

1. 3. Political Background

The Afro-American literary tradition is informed by a strong sense of history. The story of the Afro-American began in the seventeenth century in connection with the slave trade.

Under this system, which in the European context had already existed since the fifteenth century, Africans of diverse backgrounds were unvoluntarily deported to the New continent to become personal possessions of the colonizers.¹

In 1807, Congress abolished the African slave trade but the system of slavery had been preserved until 1862, when president Lincoln delivered his *Emancipation Proclamation* ending thus the “peculiar institution” of slavery. Although officially, it was the thirteenth Amendment of the US Constitution, ratified in 1865, which abolished slavery throughout the country. Further way to emancipation of blacks led through the fourteenth Amendment from 1866 which guaranteed equal citizenship to any person born or naturalized in the United States, and finally to the fifteenth Amendment from 1870 which guaranteed suffrage to black men. However, none of these official statements did away with segregation and racial discrimination in the United States. It is with this background in mind that we should approach the issue of Afro-American identity as it appeared in the second decade of the twentieth century.

1. 4. Socio-Cultural Background

As the historian Nathan Huggins suggests, we tend to pick out one moment in time, as a point of change, when the old is being transformed into something new (Voices 3). So is the case with the Harlem Renaissance, a remarkable outburst of creative activity among African Americans as it occurred in Harlem around the years 1920-1930. Although much of the transformation took place before this movement and many of the old concepts persisted long afterward, the Harlem Renaissance became a symbol of Afro-American coming of age. It was

¹ To be precise, the first black people in North America were not slaves but laborers, who could win their freedom if they worked hard for their masters for a specific period of time. But with the introduction of chattel slavery in 1700, the arrived Africans were considered lifetime property of the white masters (Gates, The Norton Anthology 130).

the first official collective appearance of Afro-American intellectuals; the first official act of shaking off the residuals of slavery.

The Harlem Renaissance brought up the issue of Afro-American art and artist. The question was how the Afro-American—victimized by a social and political system which was often brutal and ugly—might effectively express his experience in art. For some black intellectuals, the Afro-American could become a true artist only if he dealt with the raceless issues, such as beauty and universal values. They feared that any expression of his social and political experience would reek of propaganda. Their aim was to equal the white artist; to prove that the black man is capable of the highest artistic achievement in terms of the standards set by Western civilisation. Yet for others, the true Negro art should proudly manifest its distinctness from the white tradition. It should express the unique historical experience of an oppressed minority group; it should strive to seek inspiration in the art of the ancestors; it should reveal the cultural heritage of the Afro-American. Negro folktales, myths, songs and music should be the foundations on which Afro-Americans could build their own body of literature.

The greatest task of the Negro author was to destroy the stereotype that the white man had created about him and that the Negro himself had assumed in order to “move in and out of the white world with safety and profit” (Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 261). In other words, the black man had to remove his mask and to let the world as well himself know of his real self. This was a task too difficult to accomplish in one generation. It has been passed like a baton to the coming Afro-American artists.

Discovering black cultural heritage and creating the new Negro art was to renew racial pride, and to enhance communal spirit and a sense of group solidarity. By destroying the stereotypes that whites had created about black people to sustain their sense of cultural and racial superiority, the Negro was to show the world as well as himself that he is as valid a

human being as anybody else. He was anxious to use the opportunities his country was offering to its citizens as well as to contribute to its advancement. The Harlem Renaissance is full of this optimism, feeling of progress and hope.

1. 5. Introducing Zora Neale Hurston

In a way, the personality of Zora Neale Hurston seems to be a perfect example of the positive spirit of this movement. Gaining education at prominent black universities, this ambitious and self-assertive woman became one of the promoters of Negro art. Yet Hurston was not a political or radical leader. Her field was narrative art. Hurston was possessed with language, with telling stories in the language of her people. She said: “the force from somewhere in Space which commands you to write in the first place, gives you no choice. You take up the pen when you are told, and write what is commanded. There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you” (Dust Tracks 173). Hurston set up her goal to collect the folktales and songs of the Afro-Americans. Informed by the theories of cultural relativism of the prominent anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston aimed to authentically record the oral material of her people and let its beauty speak for itself. She was also interested in the African religion which she studied for a few years in the Southern states as well as in the Carribean. Her research resulted in unique records of religious ceremonies and rituals. Hurston believed that in hoodoo she had located an example of Afro-American culture that transcended national boundaries.

Although Hurston sought to manifest her people’s cultural sovereignty, she would often demonstrate her own feeling of racelessness. As in her famous essay “How It Feels to be Colored Me” as well in her autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston proudly spoke of her individual achievement and her racial independence. In her view, race was rather a common cultural experience, not specific physical features and abilities. As many have

pointed out, this stubborn pride of Hurston's was to a large extent due to her positive childhood experience in the town of Eatonville, Florida, the first exclusively black town in the United States. Hurston refused to portray the black people as godforsaken, exploited individuals or imitators of white culture. She saw the common black folk as being vivid and creative.

2. Harlem Renaissance: The Awakening of a Dormant Culture

The term Harlem Renaissance has fully established itself within American cultural history. It has become something like a label for modern Afro-American culture.

Renaissance means revival or rebirth. That presumes that a certain phenomenon had already existed in the past and that for some time its existence had been interrupted or suppressed. The black intellectuals of the twenties—the Harlemites—thought this was the case with the Negro culture in the United States. They thought this culture had been present but had not yet had the opportunity to fully explore and manifest itself. They were convinced they were evoking their people's "Dusk of Dawn" (Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 3).² Thus the 1920s marked the Afro-Americans' coming of age for it was during this period that the Afro-American "became self-assertive and racially conscious as if for the first time" (Huggins, Voices 3).

2. 1. Historical Conditions

The occurrence of the "New Negro Movement," which is another term for the black cultural outburst of this decade, was conditioned by World War I. The idealism associated

² Huggins alludes to the title of W. E. B DuBois's autobiography Dusk of Dawn: An Autobiography of a Concept of Race (1940).

with War was promising democracy and self-determination for all. That raised expectations of blacks throughout the world who began to believe in restoring civil rights and the social order. The War also brought Africa, which was to be freed from the bonds of imperialism, to the center of attention of blacks. The feeling of black solidarity created the concept of Pan Africanism, a movement for the unity of African nations. The leader of this movement, Marcus Garvey led this concept to even more radical terms and suggested the return of all American blacks to Africa where they would establish a Pan-African state. Although Garveyism eventually failed, it positively stirred the black racial consciousness and found its followers later in the Civil Rights movement of the sixties.

World War I also brought a reevaluation of Western civilisation which encouraged non-Europeans to esteem their own cultures as being as valid and civilized as those of Europe. The disillusioned whites, on the other hand, were discovering and appreciating non-European cultures and civilisations in which they searched for authentic, spontaneous and natural experience. Freud's psychology called to abandon our civilized self which is spoilt and unauthentic and to free our subconscious and impulse. This immediacy and primitivism was to be found outside Western civilisation. Last but not least, the War caused industrial expansion in the North but at the same time cut off the traditional sources of immigrant labor. This situation created new work opportunities for blacks from the South.

By 1920, three hundred thousand black workers had left the South and moved to northern cities. The "Great Migration" brought blacks to East St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and many other urban centers. Their reason to migrate was simple: they wanted to escape Jim Crow, the segregation system in the South, which made the lynchings of the *Ku Klux Klan* and the disfranchisement of blacks officially legal. The industrial demands of the North were also promising blacks work positions better than those

of sharecroppers or tenants, which were their typical occupations in the post-Reconstruction South.

2.1. 1. Resettling Harlem

The largest black population found its place in New York, America's cultural capital. Harlem, the northern part of New York City, formerly a luxurious white residential area, had been opened to black residents already as early as in 1905. By then, many white residents were leaving due to a raising crime and unsatisfactory transportation and white property owners were forced to look for new tenants. Although facing opposition of some of their colleagues, the majority of the owners decided to let reliable and well-paying black tenants in. The reason was fairly pragmatic: it immediately filled the vacant apartments and also enabled the owners to increase the rents (Lewis 25-27). By 1929, Harlem made up the largest black urban area in the United States. To Harlem were coming not only blacks from the South but also from the West Indies and Africa so it soon became the "Black Metropolis"--a center of black intelligentsia and culture.

Mainly, all the important black political organisations and their magazines and newspapers found their seat in Harlem. NAACP—The National Association of the Advancement of Colored People with the magazine the *Crisis* (Du Bois), the National Urban League with *Opportunity* (C. S. Johnson), Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association with *Negro World* and the leftist Industrial Workers of the World with their *Messenger* (A. P. Randolph and C. Owen).

2. 1. 2 The Beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance

The estimations of historians and critics of the actual beginning of the Harlem renaissance vary, depending upon whether they associate it more with historical, sociological

or cultural events. However, as with other movements in history, there is not any particular year which simply “opened up” the renaissance. Rather, it seems, the beginning lies on the intersection of these sociological, historical and cultural events, as they all conditioned it.

From the historical perspective, one of the delimiting landmarks is certainly the end of the first World War. There was one specifically symbolical event connected with it: in 1919, the Fifteenth Regiment marched up Fifth Avenue in New York, “home to Harlem.” This regiment of about 1300 black men won its fame not only for the valor of the soldiers but especially for its “Jim Europe’s Band” which charmed the European audiences with jazz music.

The year 1919 was also the year of many antiblack riots which took place across the country. In Texas, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Arkansas race war set in. This wave of race hatred inspired black artists in their work. The famous poem “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay reacted to these events, although indirectly, and with its loud defiance, long unheard in black literature, it became the hymn of this generation.

The historian David Levering Lewis claims that “The Harlem renaissance began as a somewhat forced phenomenon, a **cultural nationalism** (my emphasis) of the parlor, institutionally encouraged and constrained by the leaders of the civil rights establishment for the paramount purpose of improving ‘race relations’ . . . [they] truly wanted to believe that they were promoting a culture of comity and understanding that would transform a racist nation” (xxviii). Lewis’s emphasis of the “parlor” character of the movement seems quite appropriate for the meetings and dinners that the leaders organized to stimulate contacts among the artists and the white editors took place mainly in salons and clubs. The activities of the movement did not really touch the common blacks. Apart from such authors as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, the Harlemites were inspired by and preoccupied with the upper or middle class audiences. The philanthropy of their endeavor which eventually turned

out to be naive gave the movement an omnipresent spirit of optimism and faith. As Hurston aptly noted, this endeavor to help enforce civil rights through art created “an alliance of ‘Niggerati’ and ‘Negrotarians’” (qtd. in Lewis xxviii). The leading “Negrotarian,” to use Hurston’s terminology, was unquestionably Carl Van Vechten, an organizer of interracial parties, an artistic enthusiast, who among others, launched the career of Langston Hughes.

There were two important publication events: in 1922 Johnson’s The Book of American Negro came out and in 1925 Locke’s The New Negro. Both texts established important terms of the movement. Closer analysis will be paid in the following chapters.

Clearly, between 1918 and 1925, the spirit of the Harlem renaissance was being born. The movement culminated in the 1920s and subsided during the 1930s.

1. 2. “New Negro”

The term “New Negro” was coined by Alain LeRoy Locke, a professor of English and philosophy at historically black Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1925 he released a literary anthology called The New Negro which was one of the events said to spawn the Harlem Renaissance.³ Locke’s anthology became for Afro-Americans the key text of the decade; something like their Bible. It included theoretical texts, works of fiction, poetry, drama, and music by the prominent, generationally mixed, black authors of the period.⁴

The anthology got its name from Locke’s title essay in which he introduced the new self-concept of Afro-Americans. According to Locke, the New Negro announces his dissatisfaction with the Old Negro who was so clogged with stereotypes that has become

³ The book The New Negro was based on the contents of its magazine version from March 1925 (which was briefer); a special monthly issue of *Survey* magazine called the *Survey Graphic*. *Survey* was a magazine which concentrated on social issues and charity work.

⁴ The New Negro anthology included also works by three white authors: A. C. Barnes, the millionaire art collector; P. Kellog, the chief editor of *Survey* magazine; and the anthropologist M. J. Herskovits from the Columbia University.

“more of a myth than a man . . . a formula . . . a stock figure” (3). Being used by whites, he permitted himself to be used. Lacking self-understanding, he has been as much of a problem to himself as well as to others. That filled him with self-doubt and self-hate. The New Negro has shed the costume of the darky, of uncle or auntie, of the retainer and the clown--the only roles in which the white man was willing to see him. He aims to define himself outside of these stereotypes. “[S]hedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem,” the New Negro is “achieving something like a spiritual emancipation” (4). He learns to understand himself--his real self which has been suppressed for years as well as his past and his heritage. Then his self-respect and self-dependence is renewed.

The New Negro is intelligent, articulate and self-assured. He is an urban man with “a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom” (6). Living in the city, the center of cultural and social interchange, enables him to get to know people of various origin, education and profession; the “finding of one another” is his “greatest experience” (ibid.). Locke’s New Negro ideology was to enhance communal spirit and group solidarity among Afro-Americans of all professions and backgrounds. They were to develop “a common consciousness” and share “a life in common” rather than to remain bound by “a common condition” or “a problem in common” (7).

According to Locke, the rehabilitation of the Negro in the world’s esteem lies in the “reevaluation by white and black alike of . . . his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective” (15). This rehabilitation, Locke continues, is the key to “further betterment of race relationships” (ibid.). Locke then introduces his elitist vision of culture and calls for “releasing our talented group” to promote and to produce Negro art (ibid.).

As Huggins suggests, Locke’s concept of the New Negro resonated the “very traditional values of self-sufficiency and self-help, as American as the Puritans and the ‘self-

reliance` of Ralf Waldo Emerson” (Harlem Renaissance 59). The old is being transformed into something new. The North, the new urban setting, art and education are to shape the New Man.

2. 3. The Discussion over the Role of Black Art: A “Black ARTIST” or a “BLACK artist”?

The promoters of the Harlem Renaissance believed that culture is the measure of civilisation. They thought that, when the Black man succeeds in equaling his art with the “high art” of the Western civilisation, he will be better accepted by whites. Thus they fixed on a vision of high culture. In their view, artists were more likely to be free of superstition, prejudice and fear than others and were thus the most appropriate ones to “reform the brotherhood in a common humanity” (Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 5). The idea was to create Black art: black novels, poems, plays, music, paintings. The existence of high Black art should be a source of racial pride as well as an eloquent argument against discrimination.

Four years before Locke’s The New Negro appeared, the critic and author James Weldon Johnson published his equally influential Book of American Negro Poetry. In its Preface, he argued that a people might choose many paths to greatness, but “there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged: the amount and standard of literature and art they have produced” (9). The evidence of the Negro’s intellectual potential should serve as the most effective weapon in his fight for civil rights.⁵

Among black thinkers and artists began a wild discussion over the character and the role of black art. The leaders like Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson promoted the neo-

⁵ Gates reveals in Johnson’s statement a reaction to R. W. Emerson’s claim (made at his speech “On the Emancipation of the West Indies” in 1844) that blacks would first have to contribute to the American nation’s cultural mix before they would be granted full citizenship (Talking Books, xxxv).

platonic ideal of art as a self-expression. Rather than reflecting the social reality, it should create images of beauty. In their view, which was rather conservative, art was a means to uplift and cultivate the gentility of their people. In contrast, Du Bois saw art as pure propaganda: "Negro art is today plowing a difficult row. We want everything that is said about us to tell of the best and highest and noblest in us. We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one." ("Negro Art" 55). His theory of uplift by the "Talented Tenth" resonated the elitism of Alain Locke, yet his view of the role of the artist was not the same. Du Bois offered the program of "continuous agitation" which consisted in educating (elevating) leaders who would be willing to fight against segregation and discrimination through social protests and political actions. Du Bois anticipated with his ideology the radicals and social realists of the forties.

The question, to put it simply, was whether the black artist should stress mainly his position as an artist--a raceless individual who declares and creates universal values--or to stress his blackness and explore its implications. Poets like Countee Cullen argued for the former, while Langston Hughes for the latter. To connect both--the racial consciousness and the traditional form--was the attempt of Claude McKay whose poetry represented the militant voice of the period.

Cullen followed in his poetry the genteel tradition of romantic poetry in the style of Keats, calling for the higher emotions and ideals expressed through unordinary language. Sticking to elevated themes and language prevented him from having to translate such harsh and low reality as discrimination or poverty into verse. Cullen aimed to transcend the Negro conditions through high art. He himself was an example of Negro achievement in the philosophy of Booker T. Washington or W. E. B. Du Bois.

Langston Hughes, on the other hand, wanted to search for the inspiration for black art in the life of common blacks who, according to him, preserve the common sense and

spontaneity of the Negro spirit: "The low-down folks do not particularly care whether they are like white folks or anybody else. Their joy runs, bang! into ecstasy. Their religion soars to a shout. Work maybe a little today, rest a little tomorrow. Play awhile. Sing awhile . . . These common people are not afraid of spirituals . . . and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations" (Hughes, Voices 306). Yet not even Hughes was free of the influence of the white tradition. The influence of Whitman or Sandburg can be traced in his poetry, which is full of immediate expressions of the self and the optimistic faith in the common man.

The poetry of Jean Toomer, condensed mainly in his collection Cane (1923), presented a unique attempt to reflect the stylistic and aesthetic experiments in the contemporary avantgarde art. Toomer's main theme was getting over the slave past and integrating it into the Negro self. He too, just like Hughes, saw richness and strenght in the common black man. In Cane, Toomer celebrated the lives of black peasants in the South, which he saw as a land of fertility, where blacks live connected to the soil as opposed to the dehumanized urban North.

As Huggins points out, the pitfall of Hughes' poetry was the fact that by then the folk artist was lacking an audience which would sustain his art and offer critical judgement. Thus he had to "generate . . . from within himself the critical terms on which his art would rest" (Harlem Renaissance 205). The dependence on a white audience and white patronage presented a major problem for the black artist of this decade. On this account, Huggins claims that most black artists were following the white models and forms and that "except for Jean Toomer and . . . Langston Hughes there was no evidence of literary inventiveness in Harlem" (228).

James Weldon Johnson was also concerned with this problem of the lack of an audience for the black author. In his article "The Dilemma of the Negro Author" from 1928, Johnson pointed out the problems that the Negro writer has to face. The white audience is used to reading about the Negro in terms of the hard-set stereotypes it had created about him. The existing black audience still discourages the Negro author to produce "everything but nice literature"; that is, to avoid the so-called taboos of black America. While it is impossible for the Negro author to disregard the white audience as it makes up nine tenths of the population, the Negro audience is not yet diversified and open to accept the Negro author as he is. Johnson suggests that the path for the Negro author is to create art which "rises above race and reaches the universals in truth and beauty" (Wintz 481). Then he can "fuse the white and black America into one interested and approving audience" (ibid.). Thus he is referring to and identifying with the above mentioned idealized—Lockian--view of art.

2. 3. 1. The Ambiguities of the "Afro-American"

In 1926, the editors of the Negro magazine *Crisis*, with Du Bois as the chief editor, organized the Crisis symposium where they proposed the issue "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?". The main task set up at the symposium was to define the Negro's identity within/against the general American context.

Once again, the issue of what Du Bois called the "twoness" of African Americans, was raised. In The Souls of Black Folk, from 1903, Du Bois argued: "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dagged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (The Norton Anthology 1688). How should Afro-Americans then articulate themselves? Is the Afro-American some special species or just another American? The frustration from this disintegration--from the divided awariness of one's identity--was expressed in Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, a novel from

1912 by James Weldon Johnson. The main character is so confused about his identity and the sense of belonging that he finally chooses to abandon his chaotic old self and to assume a new identity which is independent of the judgement of others: "I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race, but that I would change my name, raise a moustache and let the world take me for what it would" (190).

For the black journalist G. S. Schuyler, the "Aframerican is merely a lampblackened Anglo-Saxon" (Huggins, Voices 310). In his article "The Negro-Art Hokum," Schuyler argues that "literature, painting, and sculpture of Aframericans . . . is identical in kind with the literature, painting, and sculpture of white Americans" because they shared a common nationality and lived in and reacted to the same socioeconomic and political environment (ibid.). Langston Hughes reacted to the sharp argument of Schuyler in his article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Hughes does not agree with the opinion that there is no distinctive Afro-American sensibility and expression. He admits that there are many blacks—especially middle class blacks—who have succumbed to white standardizations as well as many would-be black artists who have to climb the "racial mountain," which is Hughes's metaphor for the urge toward whiteness. Hughes feels pity for him who has not been taught to see the beauty of his own people and apes white models instead.

Yet according to Hughes, the true Negro artist thematizes "his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears" (307). He challenges "white is best" with "Negro is beautiful." It is jazz, the genuinely Afro-American phenomenon, Hughes argues, that reflects "the eternal tom-tom beating [of] the Negro soul . . . the joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile" (308).

Thus, one can conclude, the Negro artist surely has a theme of his own. He can tell the world of his experience of being black in a white society. He can equally tell the world of his

experience of his slave past. Last but not least, he can express his blackness; his particular state of mind, in blues and jazz, in spirituals and gospels where he can sing out his vibrance, as well as pain.

2. 4. The Paradox of Harlem

The Great Depression of 1929 brought an end to the vogue of Harlem. As Huggins put it, “a self-conscious culture had to struggle for relevancy at a time when physical survival was a notable achievement” (Harlem Renaissance 190).

Although there were authors like Langston Hughes or Jean Toomer who aimed to express in their work the true black genius, independent of the white readership, his standard and judgement, the majority of the Harlem intellectuals was committing a paradox in their endeavor. Promoting the Negro, they were trying to demonstrate to the white world that blacks could achieve on the highest level, measured by Euro-American standards.⁶ Thus they were unconsciously affirming of the white standard as the only possible and proper cultural model. The aestheticism of the Harlemites, the idea that creating black art would bring races together was soon to be revealed as idealism and naivite. Preferring to stress the black achievement rather than black problems prevented the Harlemites from seeing that the ordinary blacks were struggling with unemployment, unflagging segregation and basic human needs. This was the answer to the quick entrance and acceptance of the social realists of the thirties.

The critical evaluation and an obituary of this era is reflected in the 1932 novel of Wallace Thurman, Infants of the Spring. As the title suggests, although the Harlem Renaissance was meant to mark the Negro spiritual coming of age, its very concept was

⁶ In this way, the Harlemites continued in the literary tradition of the slave authors whose aim was also to master the Anglo-American literary tradition in order to prove their humanity.

immature. Huggins points out the great irony of the Harlem art which, despite its intention to be distinctive, ended up being mostly derivative (306).

So paradoxically, it was the black musicians, not the black artists and writers, who “did not . . . depend on outside critics or a learned and alien tradition to give them validity” (Huggins, *Voices* 280). It was jazz, the music which was to define the age but which at the same time was not approved by the Harlem intellectuals as the “high art,” which left the greatest mark on the Afro-American as well as American culture.⁷

2. 5. Zora Neale Hurston and Her Position within the Harlem Renaissance

Zora Neale Hurston officially entered the Harlem scene in 1925 when she joined the Gala Awards dinner given by the Negro magazine *Opportunity* in New York. She was invited by the founder and chief editor, Charles S. Johnson, who used the magazine to introduce new black authors and their work to public. Johnson had previously published Hurston’s story “Drenched in Light” and wrote to her to come to New York to meet with equally talented writers. The evening, during which Hurston met with prominent authors and publishers, marked the official beginning of Hurston’s career. Her reputation preceded her arrival—she was already a published author and a promising student of Howard University where she studied under Alain Locke. Locke was the leader of *Stylus*, a literary club at Howard University which Hurston attended and where, in 1921, she published her first story “John Redding Goes to Sea.” Locke decided to include Hurston’s award-winning story “Spunk” into The New Negro anthology. Thus Hurston gained a status of an artist.

⁷ Gates argues that black musicians and their music “have escaped the burden of representing ‘the race’ in accordance with explicitly political programs because so much of what they composed was in nonverbal forms and because historically black music existed primarily for a black market” (Cronin 231).

In the Harlem discussion over the character of black art, Hurston's attitudes would have ranked her together with Langston Hughes. Just like Hughes, Hurston saw the inspiration for the black artist in folk characters--in the authentic, "primitive" folklore. This attitude was in contrast with the "Talented Tenth" who were supposed to elevate the black readership through stories about social-climbing Negroes written in standard English. Even folklore was to be artistic--rewritten as literature for the sophisticated reader. Hurston's point was exactly the opposite. Trained as a Boasian anthropologist, her interest was to grasp the authenticity of folk characters, with their particular speech: uncultivated black southern dialect.

One of Hurston's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance is The Eatonville Anthology, a collection of stories published in 1926 in *The Messenger*. The Eatonville Anthology is the literary equivalent of Hurston's memorable performances at parties (Hemenway 69). It is a mixture of fiction, folklore and biography, full of dialect and humor. It introduces some of Hurston's later themes and characters. Nevertheless, as Pavlovskaya points out, Hurston's "Eatonville" was problematic for several reasons. Harlem intellectuals rejected the notion of Eatonville as representative of the "New Negro" (78).

2. 5. 1. Hurston versus White Patrons, Publishers and Audience

One of the things for which Hurston would often be criticized by her Harlem contemporaries was her ambiguous relationship to white patrons and publishers. As we said earlier, the black writer of the twenties was heavily dependent on white patrons and publishers. At this time, there might have been plenty of black magazines but only a few black publishers.

One of the enthusiastic white patrons of the young Negro artists was Charlotte Mason. She gave over fifty thousand dollars to struggling artists who needed money to survive and develop their talents. She insisted that they call her "Godmother," encouraging an emotional

dependency as well as financial one (Lyons 51). Mason turned out to be a very generous yet also a very dominating patron and censor who required absolute devotion of her artists. Among the supported artists were Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes.

In Dust Tracks, Hurston speaks of Mason as a “mother-love,” an “extremely human” individual with whom she shared a “psychic bond” (145). Yet as Hemenway points out, “the relations with Mrs. Mason were humanly inconsistent . . . [sometimes] the Godmother became a meddling patron” whose restraints and restrictions chafed Hurston (109). Mason represented the neverending, persistent urge of whites to cultivate other races. While Hughes decided to sever the fettering bonds—in spite of losing the wealthy patron’s support—, Hurston continued to compromise her art. Sometimes her devotion bordered on obsequiousness. In one of her letters, she raved: “Flowers to you—the true conceptual mother—not just a biological accident. To you of the immaculate conception where everything is conceived in beauty and every child is covered in truth . . . I have taken form from the breath of your mouth. From the vapor of your soul am I made to be.” (qtd. in Hemenway 109).

Throughout her life, Hurston remained (with the exception of one novel) faithful to one white publisher: J. B. Lippincott in Philadelphia. She kept good relations with him, although she often had to adjust the original manuscripts of her texts according to Lippincott’s requirements. Probably the greatest and most unfortunate adaptation was that of her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road. Apparently the book was written with a white audience in mind, because of editorial suggestions. The second half appears especially insincere. Hurston avoids discussing discrimination as dwelling on it she finds self-indulgent. Her opinions on international politics were excised by editors (Hemenway 278). Hurston once explained to an interviewer: “Rather than get across all of the things which you want to say you must compromise and work within the limitations of those people who have the final

authority in deciding whether or not a book shall be printed” (qtd. in Hemenway 286-7). How many of her sincere opinions Hurston suppressed is apparent if we compare the manuscript of Dust Tracks⁸ with its final printed version. In the manuscript, Hurston openly expressed her anger with colonialist oppression of nonwhite people, which she connected with American racism; she condemned the Nazi terror, and criticized the hypocrisy of president Roosevelt (287). There Hurston’s voice sounds much less detached and elevated.

2. 5. 1. a. The Minstrel

The critic Darwin Turner has suggested that much of Hurston’s achievement was due to her becoming a “wandering minstrel” (91). This was also an opinion of Hurston’s contemporary and rival, Richard Wright, whose review of Their Eyes Were Watching God manifested Wright’s opinion of Hurston’s art. There he proclaimed that Hurston’s novel did for literature what the minstrel shows did for theater, that is, make white folks laugh. The novel, he said, exploited those “quaint” aspects of Negro life that satisfied the tastes of a white audience: “her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears” (Wright 22-3).

Minstrel shows developed out of early nineteenth-century circus performances by white men who blackened their faces. The black masks of the white performers represented their suppressed alter egos. By putting on the black mask, the white man became another self, which was devoid of tension and anxiety. Whites would thus release their fear and self-doubt by laughing at the darky on the stage.⁹ The stereotype represented by the mask “defined the

⁸ Unpublished Dust Tracks on a Road Manuscript, Johnson Collection, Yale University Library. Excerpts are qtd. in Hemenway (also see 3. 4. 1.).

⁹ Alice Walker explains the term darkie (darky) in her essay “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston”: it is a naive, childlike, sweet, humorous, highly colored Negro.

Afro-American as white Americans chose to see him; outside the mask the black man was either invisible or threatening" (Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 254). "Negroes, accepting the pretense, wore the mask to move in and out of the white world with safety and profit" (ibid.).

However, shrinking the role of Hurston into a mere "minstrel" seems highly unjust. One has to keep in mind that Hurston and Wright represented at the discussed period two contrasting views of literature. We can easily understand why Wright, a marxist intellectual who was working for social change, felt that Hurston's work was counter-revolutionary. Not only was it lacking the bitterness and victimization of blacks that he felt was the goal of every piece of good literature but it was also manifesting the possibility of (every) man's growth. Hurston reacted to Wright's critique stating that she wanted to write a novel, not a "treatise on sociology" (Gates, Afterword. Their Eyes 190). To her, black lives did not equal only to defensive reactions to white actions. Such view she saw as highly limiting.

Notwithstanding the accustion, Hurston did all but confirm the minstrel image. Her characters are full and lively--complex human beings who undergo development (Janie), suffer inner disintegration (Mrs. Turner, Jody Starks) or exercise narrowness (the gossiping townspeople) and commit mistakes (Tea Cake beating Janie; Missy May's infidelity). Their "like a pendulum" eternal swinging to which Wright hinted, suggests rather than monotony a lifelong persistence and strength of the spirit.

All in all, both authors did not quite escape extremes in their work. Both the total lack of love and joy as presented in Wright's work and the romantic notion of the self as we find in many of the essays, novels and stories by Hurston seem unrealistic.

3. Hurston in Search of Black Identity

3. 1. "Characteristics of Negro Expression"

In 1926 Hurston was sent to do fieldwork for Boas who was interested in exploring the African survivals in Afro-American culture (Hemenway 88). Informed by Boas's sociolinguistic theories, Hurston set to trace the essence of Negroness; to investigate what she called "Characteristics of Negro Expression."¹⁰ Unlike the black assimilationists, Hurston proudly stressed those features which made black culture a distinct phenomenon. She decided to examine African American folk culture through the prism of language, the one mode of cultural expression by which African Americans were judged deficient and condemned as culturally inferior (Plant 44). In her research, she applied the diffusionist theories of Boas which were grounded in the belief that cultural forms and traits generate in one culture but are dispersed over diverse culture areas. By comparative analyses she also affirmed the theory of cultural interdependence.

In 1934 Hurston summarized her observations of Negro everyday-life behavior and wrote the essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression." In it she asserts that the Negro use of mimicry is not a proof of assimilation but on the contrary, a proof of originality. She differentiates blacks who imitate "for the love of it" from "slavish" imitators who "ape[] all the mediocrities of the white brother" (Huggins, *Voices* 231). These Negroes assume the white man's perspective of their own race and reject their own cultural forms. The same year Hurston wrote an article "The Race Cannot Become Great Until It Recognizes Its Talent" in which she criticized the "black-fur-coat peerage"¹¹: "Fawn as you will. Spend an eternity awe

¹⁰ This essay was included, along with six other ethnological essays of Hurston, in the anthology *Negro* edited by a wealthy British revolutionary, Nancy Cunard in 1934. Later Hurston collected these essays and included them in her own collection *The Sanctified Church*. The book, however, was published some sixty years after, in 1981.

¹¹ A term used by Hurston in *Dust Tracks*, 144.

struck. Roll your eyes in ecstasy and ape the white man's every move, but until we have placed something upon his street corner that is our own, we are right back where we were when they filed our iron collar off" (qtd. in Hemenway 206). By the "something that is our own" Hurston meant Afro-American folklore. Boas defined folklore as "the science of all the manifestations of popular life" (Stocking 31). According to this concept, Hurston set out to investigate the daily manifestations of her people's lives.

In "Characteristics," Hurston depicts the Negro tendency to dramatize everything: "the Negro's universal mimicry is . . . an evidence of . . . drama. His very words are action words" (225). She comments on the Negro sense of visualization: "the speaker has in his mind the picture of the object in use" (ibid.) and hence the Negro tendency to use descriptive words which illustrate the action (thereof originates the Negro linguistic speciality of the double descriptive, such as in "chop-axe" or "sitting-chair"). Hurston concludes: "the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics." She suggests that the Negro's greatest contribution to the language is the use of metaphor and simile. According to Boas, "language is a reflection of the state of culture and follows in its development the demands of culture." Words, phrases, and linguistic usage such as metaphorical expressions and allusions "are symbols of cultural attitudes" (The Mind of Primitive Man 142-143). Metaphor is connected with the Negro "will to adorn" (225) which indicates the omnipresent "desire for beauty" (227). Negro originality lies in the fact that "everything he touches is re-interpreted for his own use" (230). That means that he does not merely assume but adapt things. Hurston provides the examples of this behavior in language, food preparation, religion, music. The greatest example of the black man's originality is Negro folklore; "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" (229). Hurston further reveals the Negro's creativity in his use of asymmetry and insinuation. Asymmetry works together with

rhythm: "each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry" (228). This asymmetry is apparent in Negro music—in the blues, jazz as well as in spirituals and gospels but also in the visual arts or dance. Insinuation in dance or music is a means to ravish the audience, to evoke its own creative potential.

In "Characteristics," Hurston asserts "we are an outdoor people accustomed to communal life." This Afro-American sense of communal life created the idea of "the Jook," the Negro night club in whose "smelly, shoddy confines" the phenomenon of the blues developed (233).

Highlighting the Negro dialect, Hurston aims to depict some characteristic features of it, such as the use of "Ah" instead of "I," "hit" instead of "it" which she ascribes to the Negro full soft lip. Another typical linguistic modification which originates in the Negro speech is softening and toning down the consonanted words, such as in "ain't" (= "aren't").¹²

3. 1. 1. The Role of Sex and Gender

In "Characteristics," Hurston marks the basic mode of communication between the sexes as a play. This play often assumes the form of friendly battle, play-fight and provocation. Both sexes want to attract the partner by manifesting his/her self-assurance. The man proclaims: "Salute me, I am strength" and the woman's reply is "I'm a darned sweet woman and you know it" (225). Also the Negro creates his stereotype about the white man: the white man is a poor lover, he only buys women but does not know what to do with them. There is also a myth of the black woman, the powerful, furious "queen of the Jook" whose counterpart is the "yaller wife," the light-skinned woman assuming the characteristics of a white woman.

¹² Paradoxically, by such claims Hurston contradicts the Boasian concept of race (see 4. 2. 2.) which opposed the idea that biological features predetermine a member of a race for certain abilities.

Hurston later examined the provocative nature of a black relationship and made it a theme of her short story, "The Gilded Six-Bits," from 1933. Missy May and Joe are a couple from a poor neighborhood in Eatonville, yet there is always "something happy about [their] place" (*I Love Myself* 208). They express their love in a mock courtship which is full of teasing and play-fight. They both perform for each other a Sunday ritual which consists of Joe's throwing his weekly wage on the floor and hiding in the bushes while Missy May pretends to be searching for him. The play culminates into a "furious mass of male and female energy" when the two are "shouting, laughing, twisting, turning, tussling, tickling each other in the ribs" (209). Hurston sees a great creative potential in this relationship: though being poor and living an ordinary life, the two people possess the skill to adorn their lives together.¹³ The infidelity Missy May commits is in fact done out of her big love for Joe for whom she is willing to obtain the material possessions he desires.

Of a similar nature is the relationship of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with her third husband, Tea Cake. When Janie becomes jealous, she attacks Tea Cake and fights: "They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; till he hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible; kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion" (*Novels and Stories* 287).

Some of the folktales and rituals recorded in *Mules and Men* which deal with the relationship of black man and woman sustain Hurston's characteristics of it as a playful, tricky business. Such is the folktale "Why Women Always Take Advantage of Men" or the "Ritual—To Rule the Man You Love" or "To Make Love Stronger."

¹³ Such a black relationship stands sharply against the sterile white relationship of Arvey and Jim in Hurston's novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*.

3. 1. 2. Negro Spirituals

When searching for the characteristics of Negro expression, Hurston also dealt with the original Negro religious songs which she encountered already as a child in Eatonville's Baptist Church: "I had heard the singing, the preaching and the prayers. They were a part of me. . . . To me, what the Negroes did in Macedonia Baptist Church was finer than anything that any trained composer had done to the folk songs" (Dust Tracks, 172). In her essay "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals" (1934) Hurston aimed to describe the genuineness of a true Negro spiritual.

She observes that spirituals are made of "jagged irregular harmony" (Huggins, Voices 344), that they are unreproducible, always a matter of a particular moment and mood. Hence the improvisation of the singers which is based on their "inner urge": "Every man [is] trying to express himself through song. Every man for himself" (345). As she says: "each singing of the piece is a new creation." It is raw, uncultivated yet genuine. It makes even the mechanics, such as breathing, part of the song. Spirituals, Hurston claims, are not entertainment--they stand for deeply felt notions of Negro freedom, confidence and self-revelation.

Hurston insists on differentiating the true spirituals which are sung by Negro singers in the church from the concert singers who wear the tuxedos and perform "the works of Negro composers or adaptors based on the spirituals" (344) in front of a passive audience. These "neo-spirituals" are just an infusion of the real folk music, they lose its spirit, which lies in the improvisation, jaggedness and even an ecstasy of the untrained singers as well as in the atmosphere of the congregation.

In 1932 Hurston organized shows of Negro spirituals at the John Golden Theater in Broadway. The folk concert was called *The Great Day* and featured much of the material later published in Mules and Men. Hurston comments that she told her singers not to stand in a stiff group but to relax and "imagine they were in Macedonia" while performing (Dust Tracks, 172). She wanted that the sense of authenticity and spontaneity be preserved.

3. 2. "Something ...that is our own"¹⁴: Collecting Folklore

After describing the characteristics of Negro expression, Hurston set to collect its manifestations: the folklore itself.

The main interest of the folklorist is tradition--those forms of communicative behavior which have been passed on from generation to generation by oral transmission. As Hemenway suggests, it is behavior which "reflects the common life of the mind existing at a level other than that of high or formal culture" (86).

When trying to establish black identity, Hurston decided to reconstruct the Negro tradition and thus to reveal the great cultural wealth of her people. She aimed to collect its manifestations before they dissappeared. It is true that black folklore had previously been collected by white authors, but, as Hemenway points out, "their eccentric collecting techniques led to artificial contexts for the lore" (87). Whites adjusted the black folklore so that it would reinforce their stereotype about blacks.¹⁵ An equal problem was the reticence of blacks to reveal their true selves before white collectors. Hurston comments on various evasive techniques of blacks in her Introduction to Mules and Men (see 3.2.1.).

In 1927, having received a research fellowship from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History,¹⁶ Hurston left to collect folklore in her home state of Florida. Her expedition was planned together with Boas and its aim was to record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, and games of Afro-American folklore (Hemenway 84). In Hurston's words, folklore is the art people create before they find out there is such a thing as

¹⁴ qtd. in Hemenway 207

¹⁵ The most famous collections of black folklore by a white author was Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus series (1880-1883). In Hurston's time it was Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro (1927) by Newbell Niles Puckett or Guy Johnson's and Howard Odum's The Negro and His Sons (1925) and Negro Workaday Songs (1926). Hurston had little regard for the work of white folklorists. In a letter to Hughes, she mentioned: "It makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbling our stuff and ruining it" (qtd. in Hemenway 117).

¹⁶ The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, in its time a prestigious institution, was founded and directed by Carter G. Woodson, America's leading black historian.

art; it comes from a folk's "first wondering contact with natural law"—that is, laws of human nature as well as laws of natural process, the truths of a group's experience as well as the principles of physics (qtd. in Hemenway 159).

3. 2. 1. The Method of Collecting

In her Introduction to Mules and Men, Hurston explains : "Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest" (2). She points out the ambiguity of the Negro's behavior: on one hand he shows his "open-faced laughter" which suggests an outgoing attitude and generosity in sharing "what his soul lives by"; on the other hand, he is cautious and hesitant to reveal his mind before a stranger (ibid.). She says the Negro is polite, so instead of expelling the visitor out of his community, he makes something up to satisfy his curiosity and to get rid of him soon. The Negro says: "I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle." (3). This is his tactic especially with the white man who "can read [his] writing but . . . sho' can't read [his] mind." (ibid.). In short, the Negro is sceptical about the white man actually comprehending his culture and tradition. Hence the inaccuracy of the Black folklore collected by the white collectors.

Hurston's great advantage in crossing the thresholds between her and the informants was the fact that she was visiting her native town whose members still remembered her as "Lucy Hurston's daughter." Still, she had to face some difficulties when first entering this world of her childhood. As Lyons comments, Hurston's first trip to Eatonville was unsuccessful because the people felt distanced from an educated lady from the North who wore fancy dress and drove her own car. It was not until Hurston altered the way of accessing her people that she began to be successfull with her collecting. She had to become a member of each community she was encountering, "by virtue of race and her sympathy with

communal ways” (Hemenway 167). Sometimes being admitted to a group meant that Hurston had to sacrifice some of her possession or to undergo an initiation rite, as in the case of studying voodoo. The key to the heart of her folk was thus what Pavlovskaya calls Hurston’s “blur[ring] the line between the scientist and the informant” (88). However, this “blurring” eventually also posed a problem for Hurston; when studying voodoo, she got so absorbed by the techniques of the initiation rites that her objectivity of a researcher was at stake (see 3.2.2.b.).

3. 2. 1. a. Literary Ethnography

Although most critics of Mules and Men called the book a collection of folklore, the recent Hurston scholarship points out the literariness of the book and tend to call it “literary ethnography.”¹⁷

Clearly, the book lacks raw objectivity of a scientific account. Hurston chose the form of a personal narrative—it is self-reflective and highly autobiographical. Her narrator is part of the narrated world but as Hemenway notes “does not intrude on the folklore event”(164). This personal attitude created certain intimacy of the text which brings the experience from it closer to the reader who can enter the community, just like the narrator, and become part of it. Darwin Turner reproached Hurston that she did not classify her material into generic categories or did not provide data on the informants (Cronin 46). It seems that Hurston deliberately favored the literary approach for which a natural context seemed more fitting. In her essay, Dolby-Stahl argues that Hurston pioneered the genre of literary ethnography, which found academic respectability only in the 1980s (Cronin 43-52). Hurston’s artistic

¹⁷ Sandra Dolby-Stahl analyzes the genre aspects of the book in her essay “Literary Objective: Hurston’s Use of Personal Narrative” in Cronin, 43-52.

inclination as well as her strong ego simply made it impossible for her to leave behind a book pure ethnography.

3. 2. 2. “From the earliest rocking of my cradle”¹⁸: Mules and Men

The material Hurston gathered on her field trip during 1927 – 1928 resulted in the publication of Mules and Men (1935), “one of the outstanding books of its kind ever published in the United States” (Rampersad xvi). Mules and Men was the first collection of African American folklore ever published by an African American. Divided into two sections, Folktales and Hoodoo,¹⁹ it presents seventy stories and Hurston’s encounters with five doctors in “Hoodoo.” The Appendix includes Negro songs and prescriptions and paraphernalia of the Hoodoo doctors.

3. 2. 2. a. The “lies” from Eatonville

In his book on the Afro-American literary theory, The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates explores the nature of the Afro-American literary discourse. His major thesis is that black texts are based on “Signifyin(g),” a rhetorical strategy which employs indirectness as the main device. Black vernacular, he asserts, is figurative discourse; “signifyin(g)” is a way of verbal game. The speakers exercise themselves in the use of troping.²⁰

When Hurston speaks of the Negro speaking in “hieroglyphics,” or his “urge to adorn,” she refers to this “signifyin(g)” aspect of black speech; of the speaker’s ability to redirect the attention from the object of the speech to the act of telling, or as Gates puts it, from the

¹⁸ Hurston. Introduction. Mules and Men, 1.

¹⁹ The voodoo section is a slightly edited version of Hurston’s article “Hoodoo in America” which was published in 1931 in the *Journal of American Folklore*.

²⁰ As Gates states, the term “Signifyin(g)” was first found by linguists in the black urban neighborhoods during the 1950s and 1960s and first defined as a rhetorical strategy by R. D. Abrahams. The examples of black verbal games, according to Gates, are: boasting, joning, horseplay, dirty dozens, rapping and others.

semantic (signified) to the rhetorical (signifier). Thus, Gates argues, the black discourse suppresses the mimetic principles in the benefit of diegesis. Hence the dramatic character of black discourse—to tell is more attractive than to reproduce. Hurston herself understood “signifying” mainly as “showing off with language use” (Gates 70). Hence the “lies” from Eatonville. To “lie” in the context of the Afro-American folklore refers to black tale telling, an analogy to the white tall tales.

In chapter one, the tellers Calvin and James vie, or “show off” about who says a more interesting story, who attracts Hurston’s attention more (and in this case gets ginger bread as a treat)—whether “about John and dis frog” or “about the man who went to Heaven from Johnstown.” The atmosphere of the storytelling is as if a character itself. The speakers as well as listeners do not meet just to deliver the content of the story. Both sides enjoy the process of telling and sharing. In the Afro-American context, this is a ritual which clearly fills the function of amusement and relaxation.

Many of the folktales represent “unscientific” interpretations of nature; they are wise and poetic explanations for various phenomena of the natural and human world. Often these explanations have humor in them. For example, one famous folktale explains “Why Negroes Are Black.” According to this tale, one day, God was distributing color among people. A group of people was late for this ceremonial and so when they were called for, they suddenly got scared they would miss God’s will, that they started to hurry and push one another forward so the God had to shout at them “Git back! Git back!” which they misunderstood as “Get black!” Hence the color of the black folk.

Often the tales assume the shape of a moral lesson, such as in “How the Cat Got Nine Lives.” This tale tells about a cat which ate nine fish which belonged to a starving family and its dog. Eventually the family and the dog died of starvation while the cat died because he had eaten too much. God got angry with the cat and expelled him from heaven. The cat still has

the nine lives in his belly and that is why "you got to kill him nine times before he'll stay dead" (121).

Some tales are based on Biblical situations and deal with the animal world. Such is the tale "How the Woodpecker Nearly Drowned the Whole World." Woodpecker's natural instinct to peck wood is so strong that he does not listen to Noah's warning that he will drill a hole in the ark and cause it to sink. Noah is angered by the bird's disobedience and bloodies his head with a sledge hammer, and "dat's why a peckerwood got a red head today" (102).

The animals themselves play quite a significant role in the Afro-American folklore. Brer Rabbit, Brer Dog, Brer 'Gator, Brer Lion and others talk and collaborate against Man or trick each other.

As Gates points out, the trickster figure is an essential figure to black oral narrative. He looks for its origins in African cultures. In these cultures, the trickster figure appeared under various names—Esu-Elegbara (Yoruba culture in today's Nigeria), Legba (Fon culture in today's Benin), papa La Bas (Hoodoo in the United States) and the Signifying Monkey in the Afro-American mythic discourse. The trickster's main function is mediation; interpretation which is always "double-voiced"—figurative, thus indirect. It is the monkey's greatest skill which helps him to get around. For through his figurative discourse he tricks the others to get them where he needs them to be. Without using power, he becomes the ultimate hero.

In the folktales that Hurston recorded,²¹ the rabbit is often such "trickster-hero" who outwits other animals. Another trickster figure is John the Conquerer, the mythical figure, who by virtue of his cleverness and wits always managed to get the best of his white masters.

²¹ Mules and Men does not contain all the folktales Hurston collected on her trip to Florida in the late 1920s. In 2001, editor Carla Kaplan published Every Tongue Got to Confess. Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States, folktales which happened to get lost from the publishers's list during Hurston's life.

Certain tales attempt to explain elemental matters. The myth included in "Why the Waves Have Whitecaps" has a fairy-tale like basis. It says that Mrs. Wind and Mrs. Water bragged about their children. Mrs. Water drowned Mrs. Wind's children and every time Mrs. Wind goes to call them, the white fringes of their caps rise. A storm represents the fight between these two ladies.

The folktales collected in Mules and Men represent charming records of rich imagination and creativity of African Americans. As Boas suggested in his Preface, the material collected in the book "throws into relief also the peculiar amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life" (xiii-xiv). Boas rightfully recognized this "amalgamation" as a pivotal aspect of the Afro-American culture. The folktales are grounded in African myths which have been shaped by North American environment.

3. 2. 2. b. Exploring Louisiana: Hoodoo in New Orleans

In 1928, after collecting the folktales and songs in Florida, Hurston decided to head on to Louisiana to get acquainted with another type of black folklore which she feared could soon be forgotten: the voodoo religion. She chose to visit New Orleans, which in its time was considered the voodoo capital, although practicing it was officially against the law there.

Voodoo (or hoodoo as pronounced by whites) is an animist religion of the Caribbean blacks, a mixture of African folk religion and Catholicism. Animism is based on the belief in the existence of supernatural forces and beings. It believes that souls are quasiphysical and can exist outside the body (in dreams and visions), can be transferred from one body to another, and persist after the death of the body (in the form of ghosts or as reincarnated). Hoodoo is accompanied by dances in trance, ritual sacrifices of animals, and black magic which consists of evil spirits or black and infernal forces.

Hurston justified the validity of hoodoo. She was convinced that “[a]ny religion that satisfies the individual urge is valid for that person” (Dust Tracks 169). She spent five months studying voodoo with the conjuring doctors whom she first had to persuade about her genuine intentions. After that she had to undergo various initiation rites which would qualify her as a pupil. She was the first black scholar to observe the voodoo ceremonies. It is apparent that Hurston’s interest was not and could not be ascribed merely to her scientific curiosity. As she admitted in her autobiography, she was fascinated with voodoo and found its rituals both “beautiful and terrifying” (ibid.). Under the influence of her wealthy patron, Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, Hurston had previously been interested in (and believed in) parapsychology and occultism.²² About her own belief in voodoo she seems to have remained perplexed: “I don’t know . . . always I have to say the same thing. I don’t know. I don’t know” (ibid).

In Mules and Men Hurston described the various initiation ceremonies and rituals that she had attended and conjuring stories she had heard and recorded. Voodoo rituals are based on superstitions. The conjuring doctor (male or female) sells his or her patient advice on various themes, for example: how to get a person out of the house; how to keep a person down; how to help a person in jail; how to make love stronger etc. The doctor is to help the unhappy or helpless individuals to fix their lives. By following the doctor’s instructions, the conjure is to work. For example the ritual of bringing a lover back tells the man or woman to “Take the left shoe, set it up straight, then roll it one-half over first to the right, then to the left. Roll it to a coming-in door and point it straight in the door, and he can’t leave. Hatband or sock can be made into a ball and rolled the same way: but it must be put under the sill or over the door” (Mules and Men 245).

²² Mason’s husband had been himself an expert in parapsychology (Rampersad, xx).

Hurston continued to study voodoo in the thirties when she visited Jamaica (in 1936) and Haiti (between the years 1937 and 1938). The experiences from these trips resulted in Tell My Horse (1938). In Jamaica Hurston lived for six months with the Maroons, the descendants of fugitive slaves who lived isolated high in the mountains. She shared the lives of these people, recorded their tales and learnt about their medicine but also helped actively to improve their communal life. Her Haitian experience was very intense. During this time, Hurston concentrated on studying the poisons and their antidotes and also tried to investigate zombiism. While studying the evil gods, the Petros, Hurston became frightened and felt a sense of danger. After she got seriously ill, she began to believe she might have been poisoned which resulted in an interruption of her research and a return home (Lyons 83).

The scientific aspect of this research seems to be at question. As Hemenway observed, Hurston "has gone deeply enough into the Caribbean night . . . In Haiti the material had engulfed her, and she needed the perspective of home" (248). Wendy Dutton asserts that Hurston "had become much more of a participant than an observer [which] caused her to produce a text unsuccessful in scientific terms" (qtd. in Hill 144). In the case of voodoo, it must have been very difficult for Hurston to retain the line between the researcher and the informants. Just as with folktales and songs, the full comprehension of it required her participation. Yet it was the participation which also caused her the dilemma between the objectives of a researcher and the duties of an initiate.

3. 3. Fortifying the Afro-American Self-Confidence

Hurston proclaimed African American folklore to be "the greatest cultural wealth of the continent" (qtd. in Plant 64). She felt that acknowledging Negro folklore would enrich blacks and whites equally: "this sunburst of Negro art . . . was going to do so much for America and the world in general" ("The Race Cannot Become Great"). This would be hard to deny,

considering the impact of Jazz, Blues, Negro dance or fine art. As Washington points out, Hurston did “not only celebrate[] the distinctiveness of black culture, but saw those traditional black folkways as marked improvements over the ‘imaginative wasteland of white society’” (I Love Myself 15). This might sound too a strong argument for white society certainly disposed of rich folklore too yet what Washington probably had in mind was the importance of the existence of a parallel culture and its recognition by the majority society. She suggested that the different does not necessarily have to mean the worse but just on the contrary: that it can be an inspiring and enriching source for the other side.

Finding and acknowledging a culture of one’s own was a means to ground black identity. Once there was something the people could look back at, admire and have a respect for, their pride would rise. The solid cultural heritage gave them also a powerful and eloquent argument when striving for their civil and human rights. By introducing the greatest collection of Black folklore ever published, Hurston helped to dispel the notion that blacks had no culture of their own. She gave the Afro-American culture a dignity that few were willing to recognize at that time.

3. 3. 1. Dialect: The Mark of the Afro-American Genius

Like her mentor Boas, Hurston seems to have believed that language is the surest index of a culture as it reflects a specific way of looking at the world. Hurston sees the cultural roots of her people lying with the common folk whose specific language is the dialect. The black dialect becomes thus the black man’s ultimate sign of difference. Unlike the detached words of the white men and the black intellectual elite, the common black people use descriptive words, the “hieroglyphics.” As Pavlovskaja points out, Hurston’s concern was not so much the content of the folktales she was collecting as the way they were conveyed, for this was for her where their “African Americanness” would lie. Hurston argued that the

Negro had enriched the English language with his "adornments": the use of metaphor and simile; the use of the double descriptive; and the use of verbal nouns. Black English is so different from standard English that Hurston spoke of the African American "language." While the standard English is alienated and reified, the language of the African-American folk is vivid and figurative (Pavlovska 88).

Hurston rarely modified the language of black people. All her books, except for one (The Seraph on the Suwanee) are written mainly in black vernacular speech. That was because Hurston would always prefer to go "directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself" (Huggins, Voices 236).

3. 3. 2. The Recognition of Neo-African Religion

Religion forms one of the basic stones of human culture. Hurston says at one point in Mules and Men: "belief in magic is older than writing," (183) thus suggesting that the principles behind the voodoo tradition are older than Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. It represents the common language of the African Americans' ancestors: Africans of various ethnic groups who had been enslaved and who comingled and integrated their beliefs to unite in the condition of slavery.

As it has had many followers, so it has had many persecutors. It has been abused by the Sect Rouge, which is a Petro sect, and Ving Bra-Drig, a cannibalistic society. These sects have taken cover under the name of voodoo, but as Hurston points out, "the two things are in no wise the same" (Dust Tracks 169). Yet the enemies of voodoo have exploited the bad fame of those sects to persecute voodoo followers. Voodoo has officially been prohibited in the United States as well as in Haiti where it nowadays makes up the largest religious group. Whites saw it as a barbaric, primitive and sexually licentious practice based on superstition

and spectacle. They feared anything African and thus practicing voodoo was punishable by death.

Recording the history and the practices of voodoo meant an important step in reconstructing the history of the Negro in the United states. Just as the folktales, songs, sayings and superstitions, voodoo religion reflected the mentality of blacks--their understanding of the natural as well as spiritual world. It is a faith which teaches respect for the natural world, seen in its magic, mystery and strength. For voodoo believers, nature is the source of harmony and peace, birth and rebirth. Music and dance, two key elements to Voodoo ceremonies, are the means to celebrate the glory of nature.

Voodoo was one of these roots that connected African Americans with their native continent, which they needed to rediscover in order to fully understand themselves. Hurston is credited with preserving the manifestations of voodoo and thus preserving the consciousness of its significance for the black people. She herself saw a great potential in voodoo medicine: "If science ever gets to the bottom of voodoo in Haiti and Africa, it will be found that some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power rather than the gestures of ceremony" (Dust Tracks 169).

4. "On Refusing to Be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design"²³: Hurston's Race Politics

4.1. The Nurturing Bosom of Eatonville

Due to her childhood in an exclusively black town of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston did

²³ The quote comes from the title of an essay by Alice Walker which she wrote as a dedication to Hurston's anthology I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive

not have to face the realities of racial violence while growing up. Eatonville was the first incorporated black community in America, with its own laws, town council, and mayor. It was a little world unto itself, which provided Hurston sheltering from lynchings and discrimination from the outside world. The Eatonville experience proved to be the essential source for Hurston's literary work and her racial pride. Nevertheless, as Mary Helen Washington suggests: "It was [also] a sheltering for which Hurston paid dearly, as it caused her to develop attitudes that were out of the mainstream, particularly in the protest years of the forties." (*I Love Myself* 123-139). The positive experiences in Eatonville along with her free-spirited character affirmed in Hurston the belief in the very American concept of self-reliance.

Already as a child, Hurston was considered a little "tiger"-- a sassy, bright and curious being who did things her own way. Hurston's family was an educated, well-off family. Her father, the mayor of Eatonville, was a respected figure in the town and his house represented a place of socializing. Although Hurston's relationship to her father was rather problematic (he instilled in Hurston an early inferiority complex about her looks)²⁴, it can be seen in her autobiography that she actually admired him and felt proud of him. Nevertheless, it was Hurston's mother who encouraged her children to always "jump at de sun" and who eventually recognized and defended talents of her daughter Zora (Lyons 2-4). Plant pays Hurston's mother the credit for being "one source of Hurston's self-confidence" (144). With her support, Hurston eventually won her fight against her "overwhelming complex" about her looks, so that as an adult, she displayed a positive, psychologically healthy sense of herself.

In her autobiography as well as in her essays and articles, Hurston conveys a strong sense of individualism and self-actualization. As Washington points out, Hurston "always saw

²⁴ see more on the issue in Plant, *Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom* 143-173.

herself as a self-made success" (I Love Myself 22). And indeed her life is an example of the American "self-made man." At the age of twenty one she left her family and supported herself by various jobs. It was due to her ambition and persistence that she earned a high school diploma and later a university degree.

4. 2. In the Light of Boasian Anthropology

In 1928 Hurston wrote her famous essay "How It Feels To Be Colored Me." This essay caused a lot of controversy on the side of critics as well as the public. In it, Hurston makes an introductory statement "I am colored but I offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief" (I Love Myself 152). Behind the irony, we can read the awakening of racial pride which hurtles to smashingly attack the reader's eyes. A program of optimism uncoils throughout the essay. In Dust Tracks from 1942, Hurston states: "I do not coyly admit to a touch of the tarbrush to my Indian and white ancestry. You can consider me Old Tar-Brush in person if you want to. I am a mixed blood, it is true, but I differ from the party line in that I neither consider it an honor nor a shame" (248). Throughout her life, Hurston refused to accept color as a determining factor of human character.

Hurston developed her view of race chiefly in the twenties during her studies of anthropology at Barnard College in New York. There she studied under the distinguished anthropologist of German origin, Dr. Franz Boas. She became one of his best students and developed a very close and sincere relationship to her mentor, whom she began to call "Papa Franz." Hemenway comments: "Boas became the most important figure in her academic life, not only because of his great personal magnetism, but also because he recognized her genius

immediately and urged her to begin training as a professional anthropologist, concentrating on folklore” (63). Boas entrusted Hurston with different kinds of field work: in 1926 she went to Harlem to measure the heads of people to disprove the fallacies of racial inferiority. In 1927 she travelled South to collect folklore in Florida. Boasian anthropology had greatly influenced Hurston’s concept and method of collecting folklore as well as her view of race.

4. 2. 1. Cultural Relativism

Franz Boas asserted descriptive objectivism in anthropology. He stated the primacy of facts over their interpretation and synthesis. For him, the scientific value of anthropological data was that they were “unconscious,” not subject to “secondary explanations,” which he glossed as rationalizations. The data were to be collected by field work. Boas emphasized the importance of the anthropologist’s knowledge of the language of the researched community. That way the anthropologist can come close to the society that he researches and understand it better. He is to understand the thinking of the foreign culture from the perspective of its members, and not to judge it according to the values and standards of his own society. Boas thus introduced into American anthropology what became known as cultural relativism. According to cultural relativism each culture is a unique, incomparable phenomenon with its own history, value system and criteria. It is thus impossible to state the development stages of human culture which would be applicable worldwide, as the advocates of evolutionism suggested. All populations had a complete and equally developed culture. One should not assume universal laws of how cultures operate.

Boas wanted the anthropologist to record the stories told by the native informants. The native informant should be given freedom to dictate his/her own terms. As it is important to maintain the specific way the stories are told. The data should be an authentic record of the oral narration, of the dialect. In his Preface to Mules and Men, Boas praises Hurston’s ability

to „enter[] into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them” and “penetrate through that affected demeanor by which the Negro exludes the White observer effectively from participating in his true inner life” (xiii).

4. 2. 2. The Concept of Race

In his research Boas aimed to disprove the rasist theories which connected the intellectual abilities of an individual with his or her physiognomy. In terms of physical anthropology race is a group of people with similar somatic features. For Boas, however, these physiognomic features are not relevant. In his 1894 lecture entitled “Human Faculty as Determined by Race,” Boas argued that “the variations inside any single race are such that they overlap the variations in another race so that a number of characteristics may be common to individuals of both races . . . the single feature does not characterize the race and the differences are sufficiently numerous to permit a satisfactory definition of the characters of races” (Stocking 223). In other words, he continued, the so-called “racial characteristics overlapped to such an extent that they were meaningless” (ibid.). In 1899 he decided to disprove the popular notion that blacks’ skulls were too small to hold normal-size brains and introduced his famous “cranial index” argument which consisted in the statement that cranial capacity varies widely among members of a single group, and even in a single person over time. In The Mind of Primitive Man, Boas argues that “the old idea of an absolute stability of human types must evidently be abandoned as well as the faith in hereditary superiority of one type over the other” (218).

Boas thus does not understand race in physical terms but in cultural terms. According to him, race is not the fundamental truth about a person or group of people but rather a mere cultural construct that affects the perception of a specific person or group. For Boas the term “culture” includes all the manifestations of social habits of a particular community, the

reactions of individuals evoked by the habits of the group in which they live, and the products of human activities determined by those habits. According to Boas, a society is controlled by habits. Habit is an action or mindset which has become automatized so it appears natural. Racism is a mode of thought which had become habitual among a great portion of American society. Thinking is controlled by emotions rather than reason. People fear the other. Thus fear, along with the lust for power, are the emotions which give rise to racism. Emotions have the resemblance of habitual patterns. Man is what his culture makes of him. Thus when one grows up in a racist society and is surrounded by it, he is very likely to assume its principles and values. According to Boas, man assumes and learns more than he creates in his life.

In this context it is interesting to point out that “Boas believed that the solution to the racial problem required that we deemphasize race in modern life and *assimilate* ethnic groups totally into the dominant American stock.”(Steward xxv, italics mine)²⁵ This belief is quite controversial to his theory of cultural relativism. On one hand Boas argued for cultural equality, i.e., the existence of parallel cultures, on the other he called for assimilation, i.e., the gradual blurring of the racial and cultural distinction--their extinction for the benefit of a hybrid culture.

4. 3. “Not tragically colored”: The Politics of the 1920s

The famous essay “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” represents Hurston’s first major proud proclamation of herself as “a cheerful, supremely confident and extroverted girl . . . and a passionate, nationalistic adult who exulted in her color, her “Africanism,” and her ability

²⁵ Steward further compares Boas’s concept to that of Alain Locke, who argued for retaining the concept of race for the practical reason that certain social and political needs were better achievable through group identification.

to *feel*' (I Love Myself 151). Although Hurston expresses her racial pride, she also speaks of various moments of feeling raceless.

4. 3. 1. Seeing Oneself in the Mirror of Society

In Eatonville, Hurston argues, she was “everybody’s Zora”—she belonged to her family, to the blacks of the town, to the white tourists whom she liked to greet. She was not yet conscious of the connotations of “race.” She recalls: “During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there” (153). Hurston admits having performed for the white people’s amusement yet without feeling any shame: “[the white people] liked to hear me “speak pieces” and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things”(ibid.)²⁶ The day when she “became colored” came, according to Hurston, when she turned thirteen and was sent to school to Jacksonville. This movement represents the shift in her identity. She left the “everybody’s Zora” and became “a little colored girl.” In Eatonville, calling her by her name was sufficient; in the “big world” she had to get used to being forever labeled by her color. The child assumes the habits of the society in which it grows up.

This idea is also elaborated in the character of Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Janie begins to tell her life memories. She recalls her childhood in a tolerant and peaceful white neighborhood:

Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn’t know Ah wuzn’t white till Ah was round six years old. Wouldn’t have found it out then, but a man come long takin’

²⁶ This recollection interestingly resonates with the image of the darky which some of her contemporaries had ascribed to Hurston when she interacted with white patrons. Langston Hughes said that “In her youth she was always getting scholarships and things from wealthy white people, some of whom simply paid her just to sit around and represent the Negro race for them, she did it in such a racy fashion...To many of her white friends, no doubt, she was a perfect ‘darkie’ ” (Hughes 239). Similarly Huggins points out to the satire of Hurston in Wallace Thurman’s novel Infants of the Spring, where Thurman caricatures Hurston as Sweetie Mae Carr, a Negro opportunist playing the fool for white people in order to get her tuition paid and her stories sold. (Huggins, Harlem Renaissance 193).

pictures [. . .] when we looked at the picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl [. . .] Dat's where Ah waz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, "where is me? Ah don't see me." [. . .] before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like the rest. (*Novels and Stories* 181-182).

Janie feels white because she is surrounded by white people and is treated as an equal. Nobody reminds her of her color and nothing makes her feel inferior. Obviously she sees herself everyday in the mirror but her color is so insignificant that she does not pay any attention to it. In a non-racial society, color loses its significance and in Boas's words, becomes meaningless. Little Janie does not realize her color and the impacts of it until the children in the black school remind her of her difference. Paradoxically, it is the black children who remind her of her color, not the white people. They ostracize Janie and make her feel bad.

4. 3. 1. a. Black Racism

The case of Janie signals Hurston's understanding of racism in the Boasian sense: as a mode of thought, it is capable of seducing members of any race, not just the members of the white race. The black children are manifesting what they have been indoctrinated with at home: that all whites are evil--their enemies--and that they should avoid being around them. Again, it is a certain cultural mindset that the blacks—even though as a means of defense—have created and have internalized. The feeling of enmity is incorporated into their thinking. The children are taught it by their parents--it is given over from generation to generation.

Hurston shows her critique of black racism through another character from *Their Eyes*, Mrs. Turner. Although she is black, Mrs. Turner, a funny-looking, conceited woman, constantly talks all about the evils of black people. She loves whiteness and argues that black people are lazy and foolish and that they should try to "lighten up de race" (289) which in other words means that they should abandon everything "black" and become white.

According to Mrs. Turner, "If it wuzn't for so many black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem" (290). Mrs. Turner hates Janie's husband, the dark-skinned Tea Cake, and wants Janie to marry her light-skinned brother. She thinks the light-skinned blacks are better and closer to being accepted by whites. In her obsession with whiteness, she "like all the other believers had built an altar to the unattainable—Caucasian characteristics for all" (293). Through the character of Mrs. Turner, Hurston attacks the black assimilationist attitudes which degenerate into racism againsts one's own race. Mrs. Turner has completely adopted white attitudes: she does not want to be treated by a black doctor or to go shopping in a black store. Her obsession turns into pathology when she willingly accepts the humiliation by whites and mocking from blacks, feeling as a martyr and thus self-important. Instead of turning her frustration toward the real cause of her state, she turns her vengence toward her own race.²⁷

4. 3. 1. b. "Color Struck"²⁸

In 1925, Hurston wrote Color Struck, a one-act play which dealt with the harmful effects of white, Euro-American beauty standards on the Black psyche. The black heroine Emma torments herself because of her color so much that she destroys her relationship with John, the man who loves her. Hurston shows how the omnipresent white standards have imprinted themselves on the thinking of blacks who, as a result, are unable to recognize their own positive traits. Emma creates an inferiority complex which she herself nourishes. Her emotional insecurity about her dark skin causes her to become jealous and, paradoxically,

²⁷ Nevertheless it is interesting to mention at this point that all main characters in Hurston's novels (except for Seraph on the Suwanee) are mulattos, i. e. light-skinned blacks. Darwin Turner argues that "dispite her impassioned defense of African features as a matter of principle, Miss Hurston's personal biases positioned her nearer to Mrs. Turner than she admitted" (Minor Chord 106-7).

²⁸ Hill quotes the anthropologist John Gwaltney who explains the term "color struck" as "accepting Euro-American aesthetic and racial values" (108).

racially prejudiced to others. Similarly like Mrs. Turner in Their Eyes, Emma becomes a tragic character, who leads a confused, unfulfilled, and destructive life.²⁹

4. 3. 2. The Invisible Discrimination

In "How It Feels," Hurston's claim is that she does not feel "tragically colored": "There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. *I do not mind at all*" (I Love Myself 153, italics mine). One hears an astounding, almost a stubborn pride behind these words. It is as if Hurston decided to express herself, whites and assimilationist blacks notwithstanding. Pavlovskaya argues that Hurston "deliberately adopted a 'racy' persona that was designed to make at least a few of her Harlem contemporaries cringe" (94). Hurston refuses to regret her color. She refuses to accept any predestined lot: "I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it" (I Love Myself 153). On the contrary, she prefers to stick to the phrase "the world is one's oyster" and adds to it: "the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less . . . I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife" (ibid.). In this way, Hurston seems to be affirming the whites' notion of the New World as the land of opportunity. This idea is so attractive to Hurston that she wants to believe it despite the realities of her time.

Hurston thus developed a particular means to cope with racism and discrimination. She simply does not accept the existence of any difference among people; she refuses to see it or she belittles it. She manifests her emotional detachment: "Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny

²⁹ Plant designates the Black female inferiority complex as "Pecola complex"--after Toni Morrison's character Pecola Breedlove from the novel The Bluest Eye. She explains that this complex is common to African American women "who internalize notions of European standards of beauty" (197). It is a "state of mind that results in confused and often destructive patterns of behavior" (ibid.).

themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me" (ibid.).³⁰ Here Hurston is reversing the situation: she suggests that it is the one who is discriminating, not the one who is being discriminated against who suffers the loss. She does not take inferiority for granted. By this stance she suggests that the superiority-inferiority relationship works only if both parties accede to it. Nobody can make her feel inferior unless she herself allows it. Her feeling of integrity and pride is not dependent on racial acceptance by whites. This suggests an extremely strong will in Hurston but also a resistance to see things realistically. Even if Hurston experienced discrimination herself in her life (and such examples were plenty),³¹ she did not want to deal with it. She would prefer to go on with her optimism and to seek luckier moments. As Lyons marks, in Dust Tracks "Hurston skipped over any discussion of racial discrimination . . . her strong sense of self allowed her to rise above the indignities of prejudice . . . she ignored discrimination . . . if her color had been an obstacle in her life, she refused to admit it publicly" (102). Hemenway comments that according to Hurston, "anyone who would dwell on discrimination is guilty of Hurston's unpardonable sin, self-pity" (281). As Hemenway points out, she did not want her self-reliance to be ascribed to a defensive reaction to white oppression; that way it would lose its value (283-284). Hurston's disgust with self-pity resonates in her 1943 article "Negroes Without self-Pity." There she describes her joy from attending a "new and strange kind of Negro meeting in Florida" where the speakers called for an active participation of Negroes in local and national affairs, without waiting to be invited by whites. Hurston was delighted about this positive and active approach which she herself would always prefer, rather than the "tears of pity" over the unfortunate past (603).

³⁰ Nick Aaron Ford, a professor at a Negro college, met Hurston in the 1930s and commented on her racial stance: "I concluded then that it must have taken courage to reach such a stage in one's thinking. It must have been a feat comparable to sainthood." (qtd. in Bloom 9).

³¹ M.E. Lyons comments on Hurston not being allowed to attend the prom at Barnard; on visiting the writer M. K. Rawlings in a segregated hotel; or on refusing to be accommodated in a white hotel by F. Hurst (100-101).

4. 3. 3. A Fragment of the Great Soul

In "How It Feels," Hurston admits the moments when she feels her race—it is always when "thrown against a sharp white background" (*I Love Myself* 154). But even then, it is not tragic for Hurston. When describing her status as a student at Barnard College, where the majority was white, she uses the euphemistic image of being "covered by the waters of the Hudson," under which however, she asserts she remains herself. So not even the white majority can erase her self.

Another time she realizes her race is when she is sitting next to a white man in a Harlem nightclub and listens to the Jazz orchestra which conjures "rambunctious" music. Through such black music she feels her primitive "heathen" self. The music makes her "dance . . . yell within . . . whoop . . . shake [an] assegai above [her] head" and her heart to "throb[] like a war drum" (ibid.). She feels her savage body and the animalistic urge to "slaughter something—to give pain, give death to what I do not know" (ibid.). The whole music experience is captured in the color imagery: she feels her face painted red and yellow, her body blue, and the "blobs of purple and red emotion" (ibid.). While she gives in completely, the white man remains detached. According to Hurston, while the white man only "hears," the Negro "feels" (ibid.). Pavlovskaya suggests the sexual connotations of this passage: "Hurston flaunts her blackness before her white readers by offering confirmation of Freud's speculations about primitive sexuality" (94). Hurston's direct evocation of her sexuality endorses this argument: "I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads" (*I Love Myself* 175).

Yet there are moments, Hurston claims, when the feeling of racelessness prevails in her. Then she feels that she is "merely a fragment of the Great Soul" (ibid.). This statement has a Whitmanesque charge. She seems to be assuming the divineness of all men and women who share a common soul. Hurston's conclusion in "How It Feels" is: "But in the main, I feel like

a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall . . . in company with other bags, white, red and yellow” (ibid.). She says that “the Great Stuffer of Bags” filled them in the first place with the same stuff and they could be “dumped . . . and . . . refilled without altering the content of any greatly” suggesting thus that all humans are made of good and evil; of essentially the same material (ibid.).

Hurston does not repudiate the existence of race but she finds it highly relative. There are moments in life when the sense of race brings a specific experience to man which can endow him with joy, pride and the sense of belonging and solidarity. Hurston avoids those moments when her race would bring her humiliation and violation. But there are also moments (and these seem to prevail) when race is dismissible and when one feels what is specifically of his/her own or what one shares with the rest of mankind. This individual share seems to be essential for Hurston.

4. 4. The 1940s and 1950s: Radical Voice

4. 4. 1. The Diseased Society

During the 1940s Hurston’s views were often controversial. Larry Neal commented in his 1971 introduction to Dust Tracks: “she was no political radical. She was, instead, a belligerent individualist who was decidedly unpredictable and, perhaps, a little inconsistent” (xv).

Hurston’s stance on slavery underwent a development from the 1920s to the 1940s. In “How It Feels,” she argues for closing the period once forever and marks out a new path for the Negro: “Someone is always . . . reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you” (I Love Myself 153). She aims to sound optimistic and to encourage black people in their progress: “The game of keeping what one

has is never so exciting as the game of getting" (ibid.). In other words, white people have already accomplished everything, so while they stagnate, blacks can climb up the social ladder. This optimism is still voiced in Dust Tracks where she again stresses the time which separates her from slavery: "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 . . . there seems to me to be nothing but futility in gazing backward" (254).

Yet in the 1945 article "Crazy for This Democracy," it is as if a different Hurston were arguing. She again uses her favorite "patient" terminology but unlike in "How It Feels," the patient is far from "doing well, thank you." American society finds itself, according to her, in the state of a long dragging disease. She says: "The patient has the small-pox. Segregation and things like that are the bumps and blisters on the skin . . . the symptoms of the sickness" which is "widespread" (I Love Myself 167). Hurston suggests that only "the shot of serum . . . will kill the thing in the blood", not the "opening of one blister" or "a change of climate" (ibid.).

It is not that usual to hear Hurston use such a radical tone: "I am all for the repeal of every Jim Crow law in the nation here and now. Not in another generation or so. The Hurstons have already been waiting eighty years for that. I want it here and now" (ibid.). She also pronounces herself strongly on the reality of discrimination: "No one of darker skin can ever be considered an equal. Seeing the daily humiliations of the darker people confirms the child in its superiority, so that it comes to feel it the arrangement of God. By the same means, the smallest dark child is to be convinced of its inferiority, so that it is to be convinced that competition is out of the question, and against all nature and God" (168). On one hand, Hurston speaks of the racial irrelevance, but, on the other, she realizes the reality of her time is overwhelming and commits herself to an eloquent statement. She realizes that no matter

how much she refuses to be “tragically colored,” discrimination is simply an indisputable fact. The Hurston of the 1940s seems to be looking at the United States with different eyes than the Hurston of the 1920s. It is no longer a world full of opportunity for everyone as she seemed to be suggesting in “How It Feels.”

In the 1944 article “My Most Humiliating Jim Crow experience” she described her discrimination by a white physician in New York who examined her in a laundry closet and tried to “get her off the premises as quickly as possible” (*I Love Myself* 163). But typically for Hurston, instead of feeling humiliated, she emphasizes her pity for the wretchedness of whites: “I went away feeling the pathos of Anglo-Saxon civilization. And I still mean pathos, for I know that anything with such a false foundation cannot last. Whom the gods would destroy, they first made mad” (164). Even in such situation, she manages to rise above the unfriendly conditions and keep her pride: “I got up, set my hat at a reckless angle and walked out” (*ibid.*).

The last paragraph of *Dust Tracks* demonstrates the typical “Hurstonian” means of coping with white superiority. She speaks in a soft tone, manifesting her peacefulness: “I have no race prejudice of any kind . . . In my eyesight, you lose nothing by not looking just like me. I will remember you all in my good thoughts, and I ask you kindly to do the same for me” (231-232). The tone of this passage is so soft that one soon discovers the hidden irony. Hemenway interprets it: “Zora assures whites that they do not have to feel inferior just because they do not look like her. By ironically reversing the perspective, exposing the presumed standard of beauty, she documents the absurdity of the white norm” (286). Her biting irony continues: “Let us all be kissing-friends. Consider that with tolerance and patience, we godly demons may breed a noble world in a few hundred generations or so. Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbecue” (*ibid.*). The phrase “a few hundred generations” reveals Hurston’s

scepticism in the issue of equality. Hemenway points out the provocative connotations of “barbecue” and suggests that Hurston’s message to the white readers is “I’ll see you in Hell” (286).

Hurston was forced by her editor to reduce the original manuscript of The Dust Tracks and to eliminate the “unwanted” opinions. Thus, hidden irony appeared to be the only means to satisfy her sense of frankness. Although she had to adjust her text to the social conditions, she still had to leave her mark. The difference between the unpublished text of the manuscript³² and the published version of the text is considerable. In the unpublished version Hurston was much more straightforward in criticizing the whites’ attitudes of superiority. For example, at one point she says it “would be a good thing for the Anglo-Saxon to get the idea out of his head that everybody owes him something just for being blonde. I am forced to the conclusion that two-thirds of them do hold that view. The idea of human slavery is so deeply ground in that the pinktoes can’t get it out of their system” (qtd. in Hemenway 289).

In an earlier 1939 article “Now Take Noses,” Hurston mocked the theories that would explain Roman conquests through the aquilinity of the Roman nose—i. e., through the superior physical characteristics of the white man. She ironically poses the question whether African civilisation could be explained by the “nose of Africa” sitting “in the shade of its cheek bones” (qtd. in Hemenway 290).

4. 4. 2. Race versus Individuality

While in the 1920s Hurston felt the necessity to contribute to the debate of racial pride, in the 1940s, namely in the Appendix to Dust Tracks, in the chapter called “Seeing the World as It Is,” Hurston emphasizes the irrelevance of race: “Why should I be proud to be a Negro?

³² Unpublished Dust Tracks on a Road Manuscript, Johnson Collection, Yale University Library. Excerpts qtd. in Hemenway.

. . . after all, the word "race" is a loose classification of physical characteristics. It tells nothing about the insides of people . . . [w]hy waste time keeping conscious of your physical aspects? . . . Priding yourself on your physical make up, something over which you have no control, is just another sign that the human cuss is determined not to be grateful" (250). In the conversation with Nick Aaron Ford, she vented: "I have ceased to think in terms of race. I am interested in you now, not as a Negro man but as a man, I am not interested in the race problem, but I am interested in the problems of individuals, white ones and black ones" (qtd. in Bloom 8). Hurston refuses the "black-and-white" concept of society. She believes a man is too complex a being to restrict him to such polarities: "I see Negroes neither better nor worse than any other race" (*Dust Tracks* 250). She does not want to identify with the radical Negroes who tend to contract the Race Problem to the axiom "black is good and white is evil." She even refuses to recognize anything as the "Race Problem": "the phrases 'Race Problem,' 'Race Pride,' 'Race Man or Woman,' 'Race Solidarity,' 'Race Consciousness,' 'Race Leader' and the like . . . mean nothing to me . . . [a]t least nothing that I want to feel" (248). According to Hurston, all is a matter of individuality: "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. All clumps of people turn out to be individuals on close inspection" (249). Such statements might seem perplexing for the readers, considering Hurston's academic facility. In Boas's view, race amounts to a group who share certain habits. On the other hand, it has been said how high Hurston valued the sense of one's own self, which is independent of any outside patterns. However, what might at first sight seem as discrepancy, was in fact quite congruous. Taking into account both Hurston's prose as well as the collections of folklore, it becomes obvious that what Hurston searched for was diversity within a unit; individuality within ethnicity. In her case, one does not exclude the other.

4. 4. 4. The Negro Stereotype

In her article "The 'Pet' Negro System" from 1943, Hurston criticizes the conditions during and after slavery in which only the elected Negroes were given protection and opportunity. The "Pet" was the privileged Negro to whom a white man ("Mr. Big") chose to manifest his generosity and enlightenment in order to please his own sense of importance. In the imaginary case of John Harper, Hurston shows the pathology of this system. John Harper works hard, saves up money, receives education at a Negro college and becomes the principal of a Negro high school. Then he can afford a house and a car and to live a decent middle-class life, tolerated by Mr. Big and his like who think that "if all the Negroes were like John Harper he wouldn't mind what advancement they made. But the rest of them, of course, lie like cross-ties from New York to Key West. They steal things and get drunk" (I Love Myself 157). Hurston attacks the white Negro stereotype which J.W. Johnson already criticized in his essay "Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist." The white man is willing to accept a Negro whom he chooses, and accepts him if he learns to do things his way, i.e., the white way, but he is unwilling to accept the race in general. As Hurston puts it, the tragedy, and the paradox, lie in the fact that "The North has no interest in the particular Negro, but talks of justice for the whole. The South has no interest, and pretends none, in the mass of Negroes but is very much concerned about the individual" (ibid.). The Negro is not allowed to live his way. In that case he is put aside into a ghetto.

This idea is followed in "What White Publishers Won't Print," an article Hurston wrote in 1950. The white man is willing to see the Negro only in the light of the uncomplicated stereotype he has created about him. This way, he feels safe and superior. This stereotype makes of the Negro a mere type, a figure from "The American Museum of Unnatural History" where the "lay figures . . . are made of bent wires without insides at all . . . [reminding one of] mechanical toys" (I Love Myself 172). The stereotype says that Negroes

do not think, and if they do, only about the race problem. The white man is thus willing to recognize the Negro merely either as “exceptional” (the one who transcends the Negro stereotype and proves white qualities--but even then he is believed only to ape the white culture) or the “quaint” (the darky). As Hurston points out, what remains “the best-kept secret in America” is the average Negro who is just like other humans, not better, not worse, capable of experiencing higher emotions and love. Hurston suggests that once this average Negro character is introduced to, and fully established within, white society, the feeling of difference will be removed and along with it the fear of and the aversion to the “savage, animalistic” Negro.

5. Hurston and Other Harlemites

5. 1. The Divided Self of the Black Psyche

The race issue was the prevailing theme for most of the Harlem authors. Yet the way they handled it was rather different. The work of Jessie Fauset, Nela Larsen or Wallace Thurman for example, stands on the opposite pole from that of Hurston.

Fauset introduced in her novels the image of the Negro as exemplary within the context of conventional morality. She tells various stories of the members of the “respectable” Negro middle class. The heroes in her novels are strong characters who manage to overcome the usual obstacle of race, as in her most famous novel, There Is Confusion (1924). Another novel of the middle class, Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral (1929) describes the attempts of the light-skinned black heroine to pass for white. Interestingly, at the end, the heroine actually comes to appreciate her African-American origin.

Nella Larsen, another Harlem author, depicts similar themes in her novels Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929). Larsen pictured the inner disintegration of the modern Negro who is according to her pulled between civility and passion. The title of her novel Quicksand is telling in this respect. Larsen felt the Afro-American identity was founded on quicksand—it was unstable and fragile. Her novels reflect what DuBois called the twoness of the black soul. The heroes fight their ethnic war within their mulatto psyche, always feeling the black-white tension in them. The title Passing indicates this inner urge of many blacks to overcome their black heritage and to assimilate into the white mainstream.

Wallace Thurman projected his own fears onto the heroine of his novel Blacker the Berry. Emma Lou tries to be loyal to middle-class values to gain acceptance by the right people. She is ashamed of her very dark skin and would like to bleach it. In the title, Thurman used a verse from a black folksong which wisely suggests that “The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice” (qtd. in Lewis 238).

The divided self of the black psyche is also a theme for Langston Hughes. In his poem “Cross” he says:

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,

I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black? (The Weary Blues 52).

Hughes's play Mullato³³ from 1935 depicts the inner torments of a mulatto boy who struggles to pass for white.

The poet Jean Toomer differed by his method of writing from the rest of his fellow-artists. Yet he too was concerned with the current state of the black psyche. The final story of his modernist collection of poetry in prose Cane (1923), "Kabnis," depicts the character of a northern mulatto who has gone to teach in the rural South. Ralph Kabnis is the modern urban Negro who hates his black past and black skin. Torn by a self-hate and self-denial, he assumes a fake identity.

When considering the firm sense of identity that Hurston manifested in her essays and novels, such concerns over the split self sound quite foreign to her work which openly celebrates the Afro-American heritage. Hurston's heroine Janie in Their Eyes is the antithesis of the heroines in the novels of passing by Fauset or Larsen. Despite her light skin, which would ensure her easier way to pass, she eschews the bourgeois life and marries a dark-skinned worker.³⁴

5. 2. The Hurston-Hughes Relationship

Of the many contemporaries who began their career in the twenties, Hurston developed the closest relationship with the poet Langston Hughes. Hughes entered the Harlem scene in the same year as Hurston and shared the same patron: Mrs. Charlotte Mason. They also shared the idea of basing Black art on black folklore, with an emphasis on Black vernacular speech. Although their friendship and artistic interaction ended unfortunately in an

³³ The play was an adaptation of the story "Father and Son" from The Ways of White Folks.

³⁴ According to Gates, Hurston Signifies upon the female novel of passing by portraying a mulatto heroine who "eschews the bourgeois life and marries a dark-complexioned migrant worker" (The Signifying Monkey xxvii-xxviii).

argument over the ownership of their only common play, the two had fruitfully influenced and enriched each other's art.

5. 2. 1. The Common Perspective on Black Art

The spontaneity and improvisation which Hurston described as the key characteristic features of Negro spirituals (see 2.1.2.) are to be found as the cornerstone of Hughes' poetry. He himself commented in his autobiography on the process of writing poetry: "there are seldom many changes in my poems, once they're down. Generally, the first two or three lines come to me from something I'm thinking about, or looking at, or doing, and the rest of the poem . . . flows from those first few lines, usually right away" (*The Big Sea* 56). The genuineness of the poetry resides in the closeness to real human experience. Thus the poet should not write from "above," from any elevated position, but rather as one of the ordinary people.

Hurston's way to stick close to the common folk was through their folk art. As a writer, she visited communities and became part of them. Her position was not that of a distant observer but a lively member of the community. Similarly, Hughes aimed to take poetry to the common people and organized tours to the South and West where he read his poems in churches and schools. His very faith in the common man, was, just like Hurston's, optimistic. With black culture they associated such qualities as warmth, love and joy—as opposed to white culture whose values they saw as rather cold and sterile.

Hughes' aim was to make people's language the legitimate stuff of poetry. He is the poet of the "low-down folk": prostitutes, sailors, beggar boys, market women, and all the unprivileged ones whose harsh beauty he tries to reveal:

What is there within this beggar lad
That I can neither hear nor feel nor see,
That I can neither know nor understand
And still it calls to me?

Is not he but a shadow in the sun---
A bit of clay, brown, ugly, given life?
And yet he plays upon his flute a wild free tune
As if Fate had not bled him with her knife! ("Beggar Boy" 85)

Thus many of his poems are written in dialect. Such is the poem "Gal's Cry for a Dying Lover" (1927):

Heard de owl a hooting',
Knowed somebody's 'bout to die.
Heard de owl a hootin',
Knowed somebody's about to die.
Put ma head un'neath de kiver,
Started in to moan an'cry. (Norton 1263)

As Huggins points out, Hughes "backed out of the Negro-artist dilemma by choosing not to deal with art as serious 'high culture' " (227). He saw himself as analogous to the blues singer who inspires himself through folk songs. His poems are melodious, using simple diction, often containing a refrain. They correspond to folk art where stories are passed from generation to generation and each generation adds its own innovation.

Hughes' famous poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"³⁵ from 1921 explores the essentials of the black soul. It introduces the symbol of the river as a relentless, persistent and timeless element. The Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile and the Mississippi are the "ancient, dusky rivers" which the Negro has watched and known as the black slave and black man. Their depths reflect the black man's sensibility, which is somber and mysterious. According to Hughes, the black soul, just like the river, is eternal and persistent.

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of
human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went

³⁵ The poem was first published in *Crisis* in 1921. It was later published in Hughes's collection *The Weary Blues* in 1926.

down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom
turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (The Weary Blues 51)

The diction of the poem is clear and simple, yet it creates a great pathos at the same time. Just like in the Negro spiritual, the speaker identifies himself with eternal forces, thus suggesting the eternity of the Negro's value.

The poem "Dream Variations" from 1924 reveals another important symbol which exemplifies the black soul. The poem introduces the contrasting symbolism of day and night—black and white. The poet identifies himself with the night--the cool, gentle and tender opposite of the sunny day. The soothing character of the night suggests death, which represents an ultimate relief from the hardships of life.

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me---
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of sun,
Dance! whirl! whirl!
Till the quick day is done
Rest at pale evening....
A tall, slim tree....
Night coming tenderly
Black like me. (23)

Again, the longing for the transcendent reminds one of the tone of the spirituals.

5. 2. 1. a. The Color: "They'll see how beautiful I am"³⁶

Although Hurston and Hughes agreed in celebrating the Afro-American heritage and manifesting strong racial pride in their works, the handling of color was not exactly the same for them.

Hurston, informed by the Boasian concept of race, did not tend to celebrate the blackness of her people, or at least not in that intensity and manner as Hughes did. For Hughes, blackness itself was a theme. It signified something which is encoded into one's mind as a state which is highly realized, appropriated, sensed.

And they asked me right at Christmas
If my blackness, would it rub off?
I said, ask your Mama. (Ask Your Mama 43)

Blackness for Hughes signifies a specific sensitivity which is most aptly captured in blues and jazz. Black is beauty of different standards than those belonging to the white society:

Ah,
My black one,
Thou art not beautiful
Yet thou hast
A loveliness
Surpassing beauty. ("To the Black Beloved" 65)

Black is beauty evoking celebration in terms of rich metaphors and similes. One of the key metaphors in Hughes's poetry is that of the night:

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa. ("Proem" 19)

Hughes lauds the beauty of his people, comparing it to that of the natural elements as the night, the stars, the sun. His argument is simple and clear, suggesting the genuineness of black beauty:

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

³⁶ a verse from Hughes's poem "I, Too" (in The Weary Blues).

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. ("My people" 58)

5. 2. 2. "Mule Bone": An Attempt at Vernacular Theater

In 1930, Hurston and Hughes began to discuss their plans for "a real Negro theatre." They were both aware of the fact that all the plays about black people so far had been serious problem dramas. They aimed to create "the first real Negro folk comedy" —not in the tone of the minstrel shows, but a new art form which would undo the racist representations of black people. Hurston commented that their dream was to see black folk material presented on stage "unhampered . . . so that people may see what we are really like" (qtd. in Lyons 57). Finally, they decided to collaborate on a three-act comedy around a folktale that Hurston had collected in Eatonville in the twenties. The tale was about two men, Dave and Jim, who fight over Daisy, an admired Eatonville woman. In their fight, Jim unconsciously hits Dave with a mule bone that he happened to find during the struggle. He is brought to trial, convicted and expelled from town. At the last scene, the two men continue to fight for Daisy but in a less violent way—through a skillful use of words. The setting is Joe Clarke's store in Eatonville, the street in front, and the Macedonia Baptist Church, converted into a courthouse. The time of the play is Saturday afternoon when people gather and talk and do shopping in a "general noise of conversation, laughter and children shouting" (qtd. in Hemenway 149).

The courting ritual is a verbal contest similar to the lying sessions on Joe Clarke's porch that are often a theme in Mules and Men and also in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Verbal play and rhetorical improvisation is shown to be characteristic of the life in Eatonville. The

men talk to test the girl's availability. Through their talking, each suitor tries to display his verbal skills and imagination.

Dave to Daisy:

I love you harder than de thunder can bump a stump—if I don't –God's a gopher.

Jim to Daisy:

You ain't never give me no chance to talk wid you right.

Daisy to both:

Aw, you'all better stop dat. You know you don't mean it.

Dave to Daisy:

Who don't mean it. Lemme you tell you somethin, mama, if you was mine, I wouldn't have you countin no [railroad] ties wid you pretty lil toes. Know whut I'd do . . . I'd buy a whole passenger train and hire some mens to run it for you.

Jim to Daisy:

De wind may blow, de door may slam, dat stuff you shooting ain't worth a dam. I'd buy you a great big ole ship—and then, baby, I'd buy you a ocean to sail yo ship on. (*Drama Critique* 103-7)

Once again, the theme of boasting and vieing as a means of gaining a woman's attention is pictured as one of the characteristics of Negro mentality (also see 2.1.1.). As Hemenway points out, "the courtship rituals were behavioral manifestations of a unique aspect of Afro-American subculture" (156) and using them as a theme of black drama was a good way to undermine the white stereotypes about the ignorant and inarticulate black folk. And indeed the authors wanted to reject the stock comic types of the minstrel tradition and replace them with real human beings and their traditional verbal behavior. In Mule Bone, Hurston and Hughes created characters who spoke in the colorful style that was typical of black folklore. They hoped to show that black speech was an art in itself.

The character of the cooperation of the two artists was of a disputable nature. According to Hughes, Hurston was to provide the material and he would provide the plot (Hemenway 137). However, the cooperation ended up in a famous argument and a final split--artistic as well as personal--of the two authors. Hurston did not like Hughes' offer to make their typist a third collaborator and business manager of the play's production. Without telling

Hughes, she sent the play off for copyright with only her name on it. Mason sided with Hurston, and, as a result, Hughes lost his patron's financial and emotional support.

The incident meant that the play was neither published nor staged during the lives of its authors.³⁷ Gates argues that, if staged on Broadway in the 1930s, the play might have significantly influenced the development of black vernacular theater (Cronin 228). Yet at the time when the play was written, it caused consternation among other black writers. In his review of the 1991 staging of the play, Gates argues that even sixty years after the play was written, there still exists a hesitation toward black vernacular culture. He says that middle-class blacks are uncomfortable with it and do not want to see, hear, or in any way witness black life—especially black language—as “different” from an assimilated ideal (ibid.).

6. Conclusion

The Afro-American of the 1920s had to face the fact that until that time, there had been little of black literature. As Gates suggests in The Signifying Monkey, the tradition of Afro-American letters has been rather a vernacular tradition. Gates mentions the Bosman's myth³⁸ which says that when God created the races of man, he decided to create the African first. The African got the choice if he wanted to be presented with knowledge (of arts, sciences, writing) or rather with gold in the earth. According to this myth, the avaricious African chose gold and as a result was punished by a curse which said that never would he master the fine art of reading and writing (140-141). It seems that the Afro-American of the 1920s was still aware of this curse. Yet he decided to break it. The art of reading and writing was no longer

³⁷ Act 3 was published in *Drama Critique* (Spring 1964). The complete play was first published and performed in 1991; sixty years after Hurston and Hughes wrote it. It was staged at the Lincoln Center Theater in New York. The production was initiated by H. L. Gates, Jr.

³⁸ Willem Bosman was the Dutch official on the coast of West Africa in what is now Ghana. He was the author of A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea (1704). The myth described is Bosman's account of the Ashanti people's myth of creation (Gates 140-141).

to belong exclusively to the white race. He too was anxious to produce written arts as a visible sign of his innate mental quality.

Whether the Harlem Renaissance was a mere “cultural nationalism of the parlor” as the historian Lewis suggests or a spontaneous outburst of artistic activities during the jazz age, it remains clear that the men and women who sparked it wanted to believe “they were promoting a culture of comity and understanding” (xxviii). Although the notion of “transforming a racist nation” might not have been relevant or appealing to all the artists, clearly the race issue played a role in their common endeavor (ibid.). The triumphant marching of the 369th Regiment from War War I to Harlem, the reputation of the regimental band (“Jim Europe’s Band”) which conquered European audiences, the 1919 antiblack riots, -all these events functioned as an imaginary overture to the movement which took place during the twenties and early thirties.

Due to the opening of the Northern part of New York City to black residents in 1905, Harlem gradually became the seat of most black magazines and newspapers, and of cultural and political organizations, such as NAACP, the National Urban League, Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, thousands of blacks were migrating from the rural South to the Northern urban centers. They were attracted by new job opportunities and an escape from Jim Crow—the system of segregation in the South. Harlem became the center of the black intelligentsia, a melting pot, where people of various origin, social status and profession exchanged their ideas on art. This period is referred to as the flourishing of black art because it was the first time that the black artist was recognized by white publishers and the first time that he began to reveal his own cultural and racial identity.

The key text of this era became Alain Locke’s The New Negro, an anthology of texts by black artists. Locke introduced his vision of the American Negro in the twentieth century:

a self-reliant, urban, proud man whose aim is to be recognized as an equal contributor to American society.

Yet the black man's "Americanness" was not always a clear issue. W. E. B. Du Bois expressed the concern of many blacks who struggled to state their true identity when he spoke in his major sociological work The Souls of Black Folk about the "twoness" of the African American, by which he meant the inner chaos caused by the two heritages. The dilemma that the African American faced was that although he was an American citizen, he was constantly being discouraged of it at the same time. This black "twoness" became from now on a theme of many important Afro-American texts, such as those of Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen and others.

To intellectual leaders like Alain Locke or James Weldon Johnson, the distinctive Afro-American voice was identical with the values of the "mature," sophisticated white man. They agreed that cultivating black intelligence and art would be the most adequate sign of racial and civic equality. Thus those men were committing a paradox in their endeavor: on one hand they wanted to emancipate the black man from the stereotypes of white America, but on the other, they were confirming the superiority of white standards by allowing them to direct their art. Others decided to examine the very stereotypes that had formerly marked them as limited and picked up the positive value in them. Thus, the "primitivism," "naivete" and emotional spontaneity of their African ancestors became the essential source for rebuilding their identity. The Harlem Renaissance meant the first real opportunity for the black artist to explore, dramatize and describe his blackness. Such were the attempts of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and others.

The critic of the Harlem Renaissance, Charles T. Davis, sees the Movement as an imaginary watershed from which one can grasp the tradition of Afro-American letters—backwards to the slave narratives and forwards to the Black Arts movement. (Black Is the

Color of the Cosmos, xxiv). Also Nathan Huggins refers to this symbolic value of the Movement and suggests, the main significance of the Harlem Renaissance resides not so much in the works of art that it produced as in its symbolic value, for it “left the mark as a symbol and point of reference for everyone to recall” (Harlem Renaissance 303). As with all symbols, it embodies a deep emotional force which causes Afro-Americans to feel their pride as a people. The Harlem Renaissance was the first intellectual movement of Black Americans—a collective act of people who were manifesting their claim to be taken seriously as a group—by others as well as by themselves. From today’s perspective, the Movement’s contribution to the development of Afro-American culture is not so much its particular results as the will of its members to raise issues and cultivate the atmosphere of open debate, and cultural interchange.

In this regard, the existence of the Harlem renaissance meant an equal asset for white culture. The generation of modernists became increasingly interested in non-Western civilisations. Harlem represented “miniature Africa” for them. The emerging Afro-American art created a parallel to the dominating white culture and aesthetics. It was simply there and by its very existence it called for a reaction. With the lapse of time it seems that what mattered was not necessarily gaining the acceptance by white culture as the fact that it questioned the validity of one cultural dominion. The Afro-American art suddenly provided the white society with a different view of the world, let it be through the prism of religion, music or spoken word.

It was not only black artists who found a fruitful inspiration in African heritage. The representatives of cubism which had sprung in France already during the 1910s, were seeking new and uncommon expressions. Just like the “primitive” African artists, cubist painters emphasized design over representation. Once again, just as in language and music, the black

artist's interest is in what Hurston called the "will to adorn"—the urge to play, rather than to merely reflect.

Huggins sees the failure of the Harlem Renaissance in its limiting ethnic provincialism: "the strange separation of Blacks from American culture" (308). He points out the inability of the Harlemites to fully appreciate the positive implications of American nativity. The Black artist of the twenties found himself helpless about his position within American culture: should he deny it or adopt it? Should he contribute to it? How? The most difficult task seems to have been finding the voice of his own and integrating it within the national context. Yet was it not, we might argue, a natural process? After decades of cultural and racial oppression, after decades of slavery, the Black man could rightfully speak of identity chaos and loss of self-assurance. Although physically a part of American society, his experience as a full American citizen, if any, was limited. Thus relating to Huggins's term "ethnic provincialism," what has to be taken into consideration is the fact that it is quite a different situation to create and present art in a society which has no prejudice to different ethnic groups and does not ascribe natural inequality than it is in the opposite case. Certain amount of perhaps exaggeration seems to be natural in the first phases of establishing oneself within the boundaries of majority. Not mentioning the fact that although we speak of Harlem as the center of cultural events of the day, it was also other—especially Northern—cities in which black cultural life was in bloom (see Gates, Norton Anthology 929).

The Harlem renaissance not only stirred the cultural life in the United States, but it also had an impact on the cultural events abroad. The most significant influences can be traced in the Négritude movement, a literary movement in French Africa which took place during the 1930s. African and Caribbean intellectuals who studied in Paris at that time, among whose probably Louis S. Senghor and Aimé Césaire were the most reknown ones, read Afro-

American authors and felt akin to them in their refusal of white cultural superiority and in searching their own means of expression.

The harmful effects of the white standards on Black psyche were often an issue for the Harlem writers. Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset or Wallace Thurman explored this state of inner disintegration in their work. The heroines in their novels struggle to accept their color. Zora Neale Hurston was one of the few who were not concerned about their "twoness." Because of her peaceful childhood in the exclusively black town of Eatonville, Florida, she escaped in her early years the lynchings and segregation of the outside world which were at that time a common reality for most of the Southern blacks. But even as an adult, Hurston refused seeing and admitting discrimination as it signified to her a self-pity which she considered an unpardonable sin. According to her, the feeling of inferiority was completely in one's power: nobody could make her feel inferior unless she herself allowed it.

Zora Neale Hurston was a proud and spirited woman who started off low and climbed high. She claimed in her autobiography: "I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows with a harp and a sword in my hands" (*Dust Tracks* 227). In a sense, her life as an artist reflects the story of the Afro-American who has also climbed high on his "racial mountain" since the end of his enslavement. Hurston's artistic aim was to reveal the humor and wisdom hidden in folk material and prove it a unique heritage of Afro-Americans. At one point she mentioned that "The Negro is determined to laugh even if he has to laugh at his own expense . . . His world is dissolved in laughter" (qtd. in Kaplan xxiv). This statement of hers resonates Hughes' image of the Negro's "pain swallowed in a smile." Both artists find this "sweet bitterness" an essential part of the Negro expression.

If "finding a voice" is a major theme and trope in the Afro-American literary tradition, as Gates seems to be suggesting, then Zora Neale Hurston succeeded in finding this voice--of

both herself and her people. In Mules and Men as well as in her novels, especially Their Eyes Were Watching God, she presented the Black Vernacular, a language so different from white English, as a peculiar form of expression which constitutes the basis of Afro-American identity. She showed that her people can express themselves and for themselves; that they can grasp the world and interpret it, without turning to the white man for teaching and giving of understanding. Next generations of readers—both white and black—should pay Hurston a merit for it is thanks to her endeavor that the world can admire the rich Afro-American folklore. That she chose a specific way of collecting it, in which she emphasized personal approach rather than a strictly scientific one, is another lucky moment for us. This way the world became possessed of not only valuable folk material but also a piece of art.

Another of Hurston's achievements is presenting the genuineness of Negro spirituals, which she saw as an expression of the Negro sensibility molded by his past condition. Hurston devoted part of Mules and Men to the neo-African voodoo religion which she studied for some time. Voodoo is probably the best example of African syncretism in the Americas. It represented the common thread among the Africans of different ethnic groups who were unwillingly deported to the New World. To understand the black heritage, Hurston argued, it is necessary to renew the awareness of one of its substantive parts. Ishmael Reed argues in his Foreword to Tell My Horse, another of Hurston's records of voodoo, that renewing the consciousness of blacks of their ancient religion might have positive impact on finding their lost self-esteem and adds that the "spiritual nourishment" is the ground for one's identity (xi-xv).

Hurston's aim was to ground the identity of African Americans by revealing to them "something . . . that is our own," not derived from the dominant culture (qtd. in Hemenway 207). As Pavlovska pointed out, unlike her Harlem contemporaries, Hurston's main aim in collecting Afro-American folklore was not "to bridge the gap between the Harlem and the

white majority” but, on the contrary, to “isolate African-American culture from the accretions resulting from years of appropriation by the white cultural mainstream” (79). Some of Hurston’s opinions seem to support such assertion. In 1927, she confided to Boas: “the negro is [having his] . . . Negroness . . . rubbed off by close contact with white culture.” (qtd. in Kaplan xxiii).

On the issue of race, Hurston was influenced by cultural relativism, as it was constituted under Franz Boas. She was one of Boas’s best students at Barnard college in New York. Boas was the co-organizer and mentor of many of her field trips. He ascribed to object descriptivism in anthropology. According to him, the anthropologist was to be a sensitive observant of the researched community. He should understand the community from the perspective of its own system of values, not from these belonging to his society. Each culture is treated with respect as a unique and equally valid phenomenon. There are no inferior and superior cultures. Race is in Boas’s terms a cultural construct; a mode of thought rather than the sum of somatic features.

Informed by the Boasian concept of race, Hurston would emphasise the importance of individuality rather than affiliation to race. In her famous essay “How It Feels to be Colored Me” she refused to belong to the “sobbing school of Negrohood” and, in accordance with the American dream, she proclaimed the importance of exerting one’s own forces in order to reach higher horizons (I Love Myself 152). In her novel Moses, Man of the Mountain, Hurston wrote that freedom “was something internal . . . The man himself must make his own emancipation” (Novels and Stories 355).

Yet despite her proud proclamation about “not being tragically colored,” Hurston could not remain detached from the social and political realities of her time and place. In the course of the forties and fifties, Hurston would apply herself to the issue of racial discrimination. Her articles from this period document her outrage from the unflagging white superiority. The

devastating effects of the white system of values on the Black psyche is for Hurston an issue for itself. In this way, she anticipated the treatment of this issue by future Afro-American female writers such as Toni Morrison or Alice Walker. What connects these authors with Hurston is not only the thematic level but also the employment of Black English as a literary language. Walker's novel The Color Purple represents a solely dialect discourse which reflects the rich and complicated consciousness of the main heroine. Similarly, the prose and poetry of Ishmael Reed playfully tests what Gates calls "The Talking Book": the attempt to represent the oral within the written but also the ability of the text to talk to other texts. Reed creatively develops the hoodoo tradition. His Neo-HooDoo Manifesto aims to restore the tenets of this "Lost American Church", even if in another light that Hurston once attempted.

Following Gates's concept of tradition as a formal bonding, the work of Zora Neale Hurston represents an essential link in the Afro-American literary tradition; it functions as a motivational source to which authors keep looking back to ground their representation of experience.

Although her work fell into obscurity shortly after her death, it was rediscovered and fully appreciated in the seventies, thanks to such literary historians and authors as Alice Walker and Henry L. Gates, Jr. It is important to account for Hurston's voice as an equal counterpart to the radical voices of the forties and sixties. Although it was not as loud at that time, with the lapse of time it signifies an equally valuable and fecund input into the treasury of the Afro-American art.

RÉSUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce nese název „Hledání afroamerické identity: Zora Neale Hurstonová a rasová politika Harlemské renesance“. Cílem práce je prozkoumat Harlemskou renesanci nejen jakožto umělecké hnutí, ale rovněž jakožto socio-politický fenomén v moderní historii Spojených států. Jednou z ústředních postav tohoto hnutí byla spisovatelka a antropoložka Zora Neale Hurstonová. Ve středu mého zájmu je zhodnocení uměleckého přínosu Hurstonové pro konstituování afroamerické identity, zejména jejího úsilí zachytit bohatý černošský folklor. Cílem práce je rovněž prozkoumat Hurstonové pojetí rasy v rámci kulturního relativismu a zhodnotit je ve vztahu k dalším harlemským autorům, zejména Langstonu Hughesovi.

V úvodu jsem se pokusila zasadit Harlemskou renesanci do historického kontextu, tzn. pochopit příčiny a podmínky jejího vzniku, a uchopit a pojmenovat ideologii tohoto hnutí a jeho přínos pro další směřování černošské kultury ve Spojených státech.

V první kapitole práce jsem stanovila cíl práce a její celkové směřování. Celé téma jsem se rozhodla uchopit v literárně - historické perspektivě s přihlédnutím na vybrané perspektivy literární teorie (viz. Gates) a moderní americké antropologie. Vytýčila jsem materiál potřebný k prozkoumání tématu a k podpoře vlastních argumentů.

Základním literárním pramenem pro pochopení ideologie Harlemské renesance je monografie černošského historika Nathana Irvinga Hugginse *Harlemská renesance* (Harlem Renaissance) ze sedmdesátých let 20. století. Huggins je rovněž autorem obsažné antologie z tohoto období s názvem *Hlasy z Harlemské renesance* (Voices from the Harlem Renaissance). Tato antologie, spolu s antologií harlemského intelektuálního leadera Alaina Locke *Nový černoš* (The New Negro), představuje soubor důležitých programních textů této éry, jako např. články a eseje W. E. B. Du Boise, Alaina Locke, Jamese Weldona

Johnsona či Lagstona Hughese. Obě antologie rovněž představují úryvky z básní a prozaických textů harlemských umělců. Ze současných literárně - historických prací jsem použila ke své práci výběrově monografii od C. D. Wintze *Harlemská renesance 1920-1940* (Harlem Renaissance 1920-1940) a *Antologii afro-americké literatury* (The Norton Anthology of African American Literature) editorů H. L. Gatese, Jr. a Nellie Y. McKayové.

První antologii díla Zory Neale Hurston – *Miluju se, když se směju... a pak taky když vypadám přísně a impozantně*³⁹ (I Love Myself When I am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean And Impressive) sestavila v sedmdesátých letech americká černošská autorka Alice Walkerová, která ji spolu s Mary H. Washingtonovou doplnila kritickými esejemi. Walkerová tak zahájila novou vlnu literárně - kritického zájmu o život a dílo Hurstonové.

K pochopení života a díla Zory Neale Hurstonové je nejobsáhlejší příručkou biografie Roberta E. Hemenwaye *Zora Neale Hurstonová: Literární biografie*⁴⁰ (Zora Neale Hurston: Literary Biography), dále stručnější monografie *Kuchyně smutku: Život a folklór Zory Neale Hurstonové*⁴¹ (Sorrow's Kitchen: The Life and Folklore of Zora Neale Hurston) od Mary E. Lyonsové.

Dále jsem konzultovala ty sekundární texty, jejichž autoři se zabývají vztahem Hurstonové k rase a folkloru: jde o díla současných amerických literárních historiků Deborah G. Plantové, Susanny Pavlovské, Lyndy Marion Hillové. K pochopení myšlenkového konceptu kulturního relativismu, tak jak se koncipoval pod vedením Franze Boase, jsem využila monografii současného významného českého antropologa Václava Soukupa *Americká kulturní antropologie a Čítanku Franze Boase* (A Franz Boas Reader) sestavenou současným americkým antropologem Georgem W. Stockingem.

³⁹ vlastní překlad

⁴⁰ vlastní překlad

⁴¹ vlastní překlad

K otázce afroamerické identity, tak jak se koncipovala během dvacátých let 20. století, je třeba přistoupit s vědomím jistých historických skutečností. I když systém otroctví byl ve Spojených státech oficiálně zrušen v roce 1862 a brzy poté (v roce 1866) získali Afroameričané rovnoprávné občanství, segregace a rasová diskriminace přetrvávala dlouho do 20. století.

Hnutí Harlemské renesance znamenalo první kolektivní vystoupení afroamerických intelektuálů a umělců na americké kulturní scéně. Ti se v průběhu dvacátých let 20. století začli seskupovat v severní části New Yorku - v donedávna luxusní bílé čtvrti Harlem. Harlem se tak stal „Černošskou metropolí“ – kulturním centrem černé Ameriky. Důležitou historickou událostí, která do jisté míry podmínila rozkvět černošského umění v tomto období, byla tzv. Velká migrace, která přivedla tři sta tisíc černochoů z agrárního Jihu do severních urbanistických center. Sever Spojených států představoval pro tyto Afroameričany nové pracovní příležitosti a především únik před Jimem Crowem - systémem segregačních zákonů na Jihu.

Ideologické základy Harlemské renesance jsou úzce spjaty s termínem Nový černocho (New Negro), který zavedl Alain Locke, když v roce 1925 vydal stejnojmennou antologii textů nových černošských umělců. Sám ji zaštitil úvodní esejí, ve které představil nové pojetí amerického černocho. Ten se podle něj měl ostře vymezit oproti jeho předešlému obrazu – tzv. Starému černochovi, spjatému s obdobím otroctví a rekonstrukce. Zatímco Starý černocho je podle Lockeá zatížen stereotypy bělošského vnímání, a tudíž nízkým sebevědomím a nepochopením sebe sama, Nový černocho je sebevědomý člověk amerického velkoměsta, který vnímá svou specifickou senzibilitu, který se snaží být rovnoprávným přispěvovatelem americké společnosti. Antologie *Nový černocho* se tak stala programním textem této éry.

Mezi harlemskými intelektuály se rozpoutala diskuse o roli černošského umění. Otázka byla, zda klást větší důraz na fakt, že černošský umělec je především černochem, či umělcem.

Alain Locke a James Weldon Johnson argumentovali pro tzv. vysoké umění s univerzálním obsahem a poselstvím, W. E. B. Du Bois chápal umění jako propagandu. Jeho teorie „talentované desetiny“ však v podstatě rezonovala Lockeův elitismus. Obě strany se shodovaly v tom, že kultivace černošské inteligence a umění má být dokladem rasové a občanské rovnoprávnosti. Tak se vlastně tito intelektuálové dopouštěli ve svých snahách určitého paradoxu: na jedné straně se chtěli vymanit z pout stereotypů bílé Ameriky, na druhé straně však svými snahami vyrovnat se vysokému umění západní civilizace potvrzovali nadřazenost standardů bělošské kultury.

Na opačném pólu stála se svým konceptem afroamerického umění Zora Neale Hurstonová. Její snahy nesměřovaly k tzv. vysokému umění, ale naopak k umění lidovému; k folkloru. Jako profesionální antropoložka se Hurstonová pokusila autenticky zachytit černošské písně, rčení, příběhy a pověsti. Sama pak ve svých dílech ztvárňovala lidové postavy, černošskou komunitu, její rituály a slovesné umění. Ve své esejí „Typické znaky černošského výrazu“ (1934) se Hurstonová pokusila vyvrátit obecně přijímaný názor, že černoši jen imitují bělošskou kulturu. Přiznala, že určitá část černochů volí často tento způsob, jak se zalíbit „bílému bratru“, ale zároveň poukázala na originalitu černošského výrazu. Ta podle ní spočívá v tendenci dramatizovat, což souvisí s černošským smyslem pro vizualizaci. Zatímco jazyk bílé Ameriky je podle ní střízlivý a konkrétní, černošská angličtina je bohatá na metafory a přirovnání. V esejí „Spirituály a neo-spirituály“ (1934) poukázala Hurstonová na originalitu původních černošských náboženských písní, jež jsou podle ní utvářeny v duchu „nevybroušené nepravidelné harmonie“ (Huggins, *Voices* 344). Jejich podstatou je improvizace a vnitřní náboj, spjatý s individualitou jednotlivých zpěváků a okamžikem provedení. Ve spirituálech je podle ní obsaženo hluboké duševní poselství černošského lidu.

Nejobsáhlejší soubor černošského folkloru shromáždila Hurstonová v díle *Muly a lidé*⁴² (Mules and Men) z roku 1935. Materiál, který zde zaznamenala, nasbírala na svých cestách a terénních výzkumech ve státě Florida, zejména pak ve svém rodném městě Eatonville, prvním ryze černošském městě ve Spojených státech. Jak komentoval její mentor Franz Boas, Hurstonové se podařilo „prolomit hranici mezi vědcem a informantem“ - stát se členem zkoumané komunity. První část knihy tvoří příběhy a lidové pověsti vyprávěné obyvateli Eatonvillu. Jsou to „nevědecká“, mnohdy humorná vysvětlení různých přírodních jevů, pověry, pověsti objasňující původ černochoů, či různé mytické síly.

Součástí *Mul a lidí* je i část mapující neo-africké náboženství voodoo, jeho praktiky a rituály. Náboženství je podle Hurstonové jedním ze základních kamenů lidské kultury. K tomu, aby upevnila afroamerickou identitu, rozhodla se Hurstonová popsat a vysvětlit podstatu tohoto náboženství, které je starší než křesťanství, buddhismus i islám a které představuje společné kořeny Afroameričanů.

Ve svém chápání rasy byla Hurstonová ovlivněna kulturním relativismem, tak jak se koncipoval pod vedením amerického antropologa Franze Boase. Hurstonová byla jednou z Boasových nejlepších žaček na Barnardově univerzitě v New Yorku a mnoho z jejích výzkumných cest bylo společně plánováno a odborně vedeno samým Boasem.

Franz Boas vyznával popisný objektivismus: stanovil nadřazenost fakt nad jejich interpretací. Fakta je podle něj třeba získávat terénní prací, během níž se antropolog snaží co nejvíce přiblížit zkoumané skupině, a to nikoliv jako nadřazený vědec, ale jako vnímavý pozorovatel. Podle kulturního relativismu je každá jednotlivá kultura unikátním fenoménem s vlastním systémem hodnot. Antropolog by ji tedy neměl hodnotit měřítky vlastní kultury, ale měl by se snažit její hodnoty, normy a ideje pochopit z perspektivy členů zkoumané

⁴² vlastní překlad

společnosti. V tomto pluralistickém pojetí neexistují tedy vývojově vyšší a nižší kultury, kultury nadřazené a podřazené, tak jak to hlásal evolucionismus, ale všechny kultury jsou považovány za rovnocenné. V duchu kulturního relativismu vysvětloval Boas i pojem rasa. Rasu nechápal jako společné somatické znaky příslušné skupiny, ale jakožto kulturní konstrukt. Rasa tedy není nějaká elementární skutečnost charakterizující člověka, ale spíše příslušnost k určité skupině, která sdílí společné sociální zvyky a normy chování. Boas bojoval proti rasistickým teoriím, které spojovaly intelektuální schopnosti s pevně fixovanými fyzickými typy. Podle něj neexistují přesná vnější specifika pro určitou rasu, která by ji vymezovala oproti jiné. Spousta znaků, které mohou být připisovány výlučně jedné skupině, se mohou objevit i v jiné skupině – tak se podle něj variace překrývají a nelze hovořit o stabilitě lidských typů, a tudíž ani o dědičné nadřazenosti jedněch typů nad druhými.

Dětství v černošském městě Eatonville poskytlo Hurstonové ochranu před lynčováním a diskriminací vnějšího světa, které byly pro většinu jižanských černochů té doby denní realitou. To z velké míry ovlivnilo i její rasovou hrdost a vědomí vlastní hodnoty. Nicméně, jak se shodovalo množství jejích součastníků, způsobilo toto eatonvillské zázemí u Hurstonové i určitou ztrátu objektivitu v rasové otázce.

Ve své proslulé esejí „Jak se cítí moje barevné já“ (1928) Hurstonová prohlásila, že se necítí „tragicky barevná“ (*I Love Myself* 152). Odmítla dědičnou inferioritu a malé sebevědomí, jakož i omezené možnosti, které jí vnější svět předkládal. V duchu „amerického snu“ viděla svou zemi jako místo s nedozírnými možnostmi a zdůraznila podstatnou roli individua oproti rase. Vyzdvihla bohatý duševní prožitek černošství, např. při poslechu jazzového koncertu v nočním klubu, kde oproti střizlivé reakci bílého gentlemana africká duše Hurstonové „tepe jako válečný buben“ (*I Love Myself* 155). Jak komentuje Hemenway ve své bibliografii, Hurstonová vědomě zavírala oči před diskriminací, nechtěla si ji připustit, protože sebelítost byl podle ní neodpustitelný hřích. Její způsob ignorace diskriminace tkvěl

v obrácené perspektivě. Podle ní to byli vždy ti bílí, kteří byli ochuzeni o její společnost, když ji zamítali. Pocit méněcennosti viděla jako ryze individuální záležitost: nikdo ji k němu nemohl přivést, pokud si jej nepřipustila sama. Hurstonová svou esej uzavřela slovy hodnotícími své já jakožto fragment boží duše, neboli částčku lidstva. Přirovnáním sama sebe k barevné taštičce naplněné směsicí nejrůznějších předmětů chtěla Hurstonová poukázat na skutečnost, že všichni lidé jsou utvořeni v podstatě ze stejného materiálu – z dobrých i špatných vlastností. Tento individualismus přetrval i do jejích pozdních let, kdy nicméně připustila a kritizovala v několika svých článcích „nemoc Ameriky“, jak nazývala stav přetrvávajícího systému Jim Crow a stereotypního vnímání černochoů bělochy.

Poslední kapitola práce je věnována vztahu Hurstonové k jejím současníkům, zejména pak básníku Langstonu Hughesovi. Zdůrazněn je shodný pohled obou umělců na afroamerické umění, na černošský dialekt jako jeho specifickou složku. Hurstonová spolupracovala s Hughesem na hře *Mulová kost*, jež měla být prvním skutečně černošským dramatem, založeným na černošském dialektu a lidových charakterech. Kvůli sporu obou umělců nedošlo však nikdy k jejímu uvedení.

Odkaz díla Zory Neale Hurstonové tkví v oslavě černošského lidového umění – pověstí, písní, rčení, pověr a náboženských rituálů, jež zaznamenala pro další generace. Hurstonová se snažila odkrýt bohatost černošského výrazu, která podle ní spočívala ve specifickém zacházení s jazykem. Hurstonové se svým dílem podařilo rozptýlit představu, že americký černoch nemá vlastní kulturní tradici, a tudíž nárok být považován za stejně vyspělého člena americké společnosti. I když její dílo upadlo záhy po její smrti v zapomnění, bylo úspěšně znovunalezeno a doceněno v druhé polovině dvacátého století, a to především zásluhou takových literárních vědců a autorů, jakými byli Alice Walkerová či Henry L. Gates, Jr. Je důležité vnímat hlas Hurstonové jakožto rovnocenný protiklad radikálním černošským hlasům

čtyřicátých až šedesátých let. I když v té době zněl méně hlasitě, znamená s odstupem času stejně hodnotný a přínosný vklad do pokladnice afroamerického umění.

WORKS CITED

I. Primary Literature

Boas, Franz. The Mind of Primitive Man. N.Y.: Macmillan, 1911.

---. A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology 1883-1911. Ed. George Stocking, Jr. N.Y.: Basic Books, 1974.

Du Bois, W. E. B. The Souls of Black Folk. In The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Ed. Nina Baym. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Comp., 1999.

---. "Negro Art," Crisis 22 (June 1921): 55-56.

Hughes, Langston. The Big Sea: An Autobiography. N.Y.: Thunder's Mouth P, 1986.

---. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." In Voices from the Harlem Renaissance. Ed. Nathan Huggins. N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1973. 305-309.

---. The Weary Blues. N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.

---. Ask Your Mama: Twelve Moods for Jazz. N.Y.: Knopf, 1971.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Mules and Men. New York: HarperCollins P, 1990.

---. Tell My Horse. New York: Harper & Row Publ., 1990.

---. Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: HarperCollins P, 1996.

---. Novels and Stories. New York: The Library of America, 1995.

---. "Negroes Without Self-Pity." American Mercury 57 (Nov. 1943): 601-3.

---. Color Struck: A Play. Fire!! 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1926): 7-15.

---. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." In Voices from the Harlem Renaissance. Ed. Nathan Huggins. N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1995. 224-236.

---. "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals." *ibid.*

---. "Crazy for This Democracy." In I Love Myself When I Am Laughing and Then Again When I'm Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston reader. Ed. Alice Walker. Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1979. 165-68.

---. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." *ibid.*

---. "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience." *ibid.*

---. "The 'Pet' Negro System." *ibid.*

---. "What White Publishers Won't Print." *ibid.*

---. I Love Myself When I am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean And Impressive. A Zora Neale Hurston Reader. Ed. Alice Walker. Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1979.

---. Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. Mimeographed copy in HUAL. Act 3 In *Drama Critique* (Spring 1964):103-7.

Johnson, James Weldon. "The Dilemma of the Negro Author." In The Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940. (7 Vls.) Ed. C. D. Wintz. New York: Garland Publ., 1996. 480-481.

- . "Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist." *ibid.* 769-776.
- . Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1960.

Locke, Alain. The New Negro. Voices of the Harlem Renaissance. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

Schuyler, George S. "The Negro-Art Hokum." In Voices from the Harlem Renaissance. Ed. Nathan Huggins. N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1973. 309-312.

II. Secondary Sources

Baym, Nina, ed. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. N. Y.: W. W. Norton & Comp., 1999.

Bloom, Harold, ed. Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Chelsea HP, 1986.

Boas, Franz. Preface. Mules and Men. By Zora Neale Hurston. N.Y.: HarperCollins Publ., 1990. xiii-xiv.

Cronin, Gloria L., ed. Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston. N.Y.: G. K. Hall & Co. 1998.

Davis, Charles T. "Black Is the Color of the Cosmos" In Black Is the Color of the Cosmos. Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981. Ed. H. L. Gates, Jr. N.Y.: Garland Publ. 1982.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. Afterword. Zora Neale Hurston: "A Negro Way of Saying." Mules and Men. By Zora Neale Hurston. N.Y.: HarperCollins P, 1990.

---. Afterword. Their Eyes Were Watching God. By Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990. 185-95.

---. Preface. Talking Books. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nellie Y. McKay. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Comp. 1997.

---. The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism. N.Y.: Oxford UP. 1988

---. "Why the Mule Bone Debate Goes On." In Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston. Ed. Gloria L. Cronin. N.Y.: G. K. Hall & Co. 1998.

Hemenway, Robert E. Zora Neale Hurston. A Literary Bibliography. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1977.

Hill, Linda Marion. Social Rituals and the Verbal Art of Zora Neale. Washington, D. C. : Howard UP, 1996.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin, ed. Voices from the Harlem Renaissance. N. Y.: Oxford UP, 1995.
---. Harlem Renaissance. N. Y.: Oxford UP, 1973.

Kaplan, Carla. Introduction. Every Tongue Got to Confess. By Zora Neale Hurston. N. Y.: Harper-Collins P., 2001. xxi-xxxi.

Lewis, David Levering. When Harlem Was in Vogue. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Lyons, Mary E. Sorrow's Kitchen: The Life and Folklore of Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1990.

Neal, Larry. Introduction. Dust Tracks on a Road. By Zora Neale Hurston.

Pavlovská, Susanna. Modern Primitives. New York: Garland Publ., 2000.

Plant, Deborah G. Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom. The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1995.

Rampersad, Arnold. Foreword. Mules and Men. By Zora Neale Hurston. N. Y.: Harper & Row Publ., 1990. xv-xxiii.

Reed, Ismael. Foreword. Tell My Horse. By Zora Neale Hurston. N. Y.: Harper & Row Publ., 1990. xi-xv.

Soukup, Václav. Americká kulturní antropologie. Praha: UK, 1992.

Steward, Jeffrey, ed. Race Contacts and International Relations. Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1992.

Stocking, George, Jr., ed. A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology 1883-1911. N. Y.: Basic Books, 1974.

Turner, Darwin T. In a Minor Chord: Three Afro-American Writers and Their Search for Identity. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971.

- Walker, Alice. "Dedication." In I Love Myself When I am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean And Impressive. A Zora Neale Hurston Reader. Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1979.
- . In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. N. Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- . "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston." Ms., (March 1975): 74-9, 85-9.

Washington, Mary Helen. "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half In Shadow." Introduction. I Love Myself When I Am Laughing, ed. Alice Walker. N. Y.: Feminist P, 1979.

Wintz, C. D. The Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940. (7 Vls.). New York: Garland Publ., 1996.

Wright, Richard. "Between Laughter and Tears." Review of Their Eyes Were Watching God By Zora Neale Hurston. New Masses, 5 Oct. 1937. 22-23.

III. Works Consulted

Baker, Houston A. Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature. A Vernacular Theory. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.

Fauset, Jessie Redmon. From Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral. In The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nellie Y. McKay. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Comp. 1997.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Charles T. Davis and the Critical Imperative in Afro-American Literature" In Black Is the Color of the Cosmos. Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981. Ed. H. L. Gates, Jr. N.Y.: Garland Publ., 1982.

---. Foreword. Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted. By Frances E. W. Harper. N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1990.

Glassman, Steve, and Kathryn Lee Seidel, eds. Zora in Florida. Orlando: U of Central Florida P, 1991.

Hughes, Langston. "Father and Son" In The Way of White Folks By Langston Hughes. N. Y.: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1947.

Larsen, Nella. From Quicksand. In The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nellie Y. McKay. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Comp. 1997.

Scott, William R. and Shade William G., eds. Essays on Afro-American History, Culture and Society. An Afro-American Reader. Washington, D.C : U. S. Department of State, 2005.

Tindall, George B. America: A Narrative History. New York: Norton, 1996.

Toomer, Jean. Cane. N.Y.: Boni and Liveright, 1923.

Washington, Booker T. Up From Slavery. In The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Comp. 1997.