2013

Narratives Of Southern Contact Zones: Mobility And The Literary Imagination Of Zora Neale Hurston And Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

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NARRATIVES OF SOUTHERN CONTACT ZONES: MOBILITY AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON AND MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS

A Dissertation
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

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December 2013

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the literary works of the two Southern women writers, Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, based on the cultural contexts of the 1930s and the 1940s. It discusses how the two writers' works are in dialogue with each other, and with the particular historical period in which the South had gone through many social, economical, and cultural changes. Hurston and Rawlings, who became friends with each other beyond their racial background in the segregated South, shared physical and social mobility and the interest in the Southern folk cultures. They wrote fiction about the region and its folk cultures while continuously moving back and forth between their Southern homes and Northern big cities. I argue that the two writers' mobility and their personal friendship enabled them to present the South from the Depression through the post-war years not necessarily as a site of racial oppression and segregation but as a type of contact zone where people with different cultural backgrounds meet and interact. Pairing the representative work of Hurston and Rawlings in each chapter, I examine how each text depict different shades of cultural contact zones found and created in the contemporary South despite of segregation and rigid social boundaries.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and daughter Eddie and Rie Hearn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my director Dr. Annette Trefzer, whose encouragement and suggestions enabled me to complete this project. I certainly could not have finished this dissertation without her continuous help and advice over the long years of my doctoral study. I am extremely grateful to my committee members as well: Drs. Kathryn McKee, Jaime Harker, and Kirsten A. Dellinger.

I would like to thank Drs. Takaki Hiraishi and Motoyuki Shibata at the University of Tokyo, who first introduced me to the Southern literature. I am also deeply grateful to all my friends and colleagues in Oxford, MS, and Tokyo, Japan, especially Dr. Yuki Watanabe Namiki with whom I shared my academic and personal thoughts and concerns at different life stages. My special thanks also go to George Atkins and Rachel Cason, for proofreading the dissertation manuscript for me.

I am greatly indebted to all of my family members, especially my parents Reiichiro and Yoko Shoji who taught me the pleasure of reading at the earliest stage of my life, and have always been supportive and encouraging throughout my graduate study.

Lastly, I would express my deepest gratitude to my husband Eddie, who not only read all my

manuscripts and made helpful suggestions but also provided the immense emotional support that I needed. I would also like to thank our daughter Rie Hearn who, when I was stressed out in front of the computer screen, always reminded me that there is more to life than this. Without their constant love and support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The term “sense of place” has long and pervasively been used to account for the most emblematic characteristics of the fiction and thoughts of the US South. Writers and critics of Southern literature have repeatedly addressed the significance of geographical attachment for Southerners in shaping their collective cultural identities. While thinking about self in relation to place became the staple of Southern literary imagination, the thus imagined South’s tendency to overemphasize stasis, rootedness, cultural homogeneity, Southern exceptionalism, and a sense of unchanging tradition also led to exclusionism, political conservatism and uncritical nostalgia, as in the case of the Agrarian manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930). Southern studies scholarship since the 1990s has thoroughly critiqued the Twelve Southerners’ version of sense of place both by challenging their romanticized view of Southern history, and by reexamining the way earlier Southern literary critics framed the Agrarian thoughts at the basis of the region’s modern literary history.[1] As a part of such efforts, they provided extensive studies on the social subjects largely ignored thus far, such as women, non-whites, and working class. Examining these historical presences, they claimed, could change our perception of Southern space.[2] In addition to this revisionist move in Southern studies, discourses of cultural anthropology, comparative literary,

and cultural studies have provided new ways to examine cultural identity in terms of mobility, migration, travel, cultural diaspora, and globalism.[3] Scholars such as James Clifford and Mary Louise Pratt, to name a few, have provided key critical concepts that are applicable in refiguring the Southern sense of place. In his seminal work *Routes* (1997), Clifford notes the common assumption about culture that dwelling is "the local ground of collective life" while travel is its supplement. He then goes on to ask, "What would happen . . . if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meaning rather than as their simple transfer or extension."[4] By resetting our critical focus from peoples' roots to their routes, from where they live to how they get there, Clifford's discussion on travel helps us reconsider our cultural identity less as something unchanging, essential, and strictly tied with particular geographical spaces than as something relational, socially and culturally constructed, and always on the move. Pratt's idea of "contact zones" provides a similar perspective concerning our spatial perception. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today."[5] Pratt emphasizes the role of a geographical space as a site for social and cultural (sometimes peaceful, at other times coercive) interaction and

negotiation, and in so doing unsettles our perception about colonial and postcolonial relations which have conventionally been binarized into those of the oppressor and the oppressed. Pratt's' idea of "contact" invokes "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects" and reveals how these subjects continuously construct and reconstruct their identities in relation to each other.[6] Both Clifford and Pratt practice comparative cultural studies which incorporate varying perspectives of multiple historical subjects encountering each other in a particular geographical space, while carefully avoiding to create a simple binary between cultural center and margin. In so doing they also foreground cultural contacts by those who travel through the boundaries between metropolis and periphery, and their efforts to mediate and interpret different cultures.

Clifford's and Pratt's concepts of space and mobility are very useful in reframing the history of the US South. Since the days of Spanish explorers, the South had historically been a contact zone of multiple cultures and its social spaces were continuously constructed through the movement of peoples who traveled through the region and encountered each other on the road. From De Soto's exploration and Native Americans' forced move westwards to Africans' displacement as slaves and the Great Migration of blacks in the early twentieth century, the region saw many kinds of travel and movement which shaped its society, cultures, and languages. In recent years, scholars have explored the Southern sense of place in this new context of mobility, pointing to the region's often overlooked cultural heterogeneity and hybridity, and its

historical interaction with the broader world (not so much with the North but more with the South's South such as the Caribbean) despite its seeming insularity.[7]

My dissertation on Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is an attempt to add some insights to this critical move. Both writers first moved to Florida in the 1920s to (re)discover Southern rural space—Eatonville in Hurston's case and Cross Creek in Rawlings's—as an inexhaustible source for their literary creation and ethnographic research. Hurston, who was born in Alabama and grew up in Florida, returned to the South as a university researcher under the guidance of Frantz Boas, one of the most significant anthropologists of her day. There she did her first field trip on Southern black folk culture, the result of which was published as *Mules and Men* (1931). Rawlings's first visit to Florida occurred in March 1928, when she and her husband Charles had a vacation trip. Immediately attracted by the state's charm, the couple, both fledging writers, migrated from Rochester, NY to be a part of booming citrus industry and find a quiet place to work. After their divorce in 1933, only Rawlings remained at Cross Creek, writing fictions about Florida "crackers" whose distinctive culture she came to know. Hurston being a Southern-born black and Rawlings a white Yankee migrant, the two women writers definitely had very different cultural roots, and of course their north-to-south move had different cultural meanings and personal motives. And yet, their routes toward, within, and beyond the South intersect in some significant ways that deserve critical attention.

Both Hurston's and Rawlings's lives are marked by constant mobility: While they showed strong emotional attachment to the Southern rural communities, they kept in touch with the metropolitan literary and academic culture, and literally moved back and forth between their Southern homes and northern big cities such as New York, and in Hurston's case, went even further down south to the Caribbean. This mobility and a kind of constant out-of-placeness of the two writers provided them new perspectives to re-vision the South as a hybrid space which consists of peoples of different race, class and cultural backgrounds. Hurston's description of Florida in the opening of *Mules and Men* exemplifies such a space: "Dr. Boas asked me where I wanted to work and I said, 'Florida,' and gave, as my big reason, that 'Florida is a place that draws people—white people from all over the world, and Negroes from every Southern state surely and some from the North and West.' So I knew that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro South in the one state" (9). In this cultural "cross section," Hurston and Rawlings discovered the rich and diverse Southern working-class cultures created by mobility, incessant influx of people within and beyond the South that occurred from the early twentieth century through the Depression years. By focusing on mobility largely ignored in mass-marketed Southern fiction (remember *Gone with the Wind*, for example) and the Agrarian manifesto, both of which idealize the planter aristocracy of the antebellum South, the two writers provide a new Southern sense of place marked less by stasis and unchanging collective identity

than by interaction, plurality, and volatility created by the mobility of rural folk.

Hurston's and Rawlings's southward move, and their shared devotion to Florida folk, follow the trajectory of many early twentieth century American ethnographers and modernist writers who delve into rural and relatively "primitive" folk cultures which were disappearing in the midst of modernization and industrialization. The two writers' choice to move and live among the rural folk, especially in the case of Hurston who worked for Boas, invokes the participant observation method of the day whose special emphasis on dwelling in a "field" has been problematized by Clifford and other scholars of cultural anthropology.[8] "Localizations of the anthropologist's objects of study," Clifford states, "tend to marginalize or erase several blurred boundary areas, historical realities that slip out of the ethnographic frame. . . . When the field is a dwelling, a home away from home where one speaks the language and has a kind of vernacular competence, the cosmopolitan intermediaries—and complex, often political, negotiations involved—tend to disappear. We are left with participant observation, a kind of hermeneutic freedom to circle inside and outside social situations."[9] As Clifford warns, overemphasis on dwelling could reinforce the boundaries between cultural margins and the center, and the cultural dominance of observers over the observed, while erasing the process of travel, contact and subversion. However, what is remarkable about Hurston's and Rawlings's writings is that their main narrative concern lies less in observed cultures than in the complex process through which

they immerse themselves in those cultures; by dramatizing the routes they take to get to their Southern folk cultures, they shed lights on the blurred boundaries Clifford notes, the boundaries where encounter with the Other, opposition, translation, and negotiation take place.

Both Hurston and Rawlings worked as cultural mediators facilitating communication and developing understanding, sometimes also causing friction, between different cultural groups. Both introduce particular folk cultures of their interest to national audience. Hurston's ethnographic works *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938), along with her fiction incorporating contemporary anthropological ideas, widely appealed to academic and non-academic audiences. Rawlings's work on "crackers," especially *The Yearling* (1938) which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and adapted into a film, shows that the Southern folk culture presented by her gained nation-wide attention. Both kept the curious dual state of insider and outsider of the community, informant / translator and observer of the anthropological field. By employing thus complex perspectives in describing Southern folk cultures, the two writers put into question the presupposed objectivity and hermeneutic transparency of ethnographic writing. In her study on what she calls "ethnographic fiction" of female modernists, Elizabeth Jane Harrison notes that Hurston's unique stance as a female researcher in the male-dominated field of social science and a literary artist enabled her to both demonstrate and challenge Boasian participant observation method and create a new, quite hybrid genre of "ethnographic fiction."[10]

This aspect of Hurston is best exemplified in *Mules and Men*, her first ethnographic work. The book employs two different narrative perspectives—of Hurston the reporter and Zora the participant. While Hurston's voice functions as that of traditional ethnographic observer, Zora acts more like a fictional character. Incorporating elements of fiction in its narration and frequently shifting the perspectives between these two, the book reveals possible arbitrariness of ethnographic observation. It even reiterates the narrative mode of "lying" which the author finds among the Southern black folk, her object of observation, and in doing so blurs the boundaries between observer and the observed while hinting at the unreliability of her own anthropological perspective.[11] And the climatic moment comes at the end of Part I, when Zora, with her life threatened by the knife-yielding woman at a jook where she collected songs and stories, walks out from her field. By literally moving away from the object of study, Hurston cunningly shows the limit of anthropological researcher's omnipresence and an area outside the reach of participant observation.[12]

Though not a trained ethnographer, Rawlings's work, especially the half-autobiographical / half-fictional narrative *Cross Creek* (1942), presents a similar doubt on the objectivity of ethnographic observer. The book embodies Rawlings's peculiar spatial imagination which denies man's privileged position within nature and emphasizes the mode of self in relation to its environment. Rawlings begins her narrative by using the first person plural "we," immediately

setting herself within the community of Florida "crackers": "Cross Creek is a bend in a country road, by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove, nine miles east of a turpentine still and on the other sides we do not count distance at all, for the two lakes and the broad marshes create an infinite space between us and the horizon"(9). This opening passage already betrays a combination of objective description and emotional commitment which Rawlings reiterates throughout the book. While the narrator is quite descriptive about the geography of Cross Creek, she also hints at a broad space which she or any of the community members cannot measure. By already setting up the blind spot of the observer's perspective, Rawlings's narrator gives up her own narrative authority, while carefully avoiding the dichotomy between I and them, and the observer and the observed. Moreover, while admittedly considering Cross Creek as her "home" and herself as part of the community, Rawlings often dramatizes the tension between the narrator and other "crackers" that is caused mainly because of her ignorance of the Creek customs. In one chapter she even confesses: "I have used a factual background for most of my tales, and of actual people a blend of the true and the imagined. I myself cannot quite tell where the one ends and the other begins" (72). Not only admitting that part of her story is not necessarily "true" but also acknowledging her own inability to separate facts and fiction, Rawlings's narrator, like Hurston's, makes clear her position as a fiction writer while suggesting

the possible unreliability of her narrative voice. Her constant efforts to deny the narrator a privileged perspective is epitomized in the last chapter, in which she questions, "Who owns Cross Creek?" The question is of course rhetorical. Here the narrator completely denies her or any other Creek resident's ownership of the land: "It seems to me that the earth may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used, but not owned. It gives itself in response to love and tending, offers its seasonal flowering and fruiting. But we are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. Cross Creek belongs to the wind the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time" (380). Notably, the narrator here imagines Cross Creek without herself. The only subject in this closing paragraph is the Creek itself or more precisely, nature, which would survive Rawlings and "cracker" community members while witnessing the whole coming and going of every creature. In describing a space which goes beyond her own narrative viewpoint and even her life, Rawlings comes to a conclusion that is similar to that of Hurston in *Mules and Men*; there is no transcendent perspective from which she can represent her Southern community. Her eye / I is always subsumed in something bigger, her identity relational rather than detached from the whole environment.

By inscribing their own non-presence, movement away from their dwelling / anthropological field in their ethnographic texts, Hurston and Rawlings suggest a new and less disproportionate relation between ethnographer and folk. Their mobile narrative selves move in and out of

hermeneutic boundaries and create an in-between space where communication and negotiation between observer and the observed could take place.

And it is not just their writings in which one can find these boundary areas: Hurston's and Rawlings's real life paths also intersected with each other and created a site of negotiation. The beginning of this was a segregated hotel in St. Augustine, FL, where the two women met each other on July 6, 1942. Rawlings invited Hurston to tea at her penthouse apartment in the Castle Warden Hotel owned by her husband Norton Baskin. Even though this little tea party was her idea, Rawlings was secretly afraid that Hurston would show up at the main entrance of the segregated hotel and shock their white guests. The black woman writer, as if she already anticipated the mental turmoil her casual appearance as a guest might cause to the white proprietress, came in from the kitchen and went up the back stairs to the penthouse without being noticed.[13] What does this oft-cited incident tell us? It of course reveals racial anxiety on the part of Rawlings who was supposed to be liberal enough to invite a black writer to her residence. Right after the incident she confesses in her letter to her friend Edith Pope that she thought "she cannot hurt her husband in a business way," though she knew "she should accept this woman as a human being and a friend."[14] But there is something more to this event. The segregated hotel, once Hurston sneaked in from its back stairs, reemerges as a space of negotiation. There, through the kitchen door, Hurston "passes," dressed in a maid's uniform; yet as she moves

upstairs to the penthouse, she changes her identity into that of professional writer, going to have tea with her fellow writer. Since Hurston never left a recollection about this incident, we cannot exactly know how she felt. Nevertheless, segregation's back stairs do not necessarily shut Hurston down; they open up a route through which she negotiates her social and cultural identity in spite of existing racism and official segregation. The Castle Warden Hotel, with its penthouse and the back door, embodies the complex cultural contact zone of the 1940s segregated South where the lives of the two women writers, one black and the other white, began to interact. It shows how a place which seems to be most rigidly circumscribed could become a site of contact, through mobility, cunningness, and the will to communicate of each subject who occupies the space. What I would like to reveal in this dissertation are such complex cultural spaces, and how such spaces can be reconstructed and re-visioned through our critical practice. I would like to show how Hurston and Rawlings's literary works depict sites of contact between people belonging to different cultural groups (including them), and how their efforts to do so are closely related to their ways of identity construction.

And finally, there is another reason why Hurston's and Rawlings's work should be read together. While the two writers' friendship is widely known and their works share a lot of historical and cultural context of the early twentieth century South, there is still what Annette Trefzer in her pioneering study on the two writers has called the "critical segregation": Critics'

tendency to separate their work into “race” and “regional” literature, Trefzer states, “continues to obscure the significance and the power of these women writers and perpetuate their neglect, an ironic fact considering that they tried hard to dissolve the tightly drawn boundaries around race and region.”[15] In addition to Trefzer’s, there are a few more critical attempts to discuss the two writers together, but as Amy Schmidt claims in her review of one of these studies, integrated and in-depth examination with “overlapping concerns” and less “dividing it up” is still missing.[16] Why has it been so hard to integrate the critical scholarship on the two writers? Are the racial boundaries that used to separate their lives in the segregated South still intact, creating critical boundaries? This dissertation focusing on mobility and contact zones in Hurston’s and Rawlings’s literary imagination is one attempt to break a critical deadlock and grapple with these questions. Each chapter will pair one work from each writer published around the same time period in order to examine how these texts are, regardless of direct influence, in dialogue with each other. This is not to eliminate the difference between the two writers or to argue the universality of their literary subjects and concerns. Rather, I would like to demonstrate a comparative and inclusive study on Hurston and Rawlings by relocating their work in a set of particular historical moments. The ultimate goal of this is to show how both Hurston and Rawlings, in their literary works and their personal lives, try to construct new Southern identities that are mobile, relational, and not necessarily limited by race, class and gender; and in their

attempts to do so how they also destabilize the Southern sense of place long accepted both in literary studies and popular culture as something seamless and unchanging.

Chapter One comparatively analyzes Hurston's and Rawlings' first published novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *South Moon Under* (1933). Through reading the two novels I argue that Hurston's and Rawlings's spatial imagination captures Southern rural community not as a prehistoric, Edenic place as often depicted in male pastoral tradition, but as an unstable and volatile space constantly changing through modernization, industrialization, and the resulting movement of people in the early twentieth century. Referring to recent ecocritical studies and discussions on the Southern pastoral imagination, I examine how Hurston and Rawlings use the basic settings of the pastoral and yet make significant revisions to the genre from female writers' perspective. I argue that the two writers, in representing the contemporary Southern space, use the concept of a pastoral middle ground created through modernity and mobility. In so doing, they reconstruct the image of the region as a kind of ecological contact zone which enables conflation and dialogue between various opposing elements, such as human and nature, and men and women.

Chapter Two deals with Hurston's and Rawlings's masterworks *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *The Yearling* (1938). I argue that *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* respond to the Depression-era's national concern in Southern rural cultures by representing the black and poor

white folk's communal survival. While critics rarely consider Hurston and Rawlings to be political, the two writers' concerns in both national and Southern folk cultures propelled them to tackle the contemporary issue of economic crisis. In a way similar to other popular Depression-era literary work, *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* describe how the Southern rural blacks and poor whites use the folk ritual to retain their sense of community under harsh economic condition, while effectively using natural disaster as a metaphor for economic disaster. I also analyze how the two novels develop their bildungsroman plot to fit into the mindset of the Depression-era audience and parallel the process through which the protagonists come to maturity and their growing awareness about the contemporary issues—poverty, racism, and social inequality. Ultimately, the two novels do not turn out to be a simple celebration of working-class folk communities. I argue that the novels' complex representation of Southern folk cultures could partly be attributable to Hurston's and Rawlings's dual commitment to the Southern folk and American literary culture, the nation and the region, individualism and communalism.

Chapter Three, which examines Hurston's and Rawlings's autobiographical works *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942), *Cross Creek* (1942), and *Cross Creek Cookery* (1943), is the key chapter of this dissertation: it contains the main argument on the two authors' mobility and the literary imagination. I argue that Hurston and Rawlings respectively used autobiographical

genre to construct their cultural identities as contact zones at the heart of which are mobility, fluidity, and hybridity. Utilizing the analogy between self and place which is conventional in Southern autobiography, they construct their autobiographical selves moving beyond boundaries of race, gender, and class, and in so doing they refigure their Southern spaces as contact zones of people from different cultures. While the basic characteristics of the two writers' southward movement—in Rawlings's case, relocation and in Hurston's, "wandering"—is different, both autobiographies set mobility as the basis for their cultural identity, and present modes of self that are very similar to each other. I also discuss Hurston's and Rawlings's peculiar combination of communalism and individualism, which makes their autobiographies Southern and American at one time. Hurston and Rawlings present communal sense of self as many Southern autobiographers do, while also reaffirming their individualism, and in so doing, presenting Southern selves that are fluid and hybrid. I also read Rawlings's cookbook *Cross Creek Cookery* (1943) as a part of her autobiographical writings, and discuss how a variety of Southern and non-Southern dishes Rawlings chose to include embodies her hybrid self constructed through the continuous contact with different cultures. As a whole, the three autobiographical writings by Hurston and Rawlings provides us a new way to read Southern autobiographies, in which the sense of self closely connected with the sense of place is not necessarily monolithic but more mobile and heterogeneous.

The last chapter further extends the idea of self as contact zone and analyzes Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) and Rawlings's unpublished story "Lord Bill of the Suwannee River." *Seraph*, Hurston's last published novel which was dedicated to her friend Rawlings, has been one of her most controversial works partly because it deals with poor white "cracker" culture. I argue that Hurston's use of Arvay Henson as the novel's heroine is not a simple appropriation of white culture in order to appeal to white audiences, as is usually considered. In *Seraph*, Hurston provides valid critique on the race relations in the mid-century segregated South and further reimagines the region as a contact zone with less rigid racial boundaries. Such a space is created by Arvay's husband Jim Meserve whose egalitarian attitude toward black workers is in fact very similar to the one of Rawlings's Lord Bill. However, it is Arvay who paradoxically most embodies a Southern self made through contacts of different cultures. I say paradoxically because the heroine scorns non-whites with a passion and tries to exclude them as her "other"; and yet, her cultural identity is unwittingly constructed through the contact with them. Arvay's struggle to shake off her abject poor white self and negotiate her social and cultural identity is based on Hurston's critique on race and cultural identity in the South. It is often said that Rawlings developed a liberal race consciousness after she met Hurston, but I argue that Hurston too came to contemplate on subtle workings of interracial relations and negotiation through her literary friendship with Rawlings. I examine how Hurston and

Rawlings, in their work and in their personal lives, try to present a heterogeneous picture of the South, through their poor white and black characters who, despite their apparent difference, have historically been in close contact with each other. By presenting the region as a contact zone, I conclude, Hurston and Rawlings help us rethink race relations in the South and its role in constructing Southern cultural identity.

Notes

[1] Following are the examples for the pioneering critical studies in this vein: Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Duke University Press Books, 2003).

[2] See Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Richard Godden and Martin Crawford, eds., *Reading Southern Poverty Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

[3] See, for example, these critical accomplishments on mobility and cultural identity: James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Stephen Greenblatt et al, *Cultural Mobility: a Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[4] Clifford, 3.

[5] Pratt, 4.

[6] Pratt, 7.

[7] See Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, "Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies," *American Literature* 78, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 677–690; Susan V. Donaldson, "Southern Roots and Routes: Mobility, Migration, and the Literary Imagination," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 5-15; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, c2005., 2005); Suzanne Whitmore Jones and Sharon Monteith, eds, *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, eds, *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[8] See Clifford, Ch.1, for the full critique of dwelling in ethnographic research procedure.

[9] Clifford, 23.

[10] Elizabeth Jane Harrison, "Zora Neale Hurston's and Mary Hunter Austin's Ethnographic Fiction: New Modernist Narratives," in Harrison and Shirley Peterson, *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-readings* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 45.

[11] Concerning the narrative perspective in the book, see D. A. Boxwell, "'Sis Cat' as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*," *African American Review* 26, no. 4 (1992): 605-617; Cheryl A. Wall, "Mules and Men and Women: Zora Neale Hurston's Strategies of Narration and Visions of Female Empowerment," *Black American Literature Forum* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 1989): 661–680.

[12] Another opinion on this scene is provided by Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002), in which Gussow discusses that the scene embodies Hurston's interaction with Florida blues culture "marked by her class anxieties as both a university-trained intellectual and a native of a slightly more elevated location on the class spectrum of Florida black folk" (235).

[13] Gordon E. Bigelow and Laura V. Monti, eds., *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1988), 223-224; Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: a Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 296; Anna Lillios, *Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 19; C Anita Tarr,

"The Evolution of a 'Southern Liberal': Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Race.," *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 15 (2007): 155.

[14] Bigelow and Monti, 224.

[15] Annette Trefzer, "Floating Homes and Signifiers in Hurston's and Rawlings's Autobiographies," *Southern Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1998), 75.

[16] See Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*; Tarr, "The Evolution of a 'Southern Liberal'"; Amy Schmidt, "The Same Creek Twice: Maintaining the Segregation of Southern Literature," *H-Net Reviews in the Humanities & Social Sciences* (July 2013). https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39036

CHAPTER ONE

Re-Visioning Nature: Jonah's Gourd Vine, South Moon Under, and the Modern South as Ecological Contact Zone

This chapter explores how Hurston's and Rawlings's first published novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *South Moon Under* (1933), reflect the two authors' thoughts on nature, modernity, and gender that are developed through their experience of relocation to the South.[1] In these novels, Hurston and Rawlings both demonstrate and critique the narrative pattern of pastoral tradition which considered the South, especially Florida which is the two writers' literary home ground, as a kind of "Eden." By effectively using the association between nature and femininity, the two writers re-vision the stereotypical image of the South as a virgin land trampled down by industrialization; they present a more nuanced view of the region as a site of contact, conflation and reconciliation between opposing elements, i.e., men and women, men and nature, the urban and the rural, and the modern and the primitive.

The biggest human mobility that characterizes the early twentieth century US is, of course, the Great Migration, which is depicted by many African American writers, especially the social realists in the 1930s and the 1940s influenced by the scholarly studies of Chicago School of Sociology.[2] Hurston's and Rawlings's southward move (Hurston as an anthropological

researcher, Rawlings as an owner of citrus grove property) or the intraregional movement of rural Southerners depicted in their work usually do not get enough critical attention because of the prominence of the Great Migration literature.[3] Yet as recent studies on *Jonah's Gourd Vine* by Martyn Bone and Helen Yitah have shown, the two writers capture a new migration pattern within and toward the South and vividly illustrate significant social and cultural changes the region had undergone as a result of this movement.[4] When Hurston and Rawlings moved to central Florida in the late 1920s, the state saw a massive influx of people from varying social strata against the backdrop of the unprecedented land boom, the expansion of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, the statewide growth of tourism, and the development of agriculture, especially farming around Lake Okeechobee area and citrus industry in central Florida.[5] The two writers' relocation had this mobility as its background, and they incorporated their own experience of relocation in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*.

The period in which Hurston and Rawlings wrote their first novels marks a significant turning point in their lives. Both writers had just started their professional careers and desperately needed isolation and a less stressful environment for writing. Hurston had been struggling to finish her anthropological project (*Mules and Men*) which began in 1927 with her first Florida field work, while facing financial stress and health problems. She ended her formal contract with her patron Charlotte Osgood Mason in 1931, and moved back to Eatonville the next year,

which was immediately beneficial. In a letter to Mason on May 8, 1932, Hurston says, "I am happy here, happier than I have been for years. The air is sweet, yes literally sweet. Summer is in full swing. . . . Godmother I am so grateful to you for letting me be here in Eatonville. I am renewed like the eagle. The clang and clamor of New York drops away like a last year's dream."[6] A change of environment had a similar impact on Rawlings. The life in central Florida quickly provided Rawlings materials for her fiction and a solitude she needed for writing. Soon she found "Cracker Chidlings" (1931), her first short story on Florida "cracker" culture, published in *Scribner's* magazine.

While their professional career began thriving, both writers experienced divorce around this period. Hurston married her first husband Herbert Sheen on May 1927 in St. Augustine, FL, but their marriage practically ended four months later when Sheen "discovered that his bride resented interruptions in her work and had no intention of following her husband in his occupation."7 Rawlings too terminated her first marriage since the relationship between her and Charles became strained around the success of South Moon Under.8. Her letter to her editor Maxwell Perkins postmarked the day after the divorce shows the extent to which Rawlings was stressed through the marital relationship:

> I was granted a divorce from my husband. The end, simply—I hope—of fourteen years of Hell—of a fourteen-year struggle to adjust myself to, and accept, a most interesting but difficult—impossible—personality. It was a question, finally, of breaking free from the feeling of a vicious hand always at my throat, or of going down in complete physical and

> mental collapse. . . . I am not riotously happy, not being interested in freedom for its own sake—I could have been a *slave* to a man who could be at least a benevolent despot—but I feel a terrific relief—I can wake up in the morning conscious of the sunshine, and thinking, "How wonderful! Nobody is going to give me Hell today!"[9]

Both Hurston and Rawlings found it hard to work out the balance between their professional and personal lives and eventually chose the former, which must have been a difficult decision but still was a "relief" for the women writers having just begun their careers in the early 1930s. It could therefore be said that their move to Florida and the resulting divorce, though was devastating at the time, in a long run offered them a sense of liberation and independence as professional female writers.

Hurston's and Rawlings's move to Florida was also a kind of pastoral retreat, for it offered them closeness to nature and a chance to reset their lives in a stress-free environment. In this sense the two writers follow the pattern of many writers traveling to or settling in Florida before them and creating an image of the state as Eden. In her study on the idea of Florida in American literature, Anne E. Rowe claims that the state, since the days of William Bertram's *Travels* (1791), "has been for the American imagination not merely a geographical region but an image, a garden, Eden-like, where the striving and seeking, the rigorous pioneering and getting ahead that characterize the Land of Opportunity has been tempered and diverted by the languors of a tropical climate washed by the Gulf Stream and the balm of an always warm sun."[10] Moving to Florida, Hurston and Rawlings might have felt the same tranquility described by

Rowe, and its flora and fauna provided them with great literary inspiration. Rawlings's biographer Gordon Bigelow presents a similar view that a less stressful, more sensual and optimistic atmosphere of the state created by its rich natural environment nurtured her literary imagination. Bigelow positions Rawlings in a line of romantics such as David Thoreau: "Closeness to nature was as essential to her as to the great romantics and like them she had a feeling for the life in plants or rocks, in hills or in a river, which resembled the animism of primitive folk. With Thoreau she could easily have believed that a pine tree when cut down might go to a higher heaven than herself."[11] Hurston presents a similar pastoral sensitivity in depicting Florida nature, often using native plants and animals as the central symbols of her work.

It should be noted, however, that Hurston and Rawlings were aware of a problematic aspect of pastoral imagination, its tendency to lapse into othering nature. The two writers perhaps drew analogy from the metropolis / field relation in ethnography—just as ethnographic researchers, albeit unwittingly, marginalize natives as their cultural other, writers of pastoral narratives often otherize nature as something beyond them and thus unfathomable. But it could have been also that because they were female writers, Hurston and Rawlings became conscious of how in pastoral nature is made other often in its association with women. Scholars of ecofeminist perspective examine how the Southern women writers review the male pastoral

tradition prevalent in Southern fiction since antebellum romance.[12] Elizabeth Jane Harrison discusses that women writers across racial lines question the male pastoral mode which represents the South itself as a Garden of Eden archetype and identifies the Southern women with the land. According to Harrison, Southern landscape in these women writers' fiction functions not necessarily as a metaphor for submission and passivity of women/nature but rather as "an enabling force" for their female characters.[13] It ultimately envisions a cooperative community in which the relationship between men and women can be renewed into a more egalitarian one. Christopher Rieger similarly sees the bond between women and nature potentially empowering. He points out that Hurston and Rawlings "represent wilderness as more than merely a passive field for the exercise of masculine power, and they identify their female characters with a vital, active nature rather than with virginal or despoiled Southern gardens."[14] Hurston and Rawlings are well aware of the various dichotomies such as nature/culture, women/men, rural/urban, and wilderness/modernization that are abundant in Southern narratives. Rather than simply accepting these conventional paradigms, however, the two writers seek to revise or disrupt them through *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*, which are their version of pastoral. While the South is generally known for rigid gender norms, Hurston and Rawlings paradoxically find a liberating aspect in Southern pastoral settings and investigate the association between women and nature which is far from debilitating and rather

empowering for women.

Moreover, through their version of pastoral narratives, Hurston and Rawlings critically reexamine a contact zone between human and nature, which is similar to what Leo Marx has called a pastoral "middle ground" in American literary imagination.[15] Marx discusses that the American pastoral narratives do not simply deny modernization and industrialization as they are often considered to; they have in fact facilitated the acceptance of industrialization by incorporating the new technology into the natural environment based on the ideal of "middle landscape." Writing in the period when the South had undergone various degree of modernization, Hurston and Rawlings were aware of this problem. The question of modernization is arguably one of the most significant topics for Southern intellectuals and artists of the 1920s and the 1930s, and like many other Southern writers Hurston and Rawlings utilize the pastoral mode to represent the Southern landscapes affected by modernization. Unlike the Agrarians, however, Hurston and Rawlings did not idealize antebellum Southern community as an organic unit that would inevitably lead to nostalgia, exclusionism and political conservatism. Rather, the two writers sought for a pastoral middle ground where nature and culture could come into contact with each other. And more importantly, as female writers they explore this question of pastoral middle ground in association with gender. They link the process of modernization to that of male domination over the female, and inquire if human and nature (and

men and women) can create a harmonious, non-hierarchical relationship with each other without lapsing into binary thinking. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*, with their marked emphasis on gender and nature, epitomize the two writers' exploration of these issues.

Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* traces how mobility and modernity brought numerous changes to the lives of Southern black folk. The novel's protagonist John Pearson epitomizes the upward social mobility of post-slavery Southern blacks successfully adapting themselves to the modernized world.[16] The opening of the novel is clearly pastoral in setting, depicting John's family of sharecroppers living in rural Alabama. John lives with his mother Amy, his stepfather Ned Crittenden, and his younger brothers. Due to friction with Ned, John soon makes his departure from "over the creek" for more developed Notasulga where he would get a job and education, and meet his future wife Lucy Potts. His first encounter with Lucy is a classic example for rural/urban, nature/culture comparison often seen in the pastoral narrative mode: "He felt ashamed of his bare feet for the first time in his life. How was he to know that there were colored folks that went around with their feet cramped up like white folks. He looked down at the feet of the black-eyed girl. Tiny little black shoes" (14). Lucy's black shoes, in contrast with his own bare feet, brings John into the recognition that there is a world beyond "over the creek" where race, class, and gender are intricately interconnected in complex social stratification. The new world represented by Lucy's shoes is much more complex than in his

rural home where the sharecropping system basically maintains the uneven race relations since slavery and determines the level of success of individuals. From there, he travels through more urban and developed Southern spaces, from "over the creek" to Notasulga and to Florida, namely, to Sanford and then to Eatonville, the all-black town in the then developing area where he would become a minister. John's whole journey attests to his adaptability to modernized life style: highly mobile and invested with entrepreneurial mindset, he successfully adjusts himself to each new environment in which "colored folks . . . went around with their feet cramped up like white folks." As John appropriately says to his sharecropping stepfather, "Dis ain't no slavery time and Ah got two good footses hung onto me" (8).

As Bone and Yitah point out, John's southward movement from Alabama through central Florida traces a rather unstudied migration pattern of Southern blacks during the years of the Great Migration. Hazel Carby's claim that Hurston displaces the urban migration of Southern blacks by creating an ahistorical picture of Southern black folk has been influential, yet as Bone's recent argument clarifies, Hurston's representation of intraregional movement of black population is no less significant when one considers mobility and modernity in the South.[17] Hurston does not necessarily give a negative portrait on the impact of modernization on the Southern rural communities. Her interest is rather in showing the mobility of Southern black folk and what that mobility implies—the folk's cultural flexibility and adaptability to

modernity.[18] In order to present such a new picture of the South where rural black population is on the move, Hurston creates a middle ground of the modern and the pastoral, an in-between space representing the transitional state of the rural folk. It should also be noted, however, that while Hurston describes how Southern blacks merit from the decline of the sharecropping system and the new mobility, she also touches on the protagonist's inner conflict brought by alienation from nature through the process of modernization. As the embodiment of this conflict, Hurston uses complex symbolism and provides a subtle critique on modernity. Train is arguably the most significant symbol in the novel which represents John's ambivalence as a modern subject. With complex and conflated imageries of the train, Hurston depicts both beneficial and potentially negative affects of modernization to the Southern rural communities. John's first encounter with a train which occurred when he came to Notasulga epitomizes his ambivalent feelings toward modernization:

> . . . that great eye beneath the cloud-breathing smoke-stack glared and threatened. The engine's very sides seemed to expand and contract like a fiery-lunged monster. The engineer leaning out of his window saw the fright in John's face and blew a sharp blast on his whistle and John started violently in spite of himself. The crowd roared.
> "Hey, dere, big-un," a Negro about the station called to John, "you ain't never seed nothin' dangerous lookin' lak dat befo', is yuh?"
> "Naw suh and hit sho look frightenin'," John answered. His candor took the ridicule out of the faces of the crowd. "But hits uh pretty thing too. Whar it gwine?" (16)

This sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is a classic example of the pastoral "middle landscape." Through John's contradictory response—simultaneous fear and

admiration—Hurston compellingly illustrates the modern man's ambivalence toward industrialization. It is both "frightenin'" and "pretty," and it builds up expectation for travel and mobility ("Whar it gwine?"). Also important is her use of anthropomorphism. Trying to understand or at least make familiar the uncanny presence before him, John attributes human (though monstrous) characteristics to the train. Such process of familiarization taking place within John's mind precisely shows how the modern is rapidly acknowledged by the rural Southerners and assimilated into their daily landscape.

Significantly, the train also symbolizes John's inner sexual desire which is considered natural and uncontrollable. As Anthony Wilson points out, the train "plays a double role in the novel's symbology: it signifies both sexuality and phallic power and the encroachment of technological and its attendant threats to community and self."[19] The association is evident in a scene in which John converts in his mind the train's mechanical sound into the rhythmical repetition of words: "Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika-black-and-dirty, Opelika-black-and-dirty!" (41). The train's enormous power is here related to the predatory animal ("Wolf coming!"), and the repetitive calling of the place name Opelika anticipates John's sexual prowess: Opelika is a place where a woman with whom he would have an extramarital affair lives. Sexual imagery associated with train appears again when John works at a Florida railroad camp. Workers at the camp sing about their women while spiking on rails, and John

absorbs himself in the rhythm of the song:

> He liked spiking. He liked to swing the big snub-nosed hammer above his head and drive the spike home at a blow. And then the men had a song that called his wife's name and he liked that.
> "Oh Lulu!"
> "Hanh!" A spike gone home under John's sledge.
> "Oh, oh, gal!"
> "Hanh!"
> "Want to see you!"
> "Hanh!"
> "So bad!"
> "Hanh!" (106)

The mechanical movement of hitting spikes with a hammer has an obvious sexual implication, and once again it hints at the close connection between the cultivation of nature and the penetration of female body. The question here is: Why does Hurston conflate the machine imageries with sexuality? It is probably to elucidate the problems modernity brings about, such as, men's disorientation from nature, structure of masculinist domination seen in the destruction of nature. In order to emphasize these problems, Hurston links industrialization and masculinity to John's sexuality and his domineering attitude and aggression toward women. In other words, John's deeply problematic masculinity in the novel represents the question of modernity in the South and how it affects the lives of Southern black folk.[20]

Compared to *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Rawlings's *South Moon Under* provides a more traditional narrative pattern of American pastoral. The novel chronicles the lives of a "cracker" family

living in a vast scrub area in central Florida. The family's struggle for maintaining the nature-oriented way of life reflects the author's contemplation on the encroachment of modernization to Southern rural communities. The scrub is, in Rawlings's view, the closest point to wilderness which "has defeated civilization. It is one of the few areas where settlements have disappeared and the scanty population is constantly thinning."[21] In this near-wilderness space, people humbly live their lives in harmony with nature. Like good shepherds in pastoral narratives, they use land but never exploit, and protect and nurture animals and environments. Even in these areas, however, contact with the world beyond gradually becomes inevitable. The scrub people now hunt not just to feed themselves—they also sell meat and furs to make their living. When they earn profit, they look through Sears catalog and order clothes. They also cannot avoid intervention of federal and local governments when they engage in so-called "illegal" activities, mainly moonshining and hunting during closed season or in the preserve. The scrub in which they live is thus no longer nature itself anymore—it is rather a volatile contact zone between human and nature, where occasional conflicts are inevitable.

As a way of depicting such conflicts between human and nature, Rawlings introduces the conflicting concepts of natural and man-made laws as the center of the novel's plot. The protagonist's family, the Jacklins, and other scrub inhabitants are obedient to natural laws which

equally influence plants and wild animals, as well as themselves. In wilderness where nature still overwhelms human civilization, those are the only laws they understand and respect. The novel's title *South Moon Under* itself denotes one of such natural laws; it is the position of the moon by which the scrub people know the creatures' pattern of behavior. The protagonist Lant Jacklin explains how the moon influences the whole ecosystem of the scrub:

> He could understand that the creatures, the fish and the owls, should feed and frolic at moon-rise, at moon-down and at south-moon-over, for these were all plain marks to go by, and visible. He marveled, padding on bare feet past the slat-fence of the clearing, that the moon was so strong that when it lay the other side of the earth, the creatures felt it and stirred by the hour it struck. The moon was far away, unseen, and it had power to move them. (110)

Here and elsewhere Rawlings depicts how Lant, born and brought up in the middle of the scrub, is capable of living in tune with the natural laws. He understands scrub animals' patterns of behavior based on natural cycles such as circadian clock and change of season. Sometimes he even feels a stronger connection to animals than to humans. Just before the above passage he tries to hunt the deer and stops, because "[t]hey were strangely dear to him. They were a part of him, closer than his mother or his dogs or his bed" (109). The idea that human can form a spiritual tie with nature is closely related with what Rawlings calls "cosmic consciousness." Gordon Bigelow explains it as an "intuitive, half-ecstatic awareness that birth, growth, and death are one and good, and that the life which move the stars was the same life which breathed through the forest and beat in her own heart. She felt that the best way to know this life was to

live as close as possible to nature, or at least to some plot of earth where one could sense its great simple rhythms."[22] The natural laws described in *South Moon Under* arguably reflect such model of human/nature relationship, and Rawlings characterizes Lant as its embodiment. As a part of the natural environment, Lant follows the laws and uses his knowledge about the scrub's biological rhythm for hunting and farming.

By contrast, the novel depicts the man-made laws as a threat to the cosmic view on nature. Both federal and local officials impose and reinforce new laws and restrictions on hunting, farming, fencing, and moonshining, which, to the scrub inhabitants, are potentially harmful interventions against the community. Therefore, Lant and other scrub men firmly resist these laws. Opposition to federal intervention itself is the Southern tradition since Reconstruction, but looking closely at how Rawlings describes the situation of Florida scrub helps one understand what it meant for the scrub inhabitants to struggle against government revenuers. Through her own experience at the scrub, Rawlings was well aware of the conditions of Florida moonshiners that were somewhat different from those in the mountain states. Restriction on moonshining had been relatively slack in backwoods Florida since the federal agents focused more on large-scale rum-running related to organized crime in the Southern part of the state. Thus Lant's grandfather Lantry who used to engage in moonshining in the highlands area says, "Floridy is a fine state that-a-way. Folkses here is the best in the world to mind their own

business and not go interferin' in nobody else" (38). However, circumstances surrounding the backwoods Florida were changed first by the taxation for distillers since Reconstruction and then by the enforcement of Prohibition laws in the 1920s, which Rawlings quite accurately describes in the novel.[23] Her descriptions generally accord with the present historical studies' consensus that moonshining in the rural South was practiced mainly by the people "who ranked near the bottom of economic system."[24] According to John J. Guthrie, The prohibition enforcement "fell disproportionately upon person who ranked near the bottom of Florida society."[25] While the large-scale smuggling controlled by organized crime was the more serious issue, federal agents "preyed mainly on easy targets such as small-time moonshiners and destitute dealers who possessed little knowledge of the legal system and whose stills contributed a mere trickle to the river of liquor production in the state."[26] In Rawlings's novel one of the characters aptly explains such condition of the backwoods moonshiners: "'Now they've got the new law since the war,' he said, 'and nobody don't belong to make whiskey at all, no-way, no time, tax or no tax. And boy, don't you think them new kind o' revenooers ain't comin' into the state. And the county, too. But now, hit's one thing for them strangers to find a still in open blackjack. Or by a branch in the piney-woods. This here river is jest another matter'" (222-23). The scrub moonshiners usually do not confront the agents and rather try either to hide their stills or to clean them up before they are discovered, but on rare occasions their hostility toward the federal

government results in the murder of the agents, as Lantry confesses to his daughter Piety in the novel (45). Moonshiners' resistance to the prohibition enforcement is, as William F. Holmes notes, an attempt to "preserve a way of life that was being threatened by the centralizing forces then shaping American society."[27] The scrub moonshiners whom Rawlings lived among and modeled after in *South Moon Under* demonstrate such attempt through their life style.

But there is more to such "outlaw" and anti-interventionist attitude of the characters than the "cracker" declaration of independence. The opposition of the two laws (natural vs. man-made) also exemplifies the difference of attitude toward preservation of nature between scrub inhabitants and governments. Government officials think that nature should be kept and managed by men, while the scrub people consider themselves as part of nature, not owning or managing it. Interestingly, moonshining in the novel is depicted as something more than an economic activity: It is a symbolic act of the scrub people's harmony with nature. As I provide an extensive discussion in the latter part of this chapter, moonshining represent human's efforts to work in and for nature; it is a cerebration of human labor, the value of hard work with the aid of nature.

In addition to the law enforcement, intervention by outsiders is also depicted as a great threat that would lead to the destruction of the scrub's whole ecosystem. The dispute over cattle-fencing best describes this.[28] The Streeters, newcomers in the scrub, build up fences to

protect their cattle, ignoring the scrub's free-range tradition which had kept the harmony within the community as well as with the surrounding environment. Lant, his uncle Abner, and other scrub inhabitants threaten the Streeters in order to remove the fence and eventually get arrested. Even though it costs the violation of man-made laws, they try to follow the natural laws on which the system of the scrub community is based and maintained. Abner's statement clarifies this: "The law's the law, and the law's always changin' but they's things beyond the law is right and wrong, accordin' to how many folks they he'ps or harms" (257). To raise a fence in the free-range scrub is to circumscribe the natural environment which originally had no border, and thus unnatural. Through the scrub inhabitants' struggle against outsiders' intervention, Rawlings questions the artificial boundaries set within nature that are essentially at odds with her cosmic model of human/nature relationship.

Hurston and Rawlings consciously use the pastoral association between nature and women in order to critique modernity. Both *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under* not only link modernization with male domination but also show how the female characters uses that very link to empower themselves in the face of oppression. In so doing, the two writers present an alternative relationship between human and nature.

John in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* provides a classic example for a modern man split between nature and civilization, struggling to find a balanced middle state. While he embodies the

modernization of the South and the socially upward mobility of Southern blacks during the early twentieth century, he fails to control his "nature," e.g., his sexual desire and moral weakness which he calls "de beast within me" (88). All through the novel John attempts to resist and control this "beast within," but his guilt for being a "natchel man" (122) in fact induces him to act more oppressively towards women, which further worsens his situation. He dies in a train-automobile accident immediately after getting into yet another extramarital affair, which is highly symbolic of his futile attempts. As Nathan Grant notes, John, "when guilty of abuses against black women—which is to say as well that they are also guilty of abuses against nature—[is] met with powerful and consuming responses to their transgressions."[29] In the novel, voodoo represents the force of nature which makes such "powerful and consuming responses" against oppression.[30] Hurston associates Voodoo practices with the female characters and emphasizes its empowering aspect for them. Voodoo itself has been one of the key concepts in Hurston scholarship. A number of studies have exhaustively discussed Hurston's illustration of Haitian Vodou in *Tell My Horse* (1938) and its influence on her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).[31] Rachel Stein, one of the influential scholars in this line, discusses how Vodou provides "an alternative spiritual model that reframes the binary hierarchies operating within the denigration of black women as nature incarnate."[32] While such aspects can also be found in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, few studies focus on the gender issue of the

novel in relation to Hurston's exploration of Voodoo in the American South that is well documented both in *Mules and Men* and its earlier and more academic-oriented version "Hoodoo in America" (1931).[33]

The Voodoo section in *Mules and Men* and "Hoodoo in America" provides a significant background to Hurston's representation of nature and her characterization of women in the novel. In these anthropological works, Hurston reveals how Voodoo as a religion and conjuring practices is closely tied with nature, and how it disrupts the hierarchical gender relationship. Voodoo initiation rituals and magic acts are often characterized by the use of animal symbols such as snake skin, sacrifices and herbs. For example, *Mules and Men* tells how Marie Laveau (spelled "Leveau" in the book), the most famous Voodoo queen in New Orleans, became a practitioner when she was called upon by a rattle snake and how the snake always stayed with her until her last moment (*Mules and Men*, 183-85). Luke Turner, the self-professed nephew of Laveau, takes over the snake hide as a sacred symbol and wears it whenever he performs the rituals (185). In Voodoo, association of nature (especially the snake) and women does not have a negative connotation as it does in the Christian context. It rather symbolizes the power which the Voodoo practitioners obtain through their contact with nature. The "two-headed doctors" of Voodoo use a variety of animal sacrifices such as chickens, sheep, and black cats at the rituals and conjure practices. They also make folk medicines and conjure potions from

herbs, roots, and natural cooking ingredients. Behind such heavy dependence on nature lies the idea of Voodoo as a mode of transformation; it utilizes nature and transforms it into spiritual (and sometimes destructive) power. Whether a Voodoo practice is performed to retrieve a lover or cause a death, it works on nature to change the status quo.

Voodoo practitioners and worshippers do not have rigid gender roles and hierarchies. "Hoodoo in America" introduces four female Voodoo practitioners including Laveau, and shows that both men and women can become the "two-headed doctors" with no visible hierarchy between them.[34] Those who consult the practitioners are often women too. An episode in *Mules and Men* in which Zora works as a Voodoo practitioner under the guidance of Father Joe Watson shows how Voodoo serves the plight of women. The woman tells Zora how a man shot her husband and nevertheless is likely to get released without punishment: "'But, honey,' she all but wept, 'they say ain't a thing going to be done with him. They say he got good white folks back of him and he's going to be let loose soon as the case is tried. I want him punished. Picking a fuss with my husband just to get chance to shoot him. We needs help. Somebody that can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick'" (205). The woman's story notably shows how the black women are positioned at the bottom of the social power structure in the South in which the whites rule the blacks and black men reiterate the uneven power relationship within the community over women, while the voices of black women are kept unheard.[35] Such is the

contemporary condition of black women which Hurston would so aptly articulate as “the mule of the world” in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and these women, who are negatively identified with nature and thus put in the margin of society, desperately need vengeance. That is exactly when a Voodoo practitioner, in this context the narrator Zora, uses that very nature on behalf of them and “hit a straight lick with a crooked stick.” By repeatedly depicting the black women in cruel predicaments and how each practice works for them, Hurston presents the destructive yet empowering aspect of female vengeance enabled by Voodoo.

Voodoo also causes transformation within Zora / Hurston. While “Hoodoo in America” provides detailed description and objective observation on Voodoo as a complex faith system/conjure practices, *Mules and Men* puts Hurston herself at the center of the narrative, and shows how she participates in the Voodoo rituals and conjure practices. As Menke points out, “Hurston speaks not as a reporter, but as an enlightened black self.”[36] Her transformation is shown in the rather abrupt ending of the book in which Hurston cuts off the Voodoo story and inserts a short animal lore about “Sis Cat.” In the lore, Sis Cat catches a rat and tries to eat him. The rat tells her to wash her face and use her manner before she eats. While she is doing it, he escapes. Sis Cat catches another rat which says the same thing to her, trying to outsmart her. This time Sis Cat replies, “Ah eats mah dinner and washes mah face and uses mah manners afterwards,” and eats the rat (228). Hurston narrates this story in the third-person, then

suddenly shifts to the first-person at the last sentence: “I’m sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin’ my manners” (Ibid.). Hurston’s use of the first-person narrative and her identification with Sis Cat suggest that she acknowledges the association between nature and women, but as a black woman writer she can use that very association and turn it into the transformative power. Because of its self-transformative aspect, Wall considers *Mules and Men* as Hurston’s proto-mother text in relation to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but the influence of Voodoo on her critique on nature and gender can also be found in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, especially in the relationship between John and the female characters depicted in the novel.

It is John’s second wife Hattie Tyson who most noticeably represents the complex association between women and Voodoo. It is certain that Hurston describes Hattie’s use of conjure on John based on her knowledge of Voodoo obtained through her anthropological research. The name of a conjure doctor An’ Dangie Dewoe whom Hattie goes to see clearly echoes an obeah (the Bahamian version of voodoo) practitioner Aunt Dangie Deveaux / Andangie appearing in “Hoodoo in America” (125, “Hoodoo” 321, 404-405). An’ Dangie tells Hattie to stand over the gate of John’s place and eat some beans, and says she will use a black cat bone “so’s you kin walk out de sight uh men” (126). The black cat bone also appears in *Mules and Men*. Zora herself joins a sacrificial ritual to get the bone so that she can perform conjure secretly: “Sometimes you have to be able to walk invisible. Some things must be done in deep secret, so

you have to walk out of the sight of man" (207).

After An' Dangie's conjure, Lucy gets terribly sick and dies. John gets married to Hattie soon after Lucy's death, but after a while he cannot remember why he is married to her. John says to her, "Hattie, whut am Ah doin' married tuh you? … Look lak Ah been sleep. Ah ain't never meant tuh marry yuh. Ain't got no recollection uh even tryin' to marry yuh, but here us is married, Hattie, how come dat?" (142-43). The whole process of turning away from Lucy and marrying Hattie is now "uh hidden mystery" (144) to John, and it is suggested that he has been under the influence of An' Dangie's conjure without knowing. Nevertheless, John realizes something is going wrong and becomes abusive, which makes Hattie to report the situation to one of the church officers, Harris. Harris suggests that she use the power of conjure, saying, "Some folks kin hit uh straight lick wid uh crooked stick. They's sich uh thing ez two-headed men" (147), which echoes the accusation of the woman in *Mules and Men* I mentioned earlier (205). John eventually finds out he has been conjured by Hattie and beats her, but this marriage and the subsequent divorce court already set him on a fixed course to decline.

Hattie is arguably the least likable character in the novel. Yet Hurston also associates her with the destructive power of conjure and contrasts her subversive nature with the passiveness and mothering personality of other female characters. Genevieve West correctly points out that "her stubborn refusal of cultural definition of appropriate or respectable womanhood is unique in

the novel. Hattie tries to make her own way. While readers may not respect the choices she makes, her persistence in making choices for herself, not for her husband, sets her apart from other women in the novel."[37] Unlike Lucy, Hattie has no intention of enduring John's change of heart or his abusive attitude. When John blames her for making him marrying her, Hattie replies: "Naw, Ah ain't no Miss Lucy, 'cause Ah ain't goin' tuh cloak yo' dirt fuh yuh. Ah ain't goin' tuh take offa yuh whut she took so you kin set up and be uh big nigger over mah bones" (145). And unlike John's third wife Sally, she never displays a forgiving yet gullible personality in her relationship with John. While Hattie basically represents the negative stereotype of womanhood, she is also described as the vengeful female self empowered by Voodoo which is otherwise helpless in the face of men's social and physical power. In this sense Hattie embodies Hurston's twofold view on Voodoo that it is dark and horrifying yet at the same time empowering.[38]

In contrast to Hattie, Lucy is described as a smart and devoted woman who gives her husband every possible support for his social success, yet is grievously betrayed by him through their marriage. The first clear example for her victimization is when her brother comes to their house and takes away their wedding bed from pregnant Lucy while John is away with some other woman. Indignant at the brother, John beats him up and then is forced to escape for Florida. After Lucy and the children accompany him in Eatonville and John succeeds as a minister, He

again goes back to illicit relationships. Lucy and the community members soon finds this out but even then she helps John out of trouble by suggesting that he should preach a sermon about himself and show his honest repentance. Lucy's faithfulness, however, is never rewarded. As she gets sick, John gets more abusive to her. In spite of her intelligence and the fact that John owes her a lot for his success, Lucy seems passive and vulnerable in their marital relationship. The nature of their relationship is indicated earlier in the novel, when John kills a water moccasin that has been scaring Lucy for a long time. Though Lucy first appears as a brilliant and spunky little girl with the gift of speech, in this scene she looks helpless and petrified by fear. By contrast, John effectively displays his masculinity to Lucy by saving her from the danger of getting bitten. The snake here is obviously the biblical symbol of evil and by killing the snake and carrying Lucy across the creek, John successfully conquers the evil nature and obtains Lucy's love at one time.

While the idea of submissive womanhood seems to apply to Lucy, her deathbed scene presents much more complexity than is usually considered. Significantly, as death approaches Lucy shows an unusual attempt to fight back against John's abuse. She says to John, "Youse livin' dirty and Ahm goin' tuh tell you 'bout it. Me and mah chillun got some rights. Big talk ain't changin' whut you doin'. You can't clean yo'self wid yo' tongue lak uh cat" (128-29). Though John slaps her after this remark, she does not get upset and makes a final comment

suggestive of his decline: “De hidden wedge will come tuh light some day, John. Mark mah words. Youse in de majority now, but God sho don’t love ugly” (129). Also noteworthy is her mysterious instruction about the deathbed. She tells her youngest daughter Isis who is modeled after Hurston; “when Ahm dyin’ don’t you let ’em take de pillow from under mah head, and be covering up de clock and de lookin’ glass and all sich ez dat” (130). Isis tries to perform her mother’s instruction, but John and the neighbors gathering at the deathbed stop her, quickly removing the pillow and covering the mirror. The reason Lucy asked Isis to see to these things is never made clear, but according to the glossary Hurston added to the novel, “[t]he pillow is removed from beneath the head of the dying because it is said to prolong the death struggle if left in place. All mirrors, and often all glass surfaces are covered because it is believed the departing spirit will pause to look in them and if it does they will be forever clouded afterwards” (206). Elsewhere Hurston reports that “among the Negroes of North American continent the power of the dead to help or harm is common tenet even among those who have discarded hoodoo” (“Hoodoo” 319). She further explains what is commonly done to a person’s deathbed: “[t]he spirit newly released from the body is likely to be destructive. This is why a cloth is thrown over the face of a clock in the death chamber and the looking glass is covered over” (*Mules and Men* 214, “Hoodoo” 398). Being a devout Christian, Lucy is dismissive about the folk belief. Yet her demand for keeping the pillow and the mirror at their place could be her

attempt to use that belief to prolong her own agonizing death and leave an eternal trace of her departing spirit to the world of the living. It could be her revenge on John for she knows that is the last thing he desires. John has already been suffering from guilt because of Lucy's long sickness, and he in fact feels "glad" when she says to him, "Jus' have patience, John, uh few mo' days" (130). After Lucy's death, he is perpetually tormented by the haunting memory of her and the snake, which now embodies both the biblical evil and the destructive power of Voodoo, recurrently coming back to his mind though he thought "the dead snake was behind him" (185). He eventually gets killed by a train which is a symbol for modernity yet also horrifyingly evokes the shape of snake.

On Lucy's mysterious requests at her deathbed, Meisenhelder argues that "[i]n providing limited explanation for these requests, Hurston can control the significance seen in them by readers unfamiliar with the rituals and thus smuggle an act of female retaliation into her novel under cover of what might have appeared mere quaint superstition."[39] Hurston indeed uses the seemingly superstitious Voodoo-based folk belief in order to interpolate a narrative of female vengeance. And by choosing Isis who is the fictional alter ego of herself to carry out Lucy's dying wish, she also emphasizes the bond between the women who are not only a mother and a daughter but also the mutually trusted accomplices in this revenge act.[40] Hurston secretly encloses the story of female bond created in the context of Voodoo, in order to critique the

masculine desire for modernization which dismisses the type of spiritualism marked by the conflation of women, nature, and the power of the dead.

John's journey is a process of "leaving behind" the spiritual tie with feminized nature in the course of modernization, yet the fact that the Voodoo imagery associated with women repeatedly haunts him attests to his ambivalent urge to retrieve that very tie with the natural (and as its extension, the feminine). That becomes even clearer if one considers his position as the minister of an all-black town. Barbara Spieceman suggests that John is "a minister who has . . . embraced the concepts and basic symbols of Voodoo."[41] Even though John seems dismissive about Voodoo on the conscious level, he lives and preaches in a Southern black community where the spiritualism based on African tradition remains intact and has become blended into Christianity. Advising Hattie to use conjure, Harris says: "Why hit's in de Bible, Sister! Look at Moses. He's de greatest hoodoo man dat God ever made. . . . Da Bible is de best conjure book in de world" (147). And at John's funeral the preacher "preached a barbaric requiem poem" and the hearers play the African drum which itself is a symbol of voodoo: "They beat upon the O-go-doe, the ancient drum. O-go-doe, O-go-doe, O-go-doe! Their hearts turned to fire and their shinbones leaped unknowing to the drum. Not Kata-Kumba, the drum of triumph, that speaks of great ancestors and glorious wars. Not the little drum of kidskin, for that is to dance with joy and to call to mind birth and creation, but O-go-doe, the voice of Death—that

promises nothing, that speaks with tears only, and of the past" (201-2). Critical rereading of the Old Testament, which Hurston would further explore in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), is a vital part of the religious system of the Caribbean and the Southern blacks who went through enslavement. As a Southern black minister who, albeit unwittingly, has always been familiar with the world of Voodoo through lore and superstitions, John embodies such cultural hybridization. Ultimately, John's Voodoo/Christianity ambivalence revolves around nature/culture opposition against whose backdrop the whole novel is structured. His final sermon which, according to Hemenway, Hurston took almost word by word from the one by the Reverend C.C. Lovelace of Eau Gallie, FL, on May 3, 1929, is a case in point.[42] In the last part of the sermon John incorporates into the traditional Christian context the image of the train, a machine in the garden which as I discussed earlier embodies the pastoral middle ground:

> I heard de whistle of de damnation train
> Dat pulled out from Garden of Eden loaded wid cargo goin' to hell
> Ran at break-neck speed all de way thru de law
> All de way thru de prophetic age
> All de way thru de reign of kings and judges—
> Plowed her way thru de Jurdan
> And on her way to Calvary, when she blew for de switch
> Jesus stood out on her track like a rough-backed mountain
> And she threw her cow-catcher in His side and His blood ditched de train
> He died for our sins.
> Wounded in the house of His friends.
> That's where I got off de damnation train
> And dat's where you must get off, ha! (180-81)

Hemenway points out that the imageries used in this passage "were familiar to most black congregation in the South, and many of them can still be heard in black churches. The train motif is well known."[43] Yet these familiar imageries also integrate the nature/culture symbolism Hurston works on throughout the novel. The central motif of "damnation train" clearly symbolizes the encroachment of modernization, but it also evokes the shape of the snake which especially in the context of Voodoo represents the power of nature. The train invested with dual images thus tells about the condition of modern men having gradually lost touch with their tradition that had been closely tied with nature, and yet still possessed by its uncontrollable power. Being such a modern man himself, John tells his audience to get off the train to interrogate if one could find a balanced state between nature and culture. Through John's struggle, Hurston vividly depicts the consciousness of contemporary Southern blacks experiencing a change in their relationship with nature in the course of modernization.

Like Hurston, Rawlings in *South Moon Under* too engenders nature/culture dichotomy. What is significant about the fencing episode discussed above is that Rawlings, as Rieger correctly points out, "associates these man-made boundaries with the social restrictions placed on women at the time, challenging their naturalness and their legitimacy" (201-2). She questions the rapid modernization which arbitrarily circumscribes natural space and negatively affects its cosmic balance. Through her representation of subversive female characters,

Rawlings explores the possibility for humans to create alternative space where they can harmoniously coexist with nature. The characters such as Piety, Kezzy, and Annie Wilson, who often deviate from the gender role of their period and disrupt the notion of what is natural for women, play a significant part in Rawlings's version of Southern pastoral. For they represent a possibility for constructing a more egalitarian relationship with both the men and the land. Rawlings's representation of strong and independent female characters is firmly based on her own experience in the scrub. In summer 1931, Rawlings moved from Cross Creek to the scrub to live with Piety and Leonard Fiddia, after whom she closely modeled Piety and Lant in *South Moon Under*. She stayed there for two and a half months to observe and record backwoods life style, customs and peculiar idioms which, thanks to their isolation, the community had preserved in an even purer way than the Creek people did. Rawlings's strategy in collecting materials was apparently to immerse into the scrub life and its surrounding environment, but as Bigelow reports, she was never secretive about the objective of her trip and quite openly asked questions and took notes while she was with the scrub inhabitants.[44] She was accepted by the community without a major trouble probably because she showed no hesitation in witnessing and engaging in activities inside the community that were often illegal from the outside perspective.

Rawlings herself reported this to Maxwell Perkins:

> Possibly you wonder how I gain the confidence of these people without being a cold-blooded spy who intends to "use" them. It is so easy for me to live their life with them, that I am in

> some danger of losing all sophistication and perspective. I feel hurried sometimes, as though I must get "written out" in this country within the next few years, because so much is no longer strange or unusual to me. The life in the scrub is peculiarly right. While I was there, I did all the illegal things too; stalked deer with a light at night, out of season, kept the family in squirrels, paddled the boat while my friend dynamited mullet, shot limpkin on the river edge and had to wade waist deep in cypress swamp to get him.[45]

As Rawlings got deeply involved in the routine activities of the scrub community, she found the boundary between insider and outsider as well as men and women become blurred in the life in the wilderness. Though the backwoods culture to which she came to feel attached presumably had the most rigid gender codes, the result was opposite; she witnessed and/or engaged in traditionally male-dominating activities from hunting and fishing to helping moonshining, partly because gender roles in the backwoods community were much more flexible than they were commonly considered to be. It could thus be said that Rawlings's view on gender and nature was nurtured through her observation and participation in the scrub life which taught her the paradoxically delimiting aspect of nature.

In the novel, Rawlings shows how the wilderness setting enables the less rigid conception of gender. Annie, Piety, and Kezzy respectively embody such flexibility in the gender roles of backwoods community. At the fence-raising scene in the first chapter, Annie works and jokes around among men while other women stay inside chatting. Her bold attitude and unconventional behavior often shock other women, and elicit a bitter remark from Piety's mother, Mrs. Lantry: "Tain't mannerly no-ways to go scaperin' acrost to the men-folks that-a-way" (18).

Nevertheless, Piety in her girlhood is strongly attracted by Annie. After the fence-raising, the Lantry family has a huge feast with dancing. Piety sees Annie dances furiously with Lantry, while Mrs. Lantry refuses to dance with him. The "warm sweet steam" that "came from [Annie's] flesh" fascinates Piety (27). Here Rawlings stresses on Annie's physical and sensual appeal and positively associates it with health and inner contentment.

In contrast to Mrs. Lantry, Annie and Piety share their willingness to enjoy life in the nature. When Mrs. Lantry dies, Piety recounts how her mother focused on the pain and hardship of making a living while she loves a simple yet strong pleasure offered by the life in the scrub:

> Breakfast was good, and dinner and supper, and a little snuff afterwards. The tug of the plow at the arms was good, and the sight of new cane and corn sprouting green above the earth. Deer, big-eyed and curious, and their spotted fawns; fox-squirrels upside down on a pine tree, black-backed and glossy, flicking their tails; all the small creatures that crossed her path were good to watch. She had never understood her mother's grumblings. (42)

Like Annie, Piety is characterized by her love of a simple life style, her reluctance to accept the gender role traditionally assigned for women, and her celebration of labor in nature. She prefers working in the field with her father Lantry to staying inside doing housework with her mother and her sister Martha. She also learns how to shoot a gun and hunt small animals, which her mother and her sister would never do. Piety and Lantry develop a closer relationship with each other than with anyone else in their family, which sometimes makes the other female members of the family feel envious or hostile. The mother even condemns Piety for doing field

work “jest to git away from the housework.” The father Lantry, however, passionately defends the daughter: “Don’t none of you know what you’re talkin’ about. She perfeckly enjoys it. She’s got a knack for it, hit comes to her natural” (36). By making Lantry insist that a woman could be “naturally” good at the work that is traditionally considered to be men’s, Rawlings indicates that the gender conception in the nature-oriented environment of the scrub could be more flexible than it is usually expected to be. A man like Lantry would not even care if his daughter does not remain in the “women’s sphere.” However, the meaning of the word “natural” fluctuates as Piety reaches marriageable age. Becoming aware of his declining health, Lantry starts worrying about Piety’s future and persuades her into marrying Willy Jacklin who had courted her for a while in a rather awkward manner. Seeing the daughter’s apparent disinterestedness, he tells her: “A man o’ your own’s natural. Seems like ever’thing go along better when you do what’s natural” (52). This time the word “natural” is used to stress the necessity for Piety to submit to the traditional gender norms embodied in marriage. Even though she does not exactly understand its significance, she accepts her father’s advice and marries Willy.

Despite her father’s encouragement, however, Piety could never consider this marriage as “natural.” All through her married life she remains emotionally distanced from Willy: “She felt a detached affection for her husband, but when he was out of her sight she seldom thought of

him" (54). One night, looking at him sleeping curled up like a dog, she thinks: "it might just as well be a dog curled up in the bed, for all the difference it made to her, one way or the other. A good dog, that fetched and carried as she told him" (Ibid.). Thus even when Willy dies of an accident at a timber camp, Piety does not make any comments on his death and focuses more on Lantry who has a terrible fit and dies from exasperation with his son-in-low who is, in his opinion, "the fool to make a pore widder-woman o' Py-tee before her time" (75). Piety's rather thin affection for Willy is partly attributable to the emphasis Rawlings places on the father-daughter relationship. Only Piety and Lantry in the family share the love for the scrub and make great efforts to stay there, and Piety later teaches that love to her son Lant, who would likewise choose backwoods life. Since she is the only person in the family who knows that Lantry killed a federal agent in the highland and flew to the scrub, she understands his loneliness and his affection toward wilderness. Through describing how the father and the daughter respectively develop a harmonious relationship with the environment beyond their gender roles, Rawlings tries to present a human/nature relationship without using the literary convention which associates both women and nature with passivity and submissiveness.

Kezzy, the step-daughter of Zeke and a niece of Annie Wilson is another female character who calls existing gender norms into question. The love story between Kezzy and Lant forms a significant subplot of the novel, but it is less about a romantic relationship in the idyllic setting as

in the existing pastoral tradition: It is more about an ideally equal relationship between man and woman which is made possible by the wilderness setting. In stressing this, Rawlings contrasts Kezzy with his first girlfriend Ardis. Lant's relationship with Ardis seems to be a classic example of romantic love, with the girl representing traditional womanhood. Ardis who is from a more populated and developed area makes a strong contrast to Kezzy growing up in the scrub. While Kezzy is strong-minded and sturdily built, Ardis is extremely shy and her body looks light and fragile. Ardis's frail and helpless look attracts Lant as a sign of feminine sophistication, but that very feature irritates Kezzy and Piety. Kezzy says, "she ain't got too much sense. She's pretty and soft-like. I reckon that's all a man wants," and Piety replies, "Well, 'taint all a man needs. Pertickler a man fixed like Lant. She's too fine-haired. That's what she is" (268). This comparison is apparently based on the country/city, wilderness/civilization binaries often found in pastoral narratives, but through her use of these opposing values, Rawlings makes clear that the conformity to gender norms is not necessarily something "natural" but rather culturally constructed. That Ardis seems much closer to traditional womanhood than Kezzy and Piety suggests that gender roles in the wilderness are paradoxically quite blurred.

Like Piety, Kezzy is less interested in marriage. As Zeke aptly states, "You kin gentle a wild hog and a raccoon and a 'possum and a wild horse. I even knowed a feller had a rattlesnake in a barrel. He claimed hit knowed him and wouldn't strike. But don't git nary idee you kin

gentle a woman has got no mind to be gentled" (197). Here Rawlings uses the association between women and nature as well as the one between marriage and domestication of animals, only to emphasize Kezzy's untamable character and her power to be able to make her own decisions. She eventually marries Lant's cousin Cleve but remains self-determined mainly through her willingness for labor. In pastoral tradition, it is usually a faithful husbandman who represents the value of labor in living close to nature. Rawlings revises this tradition by giving the husbandman's role to her female characters. Similar to Annie and Piety, Kezzy does not hesitate to do men's work, and her hard-working nature marks a sharp contrast to Cleve who never works constantly.

Toward the end of the novel, Rawlings redefines the meaning of the word "natural," and in so doing indicates the possibility of more equal men-to-women / human-to-nature relationship. When Cleve betrays the scrub community by informing the revenuers of the location of the moonshining stills, Kezzy faces the dilemma of choosing either her husband or the communal values of the scrub. Ultimately she decides to let people know Cleve's betrayal, saying, "Hit ain't natural for a woman to go agin her husband, whatever he do. But 'taint natural for Cleve to do what he's a-doing" (308). Here Rawlings gives the word "natural" two conflicting meanings: The first half of the sentence clearly points to the gendered conception of what a woman is supposed to do in marital relationship, while the second half implies a larger, more

ethical value which encompasses human and their environment. In choosing to protect the whole scrub community, Kezzy chooses a larger relationship between men and nature which goes beyond the existing gendered human relationship.

Cleve's betrayal marks a climatic moment in the novel. It is described not only as the betrayal against his own people but also as the violation of natural law which is the significant theme of the novel. By contacting the federal agents, Cleve breaks the "natural" balance between the people and the surrounding environment that had been sustained through moonshining. Throughout the novel Rawlings suggests that moonshining is not simply a means to make a living; it provides harmony between humans and nature. Rawlings describes Lant working in his still in complete accord with the nature of the scrub:

> He liked the smell of the sour mash and the heat of the copper. When he ran a charge at night, he liked the blue flame of the burning ash in the black of the night, and the orange glow on the sweet-gum leaves. Here he liked the intimacy with the hammock. Its life washed over him and he became a part of it. The scrub yonder sent its furred and feathered inhabitants past him to eat and drink, and he and the scrub were one. (224)

Here Rawlings presents her version of pastoral middle ground, a contact zone of human and nature where Lant and his moonshining still perfectly blend in with the surrounding environment. The dense vegetation of the hammock hides the still and protects it from outsiders, and there Lant sits working quietly, with the tentativeness of a wild animal, to the extent that he becomes a part of the entire ecosystem of the scrub. This is a perfect example for a man laboring in nature,

the idea of which Rawlings tries to present throughout the novel. While the act of moonshining is "illegal" from human perspective, it is actually the federal agents who dare to intrude into nature and destroy it. Under Cleve's instruction, they find Lant's still and burn it down, which leads to the destruction of the hammock surrounding it: "The trees in the swamp had burned for forty feet around, and the flames had licked far up into the hammock. Sweet gum and magnolia and hickory and palm stood sick and charred" (314). Lant, "trembling like a rabbit," laments, "Hit'll be a year 'fore the hammock's green agin" (Ibid.). Significantly, here Lant is concerned more about the environmental disaster than about the destruction of his still itself. He can build a still again when the agents are gone, but the destroyed nature is not easily retrievable. Though it might sound paradoxical, Lant's concern for the nature of the scrub hints that moonshining has created a non-exploitive relationship between human and nature. Through moonshining, Lant demonstrates how humans can, against the assumption that they are fundamentally different from all the plants and creatures, develop cooperative relationship with nature beyond the form of domination and be a significant part of the cosmic environment.

At the ending of the novel, Lant and Kezzy finally become united as a couple, and Kezzy proposes that they get married and work together at a new still: "You and me git married, and me to he'p you at the outfit?" (332). Kezzy reimagines marriage as a cooperative work of a couple, and moonshining here represents a collaborative work of men and women in nature which was

lacking in her marital relationship with Cleve. While Rawlings has described moonshining mainly as a male activity up to this point, she also suggests that it could be done by both sexes, and could be a means to develop a harmonious relationship with each other, and with the scrub. As Kezzy's final statement shows, the wilderness setting opens up a possibility for a more equal and less hierarchical relationship between men and women, and between human and nature: " 'Man, the scrub's a fine place to be,' she said. 'If things ever gits too thick, you and me jest grab us each a young un and a handful o' shells and the guns and light out acrost it. I'd dare ary man to mess up with me, yonder in the scrub'" (333).

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*, Hurston and Rawlings reexamine the relationship between human and nature with emphasis on its correlation with gender. Through that process, both writers characterize their protagonists as a kind of hybrid subjects, who work as mediators in the contact zones of nature and culture. The two authors also examine the contemporary South undergoing modernization and recreate them as the space where various opposing elements encounter and seek ways to reconcile with each other. Hurston seems to see less harm in the modernization of the Southern black communities and rather seeks for a way to incorporate their tradition into modern life. That is why Hurston does not bring a scathing indictment against John. While she is apparently more sympathetic to Lucy, she at the same time finds in John the embodiment of Southern nature/culture contact zone. Whereas Hurston

tries to look into the possibility of a balanced middle ground between nature and culture, Rawlings is drawn more by wilderness itself. Compared to Hurston, Rawlings tends to fall into the mystification of nature as seen in the male pastoral tradition, which, as Rieger points out, might lead to othering of nature she aims to critique through the novel. Rawlings's tendency to idealize the untouched wilderness sometimes leads her to reaffirming the more traditional pastoral narrative mode which romanticizes and feminizes nature as "virgin land." To Rawlings, the nature of backwoods Florida was a whole new discovery. To a fledgling writer who just found a perfect material, nature was something "out there" that needed to be made familiar through her writing at least at the time she was working on her first novel. In later works such as *The Yearling* (1938) and *Cross Creek* (1942), Rawlings would reach to a more nuanced view concerning whether humans can build an equal relationship with nature beyond romanticization or subordination (which are both forms of othering), yet in *South Moon Under* which was her first novel to deal with Southern wilderness landscape, she was yet to resolve her own pastoral impulse.

We should avoid simply attributing the difference between Hurston's and Rawlings's attitudes toward nature to their racial difference, especially because that is exactly what perpetuates the "critical segregation" of the two writers. Yet at this point it could at least be said that Hurston, as a writer of the Harlem Renaissance, more often saw black womanhood strongly associated

with nature in the contemporary literary discourse. By and large the writers of the Harlem Renaissance used this association to meet their own literary purposes. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), which fully uses the nature-woman association in an imagistic way, is one good example. As a black female writer, Hurston was aware of the danger that such an association could be used negatively against women and thus it was thus most urgent for her to turn that negative association into something empowering in a way that would be convincing to her heterogeneous audience. Meisenhelder suggests that the pastoral setting of Hurston's fiction could potentially be a device to tell about the "models of black masculinity and of female resistance to male oppression" to black audience while masking it with quaint images and languages popularized for white audience (36). Ironically, however, contemporary critics of her work, especially male black writers such as Richard Wright and Sterling Brown, generally failed to understand Hurston's motives and criticized the seemingly exaggerated quaintness of the settings and the language of her Southern narratives.[46] For that very reason it is important to reread Hurston's fiction from the pastoral context in order to fully examine how she, as a Southern female black writer, created interventionist narratives through her re-vision of pastoral tradition and her exploration of Southern mobility and modernity.

Notes

[1] A portion of this chapter is published as Kyoko Shoji Hearn, "Re-Visioning Nature□: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under* as New Southern Pastoral," *Strata* 26 (March 2013): 61–86.

[2] Helen Yitah, "Rethinking the African American Great Migration Narrative: Reading Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*," *Southern Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (Fall 2011), 10.

[3] For the representative reading of African American migration narrative, see Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative*, *Race and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Lawrence R. Rodgers, *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[4] Yitah, 10-29; Martyn Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk: Intraregional and Transnational Migrant Labor in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *American Literature* 79, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 753–779. Hazel Carby's critique on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is also significant in the context of Hurston criticism: Hazel V. Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," in *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 168–188. For general criticism on the Great Migration, see Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *Fly Away: The Great African American Cultural Migrations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[5] See M.C. Bob Leonard, "Florida in the 1920s" at *The Floridians: A Social History of Florida* (http://floridanabob.hypermart.net/floridians.htm) and William W. Rogers, "Fortune and Misfortune: The Paradoxical Twenties" in Michael Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 287-303. Rogers reports on the permanent population increase during the decade: "Florida started the 1920s with 968,470 people, and by 1930 had 1,468,211. The white population rose from 638,153 to 1,035,205, blacks from 329,487 to 431,828 " (291).

[6] Kaplan, 254

[7] Hemenway, 93, 94.

[8] Bigelow, 16.

[9] Gordon Bigelow and Laura V. Monti, eds, *Selected Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1983), 80.

[10] Anne E Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 4.

[11] Bigelow, *Frontier Eden*, 62.

[12] See Harrison, *Female Pastoral: Women Writers Re-Visioning the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 1991, and Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden: Ecology and the Pastoral in Southern Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 2009. For the more general discussions on the link between women and nature in American literature, see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and Louise Westling, *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press), 1996.

[13] Harrison, 11.

[14] Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 15-16.

[15] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000).

[16] For the relationship of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and the mobility of the Southern blacks during the 1920s, see Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk," esp., 759-65.

[17] See Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston,"; Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk."

[18] See Chapter Four of Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), which extensively discusses the modernity of Hurston's folk.

[19] Anthony Wilson, "The Music of God, Man, and Beast: Spirituality and Modernity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 35.2 (Spring 2003), 74.

[20] Susan E. Meisenhelder, *Hitting the Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 36-61, discusses how Hurston critiques the oppressive relationship between the Southern black men and women in the novel. Genevieve West, "Feminist Subversion in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine," Women's Studies* 31.4 (July-August 2002), 499-515, follows Meisenhelder's argument and closely examines the subversive quality of the female characters. Nathan Grant, *Masculinist Impulses: Toomer, Hurston, Black Writing, and Modernity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 117-144, also sees John's oppressive nature but further relates the gender issue with the representation of nature in the novel. John Lowe, "Modes of Black Masculinity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*" in John Lowe, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Other Works* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 93-104, while critiquing John's masculinity, comments that "models of patriarchy . . . contains noble, inspiring, and socially useful functions as well" (104).

[21] Roger L. Tarr, ed., *Max and Marjorie: The Correspondence between Maxwell E. Perkins and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999), 44.

[22] Bigelow, 62-63.

[23] For the moonshining in the rural South, see John J. Guthrie Jr., "Hard Times, Hard Liquor, and Hard Luck: Selective Enforcement of Prohibition in North Florida, 1928-1933," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 72.4 (April 1994), 435-452, and William F. Holmes, "Moonshining and Collective Violence: Georgia, 1889-1895," *The Journal of American History* 67.3 (December 1980), 589-611. Other studies related to the enforcement of prohibition in Florida include Patricia Buchanan, "Miami's Bootleg Boom," *Tequesta* 30 (1970), 13-31, James A. Carter III, "Florida's Rumrunning During National Prohibition," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 42.3 (January 1964), 209-15, and Rogers, 289.

[24] Holmes, 598.

[25] Guthrie, 436.

[26] Guthrie, 436-37

[27] Holmes, 603.

[28] See Rieger, "Don't Fence Me In: Nature and Gender in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *South Moon Under*," *The Mississippi Quarterly* (Spring 2004), 199-214.

[29] Grant, 117.

[30] In the New Orleans section of *Mules and Men* and "Hoodoo in America," Huston herself uses the term "hoodoo," meaning both the religious system and conjure/magic practices developed in the American South. Since "hoodoo" sometimes signifies only magical act, I use "Voodoo" to denote the complex system including both religious and nonreligious practices. For the development of New Orleans voodoo, see Jessie Gaston Mulira, "The Case of Voodoo in New Orleans," in Joseph E. Holloway ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 34-68. Mulira notes that "By 1947 the term *voodoo* had been virtually replaced with *hoodoo* when referring to the money-making traffic of talismans, luck powders, and bottled love. Nevertheless, the non-religious elements of voodoo are by-products of voodoo as a faith system whose origins are African" (63).

Some scholars choose the Creole spelling "Vodou" to signify the Afro-Caribbean religious system, attempting to "differentiate this complex Haitian religion from the erroneous portrayals of 'voodoo' in Hollywood movies and popular culture" (Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 181, n.2).

[31] Studies focusing on Hurston's use of Vodou are: Ellease Southerland, "The Influence of Voodoo on the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston," In Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds, *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature* (Garden City; New York: Double Day, 1979), 172-83; Wendy Dutton, "The Problem of Invisibility: Voodoo and Zora Neale Hurston," *Frontiers* 13 (Winter 1993), 131-53; Rachel Stein, *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Daphne Lamothe, "Vodou Imagery, African American Tradition, and Cultural Transformation in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in Cheryl Wall, ed, *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Case Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165-87; Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*," *African American Review* 34 (Summer 2000), 299-312; Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 92-134.

Studies that specifically mention hoodoo, *Mules and Men* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* include: Cheryl Wall, "Mules and Men and Women: Zora Neale Hurston's Strategies of Narration and Visions of Female Empowerment," *Black American Literature Forum* 23.4 (Winter 1989), 661-680; Barbara Spiesman, "Voodoo as Symbol in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*," in Steve Glassman and Kathryn Lee Seidel, eds, *Zora in Florida* (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1991), 86-93; Pamela Glenn Menke, "Black Cat Bone and Snake Wisdom: New Orleansian Hoddo, Haitian Voodoo, and Rereading Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* " in Suzanne Disheroon Green and Lisa Abney, eds, *Songs from the New South: Writing Contemporary Louisiana* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2001), 123-39.

[32] Stein, 54.

[33] The rare exceptions are Wall who considers Voodoo in *Mules and Men* as "the sources of female empowerment," and Menke who points out that *Mules and Men* should be considered "integral companion text" to *Jonah's Gourd Vine* just as *Tell My Horse* is to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Wall 672, Menke 123).

[34] Mulira presents a different view: "The emphasis on hoodoo causes a revolutionary change within the world of the voodoo. The predominance of female rulers was undermined. Even though women remained part of the religious sects and were numerically well represented in the fields of magic and medicine, the majority of cult leaders and hoodoo practitioners were men, generally referred to as hoodoo or voodoo doctors, medicine men, root doctors, or conjurers" (56).

[35] It should also be noted that Hurston records several practices specifically dealing with lawsuits and court scrapes, which hints at arbitrariness of the contemporary jurisdiction system ruled by the whites.

[36] Menke, 125.

[37] West, "Feminist Subversion," 508.

[38] Stein notes that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is also "dismissive of Voodoo on a conscious level but is suffused imagistically and formally with Voodoo belief" (71).

[39] Meisenhelder, 60

[40] Hurston revisits the deathbed scene in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*. For the mother-daughter relationship in *Dust Tracks*, see Fran□oise Lionett, "Autoethnography: The An-Anarchic Style of *Dust Tracks on a Road*," in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 97-129. Lionett discusses on the deathbed scene as follows: "the folk custom of veiling the mirror (so that the dead may rest in peace and not trouble the living) is implicitly criticized: the dying mother suggests that the mirror should not be veiled if the past and the faces of our mothers in it are to leave their imprint on the memory of the living so that *we* may live in peace with history and be thus able to 'think back through our mothers'" (117-18).

[41] Spieceman, 88.

[42] Hemenway, 197.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Bigelow, 107.

[45] *Max and Marjorie*, 45.

[46] For this topic, see Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO
Masterworks: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Yearling*, and the 1930s Literary Culture

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) and *The Yearling* (1938), Hurston's and Rawlings's masterworks dealing with Florida folk cultures, were published in two successive years in the late 1930s during which the South and the nation were still struggling their way out of the Depression.[1] The nation-wide crisis caused by the Depression was not only economic and ideological but also cultural. As Richard H. Pells observes, it "confirmed [intellectuals'] belief that American ideals were dangerously distorted and unreal, that competition and acquisitiveness were eroding the country's social foundations, that the quality of human life under capitalism offered men no sense of community or common experience."[2] Intellectuals of the 1930s were sensitive to the demoralizing effect of capitalism on the previous decade and were consequently "attracted to societies that seemed outside the pale of capitalist civilization."[3] Thus many writers and literary critics from Sherwood Anderson, Edmund Wilson to James Agee traveled to the more rural regions including the South and explored their folk cultures and rural communities.

It was also the period in which the South gained the national attention for its economic plight

and the subsequent New Deal, which is epitomized by the president Franklin Roosevelt's famous statement in a 1938 speech that "The South presents right now the Nation's No.1 economic problem—the Nation's problem, nor merely the South's."[4] The FDR speech was tied together with the National Emergency Council's *Report on the Economic Condition of the South*, which addressed the problems such as the failure of traditional agricultural economy, its general inefficiency caused by sharecropping system and the lack of mechanization, low wages, unemployment, and child labor, elicited a huge attention to the region's economic plight within and beyond the South.[5] The idea that the South's economic disaster could seriously affect the nation had a considerable impact on the contemporary cultural discourse. Leigh Ann Duck argues that

> discussion of Southern culture from the early to the late 1930s demonstrates two somewhat conflicting shifts—a sharpening perception of a dangerous Southern difference and an increased desire for greater interregional understanding. Accordingly, where many liberal regionalists sought to reform the nation by expanding the role of regions in understandings of national culture, liberals and leftists focused on the South sought chiefly to reform the region by increasing its cultural, economic, and legal integration with the larger United States.[6]

Not only the 1938 NEC report mentioned above but also contemporary cultural discourses (novels, essays, documentaries, and so on) problematize the striking cultural difference of the South from the nation which often implies the region's backwardness. Such a discourse about the Southern backwardness incited mixed responses from Southern intellectuals. Among them, the most conservative one came from the Vanderbilt Agrarians who idealize antebellum

Southern community as the final bulwark against the industrialization and capitalist invasion of the North, but there were also different shades of opinions expressed by the contemporary Southern intellectuals and writers including Hurston and Rawlings. Because of their experience of moving back and forth between the northern big cities and the rural South, between the national and regional cultures, Hurston and Rawlings developed a relativistic view on the relationship between the nation and the region. They ultimately rejected the view that the rural South was economically and culturally holding back the nation while avoiding the romanticization of Southern past. Their shared ethnographic concern in the Southern folk culture is also at the basis of their cultural relativism; they neither saw the Southern rural folk culture as underdeveloped nor allowed themselves to sentimentally identify with the folk. Hurston's famous metaphor of "tight chemise" at the beginning of *Mules and Men* fully explains how her mobility and the consequent acquisition of academic research method enabled her to see her Southern home from a different perspective: "[Southern black folklore] was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that" (9). Rawlings's experience of southward move also made her contemplate the position of the South and herself in a broader literary context. In her 1940 essay titled "Regional Literature of the

South," she claims that "the New Yorker's acceptance of his subways and his taxis and his cliff dwelling seems as outlandish and worthy of note as an Alabama poor white's acceptance of mules, drought, and the boll weevil" (382) and dismisses regional writings which merely trace the superficial elements of regional (often rural and quaint) cultures. She separates such writings from more serious literary works that are of universal and permanent value and insists that the latter should provide "the inner revelation of mankind, thinking, and moving against the backdrop of life itself with as much of dramatic or pointed effect as the artistry of the writer can command" (385). Gordon Bigelow states that Rawlings's concern about this issue could be linked to the fact that "she had worked on both sides of the fence which divides local color from literature."[7] As a "Yankee" writer who migrated from New York, she started her literary career with picturesque and reportage-like "Cracker Chidlings" (1930), but later developed her idea of the poor white Florida and its folk culture through works such as *South Moon Under* and *The Yearling* that are less local-color and have more universal appeal. The fact that *The Yearling* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939 and was adapted into a film in 1946 shows how this change of direction enabled her to obtain a broader and long-lasting readership.

Both published in the late 1930s, *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* provide an interesting example of how Hurston and Rawlings, based on their experience of traveling between the South and the nation, responded to the economic and cultural dynamics of the Depression era. However,

surprisingly few scholars have considered the two novels in the context of the 1930s cultural discourse.[8] It is partly attributable to the two writers' apparent distancing from cultural radicalism and protest literature. In her 1931 letter to Maxwell Perkins in which she describes the Fiddia family she modeled after Lant and Piety in *South Moon Under,* Rawlings is amazed by "the *utter lack of bleakness or despair*" (italics original) in their lives in spite of their abject poverty. She goes on to note that "[w]hatever else my story turns out to be, it will not be a gloomy, morose 'novel of the soil,'" which apparently points to the contemporary proletarian literature focusing on the predicament of rural folks.[9] Throughout the 1930s Rawlings persistently distanced herself from the "novel of the soil" and the era's demand for artists' social commitment. In another letter in which she talks about Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), even though she basically praises the book, she admits that "[t]he experience of reading it is a nuisance for an escapist, for all the social consciousness, and conscience, that you've been ducking for years."[10] Her reluctance to write politically-oriented fiction is closely tied with her irritation with popularized regional writings, and "Regional Literature of the South" in fact makes a scathing criticism on that type of writings by linking them to the New Deal and its federal cultural programs: "'Regional literature,' to the best of my knowledge, is an expression only a few years older than New Deal phraseology. It is as glib as W.P.A., C.C.C., and N.R.A. . . . I believe that the phrase 'regional literature' is not only false and unsound but

dangerous to a sharp appreciation of values, for the linking of the two words has brought in the connotation that if a piece of writing is regional, it is also literature" (381). Rawlings goes on to argue that a work of regional literature should be universal while firmly based on concrete cultural traits which gives it the aura of reality, and many of the regional writings of the period, which obviously reflect the cultural discourse of the Depression and New Deal, do not satisfy these conditions. Her apparent determination to dissociate herself from the decade's sensibility thus precluded her work from being examined in relation to the contemporary economic and cultural circumstances.

Similarly, critical history of *Their Eyes* reveals how Hurston scholarship came to avoid reading her works in relation to the 1930s cultural discourse.[11] In his well-known review of the novel Richard Wright censured Hurston for not only providing for white readers' preference but also carrying "no theme, no message, no thought" that would make a commitment to the contemporary ideological sphere.[12] Hurston counterattacked Wright in her review of *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), insisting that he provides a typical "picture of the South that the communist have been passing around of late. A dismal, hopeless section ruled by brutish hatred and nothing else."[13] The controversy between them was somewhat renewed by the scholars of the 1970s black feminism whose attempt to reconsider Hurston as a pioneer of female writers in the male-dominating (and often Communist-oriented) black literary society of the 1930s

consequently extended the critical divide between masculine and politically charged Wright and female-empowering but less political Hurston. More recently, Hazel Carby reframed this argument by adding the modern/pre-modern, urban/rural divide to the Wright/Hurston conflict and discussed that Hurston turns away from the contemporary social crises blacks in urban areas are experiencing by making a nostalgic attempt to preserve the Southern rural black folk culture.[14]

This series of critiques arguably have created Hurston's image as a writer with less social concern (or of more conservative vein), but as William Maxwell points out, what is often overlooked in this debate is that both Wright and Hurston present "versions of African-American cultural belonging pivoting on the rural folk arising through intercultural contact in America's *echt* modern cities. Contact that guaranteed some self-consciousness about the reciprocal nature of southern and northern, rural and urban, folk and mass identifications."[15] Against the premise that Wright represents a new urbanized black culture of Northern cities while Hurston speaks for the Southern rural folk culture, the two writers in fact have a very similar experience of South-to-North migration and construct their ideas about the folk through that experience. In other words, they base their literary revision of the folk culture not on their birthplace but on their mobility and urban diasporic experience beyond their Southern home. A similar argument can be made about Rawlings whose Northern/urban background paradoxically motivated her to

migrate to the rural South and explore its folk culture. Her exploration of Florida "cracker" culture is not merely a nostalgic pastoral retreat to a quaint place; it is interlocked with an increasing national concern in folk culture and attempts to critically examine urbanization and capitalist society from the perspective of regions. As Bigelow illustrates, "[e]conomic catastrophe and social unrest produced a widespread renewal of interest in the regions, so that life in the village began to receive new scrutiny as a source of those virtues which could heal the ills brought on by too much city and too much big business," and Rawlings's migration coincided with this increasing interest in linking the urban and the rural as a means of social critique.[16]

Hurston's and Rawlings's mobility between the Northern big cities and the rural South, and between the national and the regional led them to reexamine the values of Southern folk cultures often neglected or simply considered underdeveloped. Both writers sought to find what Southern sociologist/regionalist Howard Odum called a "new equilibrium or balance . . . between man and nature, between geography and culture, between urban civilization and rural culture."[17] Sharing the contemporary intellectuals' renewed interest in rural life and regional culture, Hurston and Rawlings critique modern urban capitalist society through their investigation of Southern black and poor white folk communities. Seeming conservativeness of their political stance (or lack thereof) thus does not necessarily preclude their works form being considered in

the 1930s context.[18] Rereading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Yearling* together, in fact, reveals how Hurston and Rawlings, acknowledge and respond to the Depression-era cultural discourse. While the two novels do not expressively present the contemporary socio-economic crisis or radical ideologies, they deal with popular issues of Depression narratives such as the impact of poverty, racial and class inequality, and communal survival under critical economic condition. In this sense they share the contemporary writers' strategy to expose social problems and the reality of poverty and to sympathetically portrait the poor and the marginalized. Both *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* put a considerable emphasis on the cultural integrity and self-sufficiency of the Southern rural folk communities in the face of harsh economic and social conditions. Rawlings refuses to victimize the Florida backwoods people and instead finds in their culture an affirmation of life which she thinks is often lacking in the contemporary fiction. To her, recording the beauty and the vitality of the folk culture was necessary in representing the Florida poor white community, which is perfectly embodied in calm, thoughtful and nature-loving personality of Penny Baxter in *The Yearling*. Hurston too tried to depict the empowering aspect of communal life while acknowledging economic and racial problems in the segregated South. Through reaffirming communalism of Southern rural folk as a means of survival under harsh social and economic conditions, the two writers present a critique on capitalism in a way very typical to the 1930s cultural discourse. As I discuss later, however, the

novels also reflect the authors' individualistic tendencies, which irreconcilably complicates their version of Depression narratives.

Also worth noting is how Hurston and Rawlings incorporate Depression narrative into the two novels' bildungsroman plot. Through the classic coming-of-age stories of Janie Crawford and Jody Baxter, both authors reveal the process in which their protagonists face the reality of the world surrounding them as they come to maturity. Both writers effectively use natural disaster (hurricane and storm respectively) as a significant turning point of the story, through which the protagonists become aware of larger social problems their communities incur. Moreover, Huston and Rawlings parallel the protagonists' acquisition of mobility as a metaphor with their psychological development. Through Janie's and Jody's travel within and beyond the Southern rural communities, the two authors present a mode of self that is in constant contact with the broader world.

In *Their Eyes*, Janie's southward movement represents her immersion into black folk culture through class descent, which eventually prepares her growth to maturity. Janie is brought up by her grandmother Nanny who believes that "[d]e nigger woman is de mule uh de world" and thus wants her granddaughter to marry a rich man and have an easy life "sitting on high" (14, 16). She first marries Logan Killicks who owns "sixty acres" and "the onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks" (23), and then Joe Starks who becomes a store-owner/mayor of newly built

all-black town Eatonville. Like John Pearson in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, these two men—one is a land owner, the other, a successful entrepreneur and the founder of an all-black town—exemplify the upward social mobility of Southern blacks. The life with them ensures Janie financial security, but deep down she remains dissatisfied—that is when she learns she has "an inside and an outside" and "how not to mix them" (72). Hurston presents a subtle critique on capitalism through Janie's alienation despite the fact that her material needs are satisfied. It is not until she meets Tea Cake that she feels inner satisfaction and a firm sense of being herself, with her "inside" and "outside" finally put together. Their new life lacks economic stability, and yet, as Tea Cake takes her further down south to the migrant workers' community in Everglades, Janie obtains something that money cannot buy—an egalitarian community and a new pleasure in labor.

Hurston presents the muck as a site for communal folk practices:

> Day by day now, the hordes of workers poured in. Some came limping with their shoes and sore feet from walking. It's hard trying to follow your shoe instead of your shoe following you. They came in wagons from way up in Georgia and they came in truck loads from east, west, north and south. Permanent transients with no attachments and tired looking men with their families and dogs in flivvers. All night, all day, hurrying in to pick beans. Skillets, beds, patched up spare inner tubes all hanging and dangling from the ancient cars on the outside and hopeful humanity, herded and hovered on the inside, chugging on to the muck. People ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor.
>
> All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants. (131)

By juxtaposing the mass arrival of migrant workers with the night-time bustle of the jook, Hurston reveals the plight of workers while presenting the jook entertainment ("[d]ancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour") through which they can ease themselves. The jook provides a kind of modern-day folk ritual that unites and gives a sense of community to the workers who are "[p]ermanent transients with no attachments," and "ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor." David G. Nicholls's study on *Mules and Men* reveals how folklore is used in the book as migrant workers' "everyday forms of resistance in the Jim Crow South."[19] Hurston uses the same strategy in the above passage, which is inspired by her 1935 folksong-collecting trip to Belle Glade with Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle.[20] While often criticized for romanticizing the Southern rural black folk culture, Hurston in fact reinterprets the folk in the contemporary context; she presents the cultural ritual of migrant workers not as the disappearing tradition of the past but as a means to survive the poverty and the severe working condition of the present. As she states in "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making."[21]

The migrant workers' camp is depicted as a horizontal community where the workers work together and enjoy their leisure time in the relative absence of racial oppression and hierarchy. Tea Cake's house in the quarters functions as "the unauthorized center" of such an extended

community: “The way he would sit in the doorway and play his guitar made people stop and listen and maybe disappoint the jook for that night. He was always laughing and full of fun too. He kept everybody laughing in the bean field” (132). Janie soon becomes a part of this community. She likes watching the men entertaining themselves with music and gambling, and soon starts working with them on the field. She feels freedom in participating in the things that she had never done until she came to the muck. *Their Eyes* has often been read as a story about how Janie obtains her voice, but scholars do not emphasize enough the correlation between the novel’s feminist theme and class issue. Janie’s travel down south signals her acquisition of voice and independence, but it is at the same time her departure from a middle-class life and entering into a more working-class-oriented society. In Eatonville, Janie is discouraged from “lying sessions” at Joe Stark’s store porch, which are an indispensable part of the town’s communal folk practices: “Janie likes to hear men sitting and passing around stories and sometimes comes up with good ones to tell, but Joe forbids her to join the session because he does not want her “talking after such trashy people” (54). It is not until Janie comes to the muck and mingles with the migrant workers that she finally becomes able to join the lying session among men: “What if Eatonville could see her now in her blue denim overalls and heavy shoes? The crowd of people around her and a dice game on her floor! She was sorry for her friends back there and scornful of the others. The men held big arguments here like they used

to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to" (134). Through Janie's perspective, Hurston makes clear that contrary to one's expectation that a working-class community requires a more rigid conformity to gender norms, the workers' camp on the muck does not necessarily exclude women from participating in usually male-assigned cultural practices.

What is equally important is that the muck is also depicted as a contact zone—not only of different races but also of different black cultures. Relative freedom given on the muck gathers workers with diverse backgrounds, and most prominent of all is the black Caribbean migrant. Through Janie's eyes, Hurston exposes the often ignored presence of Bahamian migrant workers on the muck: "during the summer when she heard the subtle but compelling rhythms of the Bahaman drummers, she'd walk over and watch the dances. She did not laugh the 'Saws' to scorn as she had heard the people doing in the season. She got to like it a lot and she and Tea Cake were on hand every night till the others teased them about it" (139). That the black American workers scornfully call them "Saws" suggests the existence of class difference and discrimination among workers, but Tea Cake's and Janie's exchange with them through music got the Bahamians "gradually drawn into the American crowd" (154). Through the inclusion of people from different geographical and cultural origins into the workers' community, Hurston presents the muck as, to borrow Scott Hicks's expression, a site of "a globally-conscious

response to local oppressions and dominations."[22]

Sense of community is also a key concept in *The Yearling*. Like in *Their Eyes*, it enables the rural folk's survival under the harsh economic condition. The novel depicts the life of the boy protagonist Jody Baxter in the Florida scrub which is scantily populated by humans. Surrounded by the rich and the idyllic natural environment of the scrub, Jody enjoys his prolonged childhood with his pet deer Flag, while learning to take a communal responsibility through taking care of him. While they are very poor, the Baxter family exemplifies a self-sufficient communal life in harmony with nature. And it is Jody's father Penny who represents such a community by protecting the family and the livestock from predatory animals and supplying food for everybody: To Jody, "[h]is father was the core of safety. His father swam the swift creek to fetch back his wounded dog. The clearing was safe, and his father fought for it, and for his own. A sense of snugness came over him and he dropped asleep" (44). There is always a threat of hunger lingering around the clearing. The Baxters have to hunt in order to survive, and in turn, predatory animals often invade the human territory, preying on the family's livestock. Yet because of Penny's constant efforts to keep the environment in order by hunting only what is necessary and protecting their livestock, Baxter's Island remains "an island of plenty in a hungry sea" (142).

Like in *Their Eyes*, storytelling plays a significant role in *The Yearling*.[23] A variety of stories

from the Forresters' hunting tales to the sailor Oliver Hutto's travel tales and Jody's best friend Fodderwing's tall tales stimulates Jody's imagination, but the stories told by Penny best represent the scrub folk tradition. Penny's stories are both entertaining and containing the practical knowledge about the behavior of scrub creatures, seasonal changes of the flora and fauna, and geographical and historical formation of the scrub island, and so on. Since he is a good hunter, many of his tales are related to hunting. Penny's hunting stories are described as "a spell of mystery and magic" that could keep listeners "eager and breathless" (60); in fact, because of his skill for telling tales, he succeeds in talking the Forresters into trading their good gun with his not-so-good hunting dog.

As John Lowe points out, many of the tales told in Hurston's and Rawlings's novels are "'crayon enlargements of life,' the creations of men who think big, talk big, and dream big."[24] In the *Yearling*, Penny's tale is always "better than when it happened" to Jody (322). And Oliver, "bursting with his tales," says that a sailor comes home "[t]o see his Ma and his gal and to tell lies" (123). As in *Their Eyes*, participation in storytelling is a key to sharing folk tradition in *The Yearling*, and again as in Hurston's Eatonville, it is mostly considered a male act. The "good male talk" (322) given by male characters, which attracts Jody with its dramatic tension and romanticism, presupposes the absence of female characters. As Carol Anita Tarr points out, the fact that the male characters who function as Jody's role models are all good at

storytelling "adds up to their positiveness."[25] By contrast, female characters are often associated with silence or failure in storytelling. Ora's story about a dog disappoints the boy with its lack of suspense and unfinished quality: "It was like all his mother's tales. They were like hunts where nothing happened" (231). And when Oliver, having just got back from his voyage, leaves to see his girlfriend Twink Weatherby with his travel tales unfinished, Jody feels frustrated and interrupted: "Something would happen to keep him from hearing Oliver's tales. He could feel it. He would have liked to sit on the river bank all morning while Oliver yarned. He had never had enough" (127).

Rawlings's novel does not focus on women's voices and gives the female characters minor roles. While the male characters develop a sense of community through their storytelling, the female characters are spotted between the male characters and are not given a chance to keep company with each other. And even when they do spend time together, they are usually hostile to each other (like Jody's mother Ora and Grandma Hutto) and never cultivate friendship. As scholars such as Anna Lillios and Rhonda Morris have argued, negative presentation of the female characters and their general isolation in the novel could be attributed to Rawlings's ambivalent attitude toward women and her own reluctance to play a role of traditional woman.[26] But that does not necessarily mean that she shied away from dealing with gender issues in her work. In *The Yearling*, Rawlings deliberately puts the mother Ora "outside the good male

understanding" (199), while focusing more on the relationship between the father and the son. In doing so, Rawlings tries to present a new type of masculinity through Penny's and Jody's character.[27] Significantly, both of them are characterized by their feminine quality which marks a sharp contrast with the more rough and masculine characters such as the Forresters. In addition to initiating Jody into male activities such as hunting and storytelling, Penny often displays a nurturing personality that is lacking in Ora. The father understands and sympathizes the way Jody cherishes his boyhood that would not last long, and tries to "act on any such occasion . . . as a bulwark for the boy against the mother's sharpness" (21). As Lynne Vallone observes, Jody practices the act of mothering which he learned from his father in his relationship with Flag.[28] Just as Penny nurtures and cares about him, Jody takes care of the fawn and in so doing embodies a nurturing kind of masculinity passed down from his father. Through Penny's and Jody's alternative masculinity, Rawlings describes affirmative experiences that would define the scrub folk community.

Producing and sharing food is the last example of everyday folk practices in Hurston's and Rawlings's folk communities. In his discussion on what he calls "poverty writing," Gavin Jones states that the fiction of the 1930s puts a dominant focus on "the power of poverty to damage the poor not only physically—through hunger, exploitative labor, or environmental decay—but also emotionally, intellectually, culturally, and even morally, as material need seemed

to rip apart conventional human relationships and to degrade behavioral norms."[29] Jones discusses Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1931) and Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (1932) as the examples for the 1930s literary work which dramatizes the physically and psychologically degrading effects of poverty, hunger, and ignorance. In contrast to these examples, Hurston and Rawlings endow the Florida poor white and black folks with dignity and vitality. The life-affirming aspect of Hurston's and Rawlings's Florida folk cultures is epitomized in the two writers' food representation. Eating and sharing food symbolizes sustenance under the severe economic conditions; it provides the basis of communal survival.

In *Their Eyes*, Hurston uses food imagery to indicate the intimacy between the characters. Sharing of food helps characters build relationships. As Judy Hood points out in her argument on the role of food in Hurston's works, "[the] preparation of food, the offering of food is seen and understood to be a declaration of attraction, affection; a sign of seduction, satisfaction; a gesture of friendship, companionship. In Janie's world, it mirrors all the appetites of love."[30] Significantly, it is the food exchange between Phoebe and Janie that opens up Janie's narrative of her life. At the beginning of the novel, Phoebe offers Janie mulatto rice as a token of her unchanged friendship. In return, Janie starts telling story which satisfies her best friend's "hungry listening" (10). Conversely, abandoned or ruined food suggests the end of a relationship; when Janie runs away from her first husband Logan Killicks, she leaves breakfast

halfway done to meet Joe Starks: “The sow-belly in the pan needed turning. She flipped it over and shoved it back. A little cold water in the coffee pot to settle it. Turned the hoecake with a plate and then made a little laugh. What was she losing so much time for? A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south” (32). Later when “the spirit of the marriage [to Joe] left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor,” Joe slaps her over the food she somehow fails to cook well (71-72).

By contrast, Tea Cake and Janie get closer to each other through food. His nickname “Tea Cake” itself is suggestive of sweetness and pleasure he can offer. Elbert Mackey notes that a teacake is “an important part of the African-American cooking and social heritage. Their delicious taste evokes fond memories.” [31] The sweet sound of his nickname arouses a good memory within Janie and indicates their future romantic relationship: “Tea Cake! So you sweet as all dat?” (97). A series of food exchanges between Tea Cake and Janie from Coca-Cola, pound cake, and lemonade to hot fish and corn muffins becomes their ritual to develop their relationship. The sensual pleasure evoked by the food they exchange is also directly linked to the famous pear tree imagery which pervades the novel. As she comes to like Tea Cake, Janie wonders if “[h]e could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring” (106). In order to see if he is the right one, Janie keeps taking Tea Cake’s offerings. And when she at last decides to accept him, Janie uses the language of desire that is inseparable from her appetite:

"Tea Cake, Ah don't know 'bout you, but Ah'm hongry, come on let's eat some supper" (107).

Later in the muck scene, Hurston presents a larger sense of community created by food crops. The muck and its fertile soil that grows "all dat cane and string-beans and tomatuhs" (128) provides Janie with a sense of place completely different from anywhere she has been:

> To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too. (129)

Discussing this passage, Hicks points out that "the rich Everglades soil signifies in terms of human sustenance. Beans, sugar cane, tomatoes, and wheat. Indeed, Hurston's depiction of the muck, despite its acquiescence to agribusiness, nonetheless presents a prototypical vision of Eden that includes, not excludes, persons of color."[32] Hicks goes on to note that the food crops of the muck symbolize a new relationship between African Americans and the land which emerged as a result of mobility and migration. Through depicting the migrant workers, Hurston presents a form of labor which, compared to Logan Killicks's land ownership or Joe Starks's entrepreneurship, seems less stable and yet more liberating in that it would not bind workers to land or work ethic and allows them more mobility. It creates a new type of labor community where "[f]olks don't do nothin' . . . but make money and fun and foolishness" (128).

Similarly, *The Yearling* uses food imagery as a symbol of sustenance. The abundance of

food on the Baxters' dinner table Rawlings illustrates in the first chapter exemplifies this:

> Jody heard nothing; saw nothing but his plate. He had never been so hungry in his life, and after a lean winter and slow spring, with food not much more plentiful for the Baxters than for their stock, his mother had cooked a supper good enough for the preacher. There were poke-greens with bits of white bacon buried in them; sand-buggers made of potato and onion and the cooter he had found crawling yesterday; sour orange biscuits and at his mother's elbow the sweet potato pone. He was torn between his desire for more biscuits and another sand-bugger and the knowledge, born of painful experience, that if he ate them, he would suddenly have no room for pone. The Choice was plain.
> "Ma," he said, "kin I have my pone right now?"(12)

The various foods on the table, which are composed of hunted animals and vegetables grown in their fields, vividly illustrate the daily eating habits of the backwoods community. The food represents Rawlings's celebration of simple yet self-sufficient backwoods life. Throughout the novel Rawlings repeatedly describes Jody's hunger and its satisfaction by the abundant food in order to emphasize a sense of happiness and well-being he gets through eating. Food is also closely tied to Jody's sense of security. In his imagination, safety is translated into the amount of food sufficient for every family member, their hunting dogs, livestock, and even wild animals surrounding the clearing:

> There was a squabble for food even in the safety of the clearing. But it seemed to him there was always enough here for every one. There was food and shelter for father and mother and son: for old Cæsar; for Trixie and her spotted calf; for Rip and Julia; for the chickens, clucking and crowing and scratching; for the hogs, grunting in at evening for a cob of corn; for the song-birds in the trees, and the quail nesting under the arbor; for all of these, there was enough at the clearing. (142)

As in *South Moon Under*, Rawlings presents the scrub as an ideal middle space between nature and culture where men and animals keep environmental equilibrium. Satisfaction and the sense of security created by the abundance of food here become a basis of the scrub community that is not just the Baxter family but encompasses the whole natural environment.

While emphasizing the sense of community among the Florida folk at the core of the Depression narratives, both Hurston and Rawlings use natural disasters as the climactic events that inevitably force the protagonists to face the harsh reality of their lives. Literary work published during the Depression years, especially regionalist fiction set in rural farming communities, often depicts natural disaster. Writers of this era often depict farmers who, partly because of insufficient agricultural knowledge, struggle with droughts, storms, and harmful insects (the Joads' unrewarded battle with droughts in *The Grapes of Wrath* provides a good example). With its unpredictability and uncontrollability, natural disaster functions as a metaphor of the Depression in the 1930s narratives. The use of natural disaster also points to the shared conception that what is happening locally is a part of a large, nation-wide devastation. As is clear in Edmund Wilson's renaming of the Depression as "the American earthquake," the Depression narratives constantly evoke the extent to which the economic crash affected the whole nation. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Yearling* reflect the frame of mind of the Depression era that refers both to man's uncontrollability of external condition and to the sense

of widespread disaster. What is in common with the two novels is the way natural disaster, in their cases hurricanes and storms, exposes the depraved condition of the seemingly self-contained folk communities, and forces the protagonists to become aware of a larger and harsher world beyond them. The hurricanes depicted respectively in the two novels thus can be reconsidered as a metaphor for the contemporary economic disaster that brought these narratives of the rural South into the national arena.

The description of the hurricane in *Their Eyes* is partly based on the 1928 hurricane that swept through the West Indies over Florida at West Palm Beach and caused a flood in Lake Okeechobee. The death toll was approximately 2000, but according to William W. Rogers, "[e]ven that figure may have been low because emergency burials in mass graves proved necessary to avoid the possibility of epidemics. Most of the casualties were black seasonal workers, some of them from the Bahamas."[33] The novel's description of the hurricane is often considered symbolical, but as Anna Lillios points out, it is also "grounded in realistic detail."[34] In the novel, the hurricane uncovers the problem of racial oppression pervasive in the 1930s. Though segregation and racial violence were ongoing problems in the South from the pre-Depression years, "[v]ictimized by an omnipotent racial caste system and saddled with the lowest paying jobs, blacks suffered disproportionately from the ravages of the economy's collapse."[35] In Hurston's novel, the hurricane and its aftermath reveal the rigid social and class

structure defined by white power. As is mentioned earlier, the community of black migrant workers on the muck maintains relative equality and the absence of hierarchy, which is even reflected in the description of hurricane victims: "[Tea Cake and Janie] passed a dead man in a sitting position on a hummock, entirely surrounded by wild animals and snakes. Common danger made common friends. Nothing sought a conquest over the other" (164). Yet as Patricia Yaeger's brief yet seminal reading of the novel shows, the world in which "white people seize the only locus of safety" begins to surface after the hurricane.[36] When Lake Okeechobee bursts, the muck workers (most of them blacks) could do nothing but keep walking toward higher places. As two of these helpless refugees, Tea Cake and Janie get to a bridge that looks high and safe enough, only to find out that "[w]hite people had preempted that point of elevation and there was no more room"(164). Later in West Palm Beach, two white men with rifles force Tea Cake to help segregate the hurricane victims for burial. There he sees corpses, coming in trucks incessantly from the muck and other places, piled up in a heap regardless of race: "Some bodies fully dressed, some naked and some in all degrees of dishevelment. Some bodies with calm faces and satisfied hands. Some dead with fighting faces and eyes flung wide open in wonder. Death had found them watching, trying to see beyond seeing" (170). Yet the "headquarters" order Tea Cake and others working on the burial to put white bodies in the coffins while putting black bodies in a huge hall without anything to cover them. "They's mighty

particular how dese dead folks goes tuh judgement," Tea Cake sarcastically comments, "Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de Jim Crow law" (171).

What is ironical about the hurricane scene, however, is that it reveals not only the presence of the oppressive power structure under segregation but also the extent to which Tea Cake himself is involved in such a structure. The arrival of hurricane exposes the African American workers' sense of hierarchy imposed on the Seminole Indians and the Bahamian workers. When the northward move of the Seminoles alarms the migrant workers, a Bahamian boy Lias comes to Tea Cake and Janie to give a warning. Tea Cake dismisses his idea based on the fact that whites on the muck have not evacuated yet: "You ain't seen de bossman go up, is yuh? Well all right now. Man, de money's too good on the muck. . . . Indians don't know much uh nothin', tuh tell de truth. Else dey'd own dis country still. De white folks ain't gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous" (156). Ironically enough, here Tea Cake inadvertently justifies the white oppression which would be imposed upon himself when the time for burial comes. Rather than promoting solidarity with the Bahamians and Seminoles, Tea Cake reinforces the hierarchy among non-white residents on the muck by discrediting their warning and makes a decision to stay on the muck until the lake floods and it gets too late "for asking the white folks what to look for" (159).

Tea Cake and Janie survive the storm, yet they encounter a "massive built dog" with

"stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge" (165-66). Seeing the dog trying to attack Janie, Tea Cake fights him with his switchblade and gets bitten. The dog's eyes filled with hatred terrifies Janie: "He wuzn't nothin' all over but pure hate. Wonder where he come from?"(167). To borrow Adam Gussow's expression, the "mad dog" emerges as "the symbolic embodiment of white racism" that would prove fatal.[37] Tea Cake eventually gets infected with rabies, and when its latent virus reaches his brain, he is transformed into a paranoid and resorts to violence against his beloved wife. He develops the delusion that Janie will leave him and turns a gun on her. Seeing that Tea Cake is helplessly possessed by racial and class hatred and becomes the "fiend" who "must kill," Janie shoots him (184). It should be noted, however, that Tea Cake's tragedy started well before his fatal encounter with the rabid dog. Earlier in the novel, Tea Cake has shown strong hostility against Mrs. Turner, an eating-house owner on the muck who befriends Janie because of her light skin and long straight hair. Being fairly light-skinned herself, she tells Janie, "Ah can't stand black niggers. . . . Us oughta class off" (141). While Janie explains race relations in terms of economic inequality—"Ah don't figger [de white folks] even gointuh want us for comp'ny. We'se too poor"—Mrs. Turner understands it though essential racial difference—"Tain't de poorness, it's de color and de features"—and tries to persuade Janie into meeting her brother with "dead straight hair" (141-42). Overhearing their conversation, Tea Cake frowns at Mrs.

Turner's discriminating attitude, but in fact he too is quite conscious about Janie's difference from other community members: "Mah Janie is uh high time woman and useter things. Ah didn't git her outa de middle uh de road. Ah got her outa uh big fine house. Right now she got money enough in de bank tuh buy up dese ziggaboos and give 'em away" (148). Tea Cake is strongly attracted by Janie's difference, but at the same time, he is anxious about possessing a "high time woman" who, according to people like Mrs. Turner he does not deserve to possess. Therefore his jealous-ridden violence against Janie is his desperate attempt to cast this anxiety aside and reassert his ownership, showing both Janie and Mrs. Turner "who is boss" (148). Yet, his use of the word "boss" paradoxically hints at his inability to articulate his relationship with Janie without a slave-master metaphor, which further reveals the extent to which he is trapped in a racist class system. The more he tries to liberate himself from this system, the more possessive and violent he becomes toward Janie, and it only gets worse when he literally gets possessed by rabies. In short, Tea Cake's irresolvable inner contradiction explodes in a form of pure hatred with the horrible symptoms of rabies, but it has latently existed and been nurtured in the segregated Southern space in which he has both seen and practiced oppression and violence. As Gussow observes, this is the cultural condition of Southern blacks created at least partially through racial bitterness, and its predicament lies in the fact that "it cannot help but reflect, and become entangled in a larger economy of white racist violence that the jook tries to provide a

relative safe haven *against*."[38] While emphasizing the migrant workers' effort for community building through the jook folk practice ("[d]ancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour") and food exchange, Hurston reveals the extent to which the folk community is still enmeshed in the structure of racial oppression. The life and death of Tea Cake tragically embody such an innate ambivalence that lies in the Southern black folk culture.

The natural disaster depicted in *The Yearling* is based on the 1871 storm which caused severe damage to the Florida scrub. Rawlings describes how Jody's sense of security is destroyed by the storm and the subsequent flood. Before the hurricane hits the scrub, Jody innocently expresses his excitement about the storm: "He loved storm. It swept in magnificently and shut the family inside in a great coziness. Work was impossible and they sat about together and the rain drummed on the hand-hewn shingles. His mother was good-natured and made him syrup candy, and penny told tales" (223). Seeing the boy not understanding the truly menacing aspect of hurricane, Penny sharply warns him. After the storm, the family faces the various damages done by it: the heavy rain ruins the crops on Baxter Island, and the wild creatures suffer from a severe plague which Penny calls "the black tongue," possible caused by "the flood water full o'dead things, has got pizenous" (268). As the result of plague, prey becomes scarce and a group of wild wolves attack the Baxters' livestock. For the first time in his life, nature and its disastrous power appear to Jody as something that is uncontrollable and can do harm: "He

decided that that the world was a very peculiar place to live in. Things happened that had no reason and made no sense and did harm, like the bears and panthers, but without their excuse of hunger. He did not approve" (269).

Around the time the storm hits the scrub, Ora begins to play a significant role in the novel on behalf of Penny, whose health is gradually declining because of long-time hard work and the aftereffects of snakebite. When Penny expresses his reluctance to poison the starved wolves as the Forresters planned, Ora rebuts him: "Ezra Baxter, if your heart was to be cut out, hit'd not be meat. Hit'd be purely butter, You're a plague-taked ninny, that's what you be. Leave them wild things kill our stock cold-blooded, and us starve to death. But no, you're too tender to give 'em a belly-ache" (287). This is the moment when "[i]t seemed to Jody that for once his father was wrong." Even though Penny tries to persuade them, saying, "Pizen jest someway ain't natural. Tain't fair fightin'," Jody, partly because he wants to protect his pet deer from the predators, and partly because of his mother's unusual vocality, begins to realize that perhaps humans sometimes have to go against what is supposed to be natural when their own survival is at stake.

As Lillios points out, Ora "is the symbol of the harsh reality that the safety of home is an illusion."[39] Time and again she reminds Jody the possible dangers lingering in the scrub which are often personified in the novel as "ol' Death" and "ol' Starvation." She knows death is

something really close to their lives through her experience of recurrent child loss:

> The babies were frail, and almost as fast as they came, they sickened and died. Penny had buried them one by one in a cleared place among the black-jack oaks, where the poor loose soil made the digging easier. The plot grew in size until he was compelled to fence it in against the vandalism of hogs and pole-cats. He had carved little wooden tombstones for all. He could picture them now, standing white and straight in the moonlight. Some of them had names: Ezra Jr.; Little Ora; William T. The other bore only such legends as Baby Baxter, aged 3 mos. 6 days. On one, Penny had scratched laboriously with his pocket-knife, "She never saw the light of day" (20).

Curiously enough, these events are mostly narrated from Penny's perspective. Though later on the same page Rawlings relates Ora's emotional detachment from Jody to these child-loss experiences, the impact of the repeated loss to the mother remains basically unknown because she keeps her silence on the matter. Unlike Penny who has a talent for storytelling, Ora does not articulate her life experiences and weave them into stories that would entertain others, but her silence itself is a reminder of the unbearable reality which is usually eclipsed by the male act of storytelling.

After the storm, Flag, having grown up to be a yearling, starts troubling the family; he knocks over the dish of peas on the table and tramples on the field, eating what little corn the family is left with and destroying the seed-beds. When Flag jumps over the fence Jody built to keep him out, Penny tells the boy to kill Flag because "[w]e cain't all go hungry," which echoes Ora's constant warning about the scarcity of food (402). Jody wanders with Flag, just unable to shoot him. When he finally comes back home with the deer, he sneaks into the smokehouse looking

for something to eat as if he were a wild animal stealing human food, and suddenly realizes hunger does exist in the scrub: “He felt like a stranger and a thief. This was the way the wolves felt, he thought, and the wild-cats and the panthers and all the varmints, looking in at the clearing with big eyes and empty bellies” (408). Next day, seeing the boy bringing Flag back, Ora shoots the deer but fails to kill him instantly. Cursing her and Penny, Jody follows the dying deer and kills him.

After killing the deer, Jody does not go home and wanders off, which is his first movement away from home. Even though he cannot forgive her mother, Jody gradually realizes that she did what she needed to do. He sees how the world outside the Baxter island is full of danger, next to “ol’ Death” and “ol’ Starvation.” Drifting around the scrub and then the river for days trying to get to Boston where Oliver lives, the boy suffers from the acute pangs of hunger. While paddling up north with a small boat, he has hallucinations about the varieties of food on the Baxter table. This is the moment he finally faces the “ol’ Starvation” about which his mother has been warning him constantly: “This, then, was hunger. This was what his mother had said, ‘We’ll all go hungry.’ He had laughed, for he had thought he had known hunger, and it was faintly pleasant. He knew now that it had been only appetite. This was another thing. The thing was terrifying. It had a great maw to envelop him and claws that raked across his vitals” (418). While Penny embodies dignity and the heroic individuality that Rawlings had

found in the Florida folk culture, Ora complementarily reminds readers of hunger that can cause actual damage to one's body and psyche, and even the possible death brought by it. The increasing emphasis on Ora's role at the end of the novel could be attributed to Rawlings's shifting conception regarding her representation of women. In her introduction to the novel, she confesses that she had originally planned to describe Ora as the least likable character, condensed into "a picture of all nagging wives and mothers."[40] The published version of the novel treats Ora in a much kinder manner, which Lillios explains as an "accurate reflection of Rawlings's respect and admiration for women, who, when faced with adversity, struggle to be strong."[41] Whereas Rawlings's portrait of Ora is definitely less sympathetic compared to that of Penny, she did not simply diminish her presence in the plot as is often said, and in fact gave her an important role at the climax of the novel, that is, shooting Flag.

Significantly, in both *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling*, women shoot their objects of love. While the male characters' wishes get crushed under the unbearable weight of reality and their "dreams mocked to death," these women, Ora and Janie, seem to know how not to alienate "the dream" from "the truth," and how to "act and do things accordingly" (*Their Eyes* 1). By firing their guns, Ora and Janie let the harsh reality of race, class, and poverty rise to the surface of the folk communities. Janie's shooting of Tea Cake and the subsequent court scene reveal the racial bitterness existing within the seemingly ideal working-class community on the muck.

While Janie has no choice but to explain what happened to the white juries, she feels the hostility of blacks hearing the trial: “They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks” (186). And after she was given the verdict of not guilty, she again hears the men saying, “Well, you know whut dey say ‘un white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth.’ Dey do as dey please” (189). Likewise, Ora’s shooting of Flag makes Jody aware of Penny’s declining health (he cannot stand up and take over when she misses the shot), which also signals he is not “inviolable” (392) anymore like the boy used to imagine him to be. While Penny and Tea Cake present an affirmative aspect of Southern rural communities through their participation in cultural rituals, Janie and Ora exposes their actualities. In this sense, the female characters of *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* add a complex self-critique to the novels’ representations of the Southern rural folk cultures.

In the final chapter of *The Yearling* in which Jody finally comes home and becomes reunited with Penny, Rawlings ultimately brings the narrative focus of the novel back to the father-son relationship. Ora, who is supposed to have gone to the Forresters to trade, is completely absent from this scene of reconciliation. The materiality of hunger Ora has indicated throughout the novel is ultimately displaced by Penny’s moral lesson, which stresses not a struggle against “ol’ Death” and “ol’ Starvation” but rather personal dignity and endurance in the face of poverty and

general hardship of life: "Life knocks a man down and he gits up and it knocks him down agin. . . . What's he to do then? What's he to do when he gits knocked down? Why, take it for his share and go on" (426). A Similar displacement is seen in the concluding passages of *Their Eyes* in which Janie is alone in her room weaving the story about her descent to the muck folk culture. As shown in the muck workers' apparent hostility toward her in the white-dominated court scene, Tea Cake's death leads the muck to lose its communal significance for Janie. The only possible way for her to endure this unbearable death is literally and figuratively "fixing Tea Cake up" (185), and going back up to a more bourgeois and individualistic Eatonville she had left behind. There the threatening materiality of Tea Cake's death—"the gun, and the bloody body and the courthouse"—is displaced by the image of him "prancing around her . . . with the sun for a shawl" (192-93). Janie thus decontextualizes Tea Cake's death from the contemporary racist climate, in which he lived and died, and retrieves him and the folk culture represented by him solely in her individual consciousness. As a result, the novel ultimately remains rather elusive about the problem of racism in the 1930s which the hurricane scene exposed earlier. As Duck points out, "in celebrating Janie's ability to preserve a folkloric selfhood, the conclusion of the novel evades a problem that the narrative, nonetheless, does not deny: however much the citizens of Eatonville and the workers on the muck may regret the decreasing prevalence of folkloric practice in their own communities, they suffer much more directly from the abuses that

they encounter through their labor in neighboring white communities" (143).

The absence and the displacement of Ora and Tea Cake at the end of the two novels could also be attributed to the bourgeois / individualistic nature of the bildungsroman as a literary genre. Barbara Foley discusses that the bildungsroman "is based upon a largely a priori conception of individual identity. . . . Even when the bildungsroman focuses on society as well as subjectivity, it presupposes a 'character' possessing intrinsic potentialities who enters an 'environment' that either fulfills or restricts his/her individuality."[42] Both *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* present the protagonists' initiation to a larger social unit that promotes their psychological development. More specifically, the muck and the world outside Baxter Island in which "ol' Death" and "ol' Starvation" (and Tea Cake and Ora as the mediators of such world) exist increase Janie's and Jody's social awareness. And yet, while stressing the function of community in constructing selfhood, the two novels end with the protagonist's return to an individual space. In *Their Eyes*, Janie returns to Eatonville to tell her life story to Phoebe, which is often read as an act of female bonding through storytelling. It should be noted, however, that Janie's ultimate conclusion to the story rather encourages individual solution: "you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" (192). In *The Yearling*, Jody's adventure in the river at first seems to prepare his incorporation

into a larger social unit. As Rieger argues, "[Jody's] hunger connects his home to the world at large, disabusing him of his childhood conception that 'Baxter Island was an island of plenty in a hungry sea.'"[43] Yet at the same time, he comes to the conclusion that "[t]here was no reality but the clearing" (421), which ultimately leads to his return home. Rawlings makes clear that Jody's entry into the adult world depends on his acceptance of loneliness, rather than on a shared sense of community. His relationship with Flag, that is "betwixt and between" (380), has prolonged his individuation. Recognizing that "[h]e would be lonely all his life. But a man took it for his share and went on" (428), which echoing his father's statement, he decides to live and farm in the clearing. The ending of the two novels that similarly emphasizes the protagonist's isolation and introspection thus indicates the difficulty Hurston and Rawlings had in reconciling conventional narrative form of bildungsroman with the contemporary context of economic crisis. Richard H. Pells observes that "in a period dominated by the issues of economics and ideology, the fiction of the 1930s seemed strongest when it dealt not with the outer world but with inner emotions and states of mind. But given the difficulties which radical intellectuals and activists encountered in transforming America's cultural and political life, it was not surprising that their call for social significance in art should lead instead to a literature of private sensibility."[44] The introspective mode at the ending of *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling* provides an example for this "literature of private sensibility," which, reflecting the 1930s

writers' commitment to and the consequent frustration with radicalism and communalism, marks their gesture toward a more traditional form of individualism.

In presenting the Southern rural folk, both Hurston and Rawlings definitely shared the Depression-era America's growing concern for working-class cultures in the margin of a modern nation; yet their crucial focus was less on simply presenting the group identity of Florida folk communities. As Deborah G. Plant has argued, Hurston considered "the individual, not the group, as the basic social and political unit and the point of origin for sociopolitical change."[45] Rawlings too kept something similar in mind when she described her Cross Creek community as a group of "individualists" with "mental nonconformity" (*Cross Creek*, 2). While both writers expressed their concern for the plight of Southern rural folk, because of their individualistic tendency, they did not go so far as to present a collective political solution for such a community. As writers constantly traveling and repositioning themselves between the national literary culture and the Southern folk culture, they were more interested in how they, as individuals, could incorporate the folk cultures with which they had become acquainted into their novels and narrate these folk cultures' stories in a way that would be accessible to broader (or one could say more middle-class) readership.

Through Janie Crawford's and Jody Baxter's narratives of individuation, Hurston and Rawlings tell about the shifting condition of Southern folk cultures that attracted national

attention during the 1930s, as well as explore their narrating selves which are on the constant move in and out of these cultures. The two writers' ultimate stress on individual solutions at the end of the novels is led less by their lack of political concern as usually considered than by their complex process of self-positioning as writers who were well aware of the national concern on folk culture yet tried to capture it through the regional. *Their Eyes* and *The Yearling*, Hurston's and Rawlings's Depression narratives, reveal the dynamics between the national and the Southern in the literary culture which drew the two authors and other contemporary writers to the South during the 1930s.

Notes

[1] A portion of this chapters is published as Kyoko Shoji Hearn, "Writing Invisible Florida: Zora Neale Hurston, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and the Literary Culture of the 1930s," *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 18 (2010), 53-76.

[2] Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 98. For the radical literature of this period, see also Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

[3] Pells, 101.

[4] Samuel I. Rosenman, comp., *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (13 vols. New York: Random House, 1938-1950) VII, 464-6.

[5] For a detailed account on the NEC report and the responses to it, see Steve Davis, "The South as the Nation's No.1 Economic Problem: the NEC report of 1938," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 62.2 (Summer 1978), 119-132. For the history of the South during the Depression and the New Deal, see also Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994) and Kenneth J. Bindas, *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South* (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2009).

[6] Leigh Ann Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, segregation and U.S. nationalism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 80.

[7] Bigelow, 72.

[8] A rare exception is Sondra Guttman, "No Tomorrow in the Man: Uncovering the Great Depression in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Arizona Quarterly* 63.3 (2007), 91-117. See also Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 134-141, whose brief discussion on *Their Eyes* touches on how Hurston shares the other 1930 female writers' concern in her critique on romance mode, and William Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[9] Bigelow and Monti, 49.

[10] Bigelow and Monti, 164.

[11] See Richard Wright's and Hurston's reviews on each other's works in Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears," *New Masses* 5 (October 1937), 22, 25, Rpt. in Gloria L. Cronin, ed, *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: G.K.Hall, 1998), 75-76, and Hurston, "Stories of Conflict," *Saturday Review of Literature* 2 (April 1938), 32. For the Hurston/Wright divide see Guttman 93-95, and also Maxwell 153-178, which deconstructs this divide by pointing out the two writers' usually unexplored similarity.

[12] Wright, 76.

[13] Hurston, 32.

[14] Hazel Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 168-188. Carby states that Hurston's representation of the Southern rural black folk in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* "is not only a discursive displacement of the historical and cultural transformation of migration, but also a creation of a folk who are outside of history" (172). According to Carby, Hurston dismisses the contemporary impact of the Great Migration and the subsequent development of urban black working-class culture, constructing only "a discourse of nostalgia for a rural community" (173). Carby's critique of Hurston is convincing as far as the emerging urban black culture is

concerned, but more recent studies have shown that Hurston's representation of Southern rural black folk has much more historical accuracy than originally considered. For recent counterarguments to Carby, see Bone 753-58, Guttman 95.

[15] Maxwell, 165-166.

[16] Bigelow, 70-71.

[17] Howard Odum, "Of New Social Frontiers in Contemporary Society," *Frontiers of Democracy* 6.47 (October 1939), 16.

[18]Significantly, during the 1930s Hurston joined WPA work both in New York and Florida. In 1935, she got a "dramatic coach" position on the Federal Theatre Project in Harlem, and later in 1938, she joined the Federal Writers Project for the state of Florida (Hemenway 223, 251). For Hurston's FWP work in Florida, see Pamela Bordelon, ed, *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers Project* (New York: Norton, 1999), 13-49.

[19] David G. Nicholls, "Migrant Labor, Folklore, and Resistance in Hurston's Polk County: Reframing *Mules and Men*," *African American Review* 33(1999), 469. For Hurston's representation of migrant workers' camp see also Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 128-159.

[20] Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner's, 2003), 276, John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Viking, 2010), 82-83.

[21] Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995), 830-846.

[22]Scott Hicks, "Rethinking King Cotton: George W. Lee, Zora Neale Hurston, and Global/Local Revisions of the South and the Nation," *Arizona Quarterly* 65.4 (Winter 2009), 63-91, esp., 82. See also Bone, 765-774, for discussion on Hurston's awareness of circum-Caribbean migration.

[23] See Carol Anita Tarr, "In 'Mystic Company': The Master Storyteller in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *The Yearling*." *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 2 (1989-90): 23-34.

[24] John Lowe, *Jump at the Sun* (University of Illinois Press, 1996), 239.

[25] Tarr, "In 'Mystic Company,'" 24-25.

[26] See Lillios, "The Death of Flag," 14-16, and Rhonda Morris, "Engendering Fictions: Rawlings and a Female Tradition of Southern Writing," *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 7 (1996), 30.

[27] For Penny's and Jody's masculinity, see Lynne Vallone, "Gender and Mothering in *The Yearling*," *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 2 (1989-90), 35-56, and Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, esp., 72-75.

[28] Vallone, 45.

[29] Jones, Gavin. *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 110.

[30] Hood, Judy. "Born With a Skillet in Her Hands." *Southern Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter 2007), 78.

[31] Elbert Mackey, "The Tea Cake Project," n.d., http://www.teacakeproject.com/index.html.

[32] Hicks, 79.

[33] William W Rogers, "Fortune and Misfortune: The Paradoxical Twenties," in *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 297. For Hurston's representation of the storm, see Bone, 765-767, Anna Lillios, "The Monstropolous beast: The Hurricane in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Southern Quarterly* 36.3 (Spring 1998), 89-93, and Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstruction Southern Women's Writing 1930-1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Pres, 2000), 16-17 and 22-23. See also Keith Cartwright, "To Walk with the Storm": Oya as the Transformative 'I' of Zora Neale Hurston's Afro-Atlantic Callings," *American Literature* 40.6 (December 2006), 741-767, which relates the novel's event to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

[34] Lillios, "The Monstropopus Beast," 89,

[35] Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 103.

[36] Yaeger, 22.

[37] Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 268.

[38] Gussow, 269.

[39] Lillios, "The Death of Flag," 24.

[40] Rawlings, Introduction, xiii.

[41] Lillios, "The Death of Flag," 16.

[42] Foley, 323.

[43] Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 76.

[44] Pells, 226-27.

[45] Deborah G. Plant, *Every Tub Must Sit* on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1995), 33.

CHAPTER THREE

Self as Contact Zone: Autobiographical Writings

It is an interesting coincidence that Hurston and Rawlings published their autobiographical works, *Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Cross Creek* respectively, in 1942. The two autobiographies have a similar significance in Hurston's and Rawlings's literary career in that they were written following the publication of their masterpieces, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Yearling*. Both writers were in need of a fresh restart and, as Anna Lillios points out, "were trying to redefine their self-identities" when they wrote their autobiographies.[1]

Dust Tracks and *Cross Creek* are marked by their pervasive sense of place. Reading *Cross Creek* in 1943, Hurston sent an enthusiastic letter to Rawlings in which she calls her "my sister" and tells her how similar the way they "look at plants and animals and people" is.[2] Having just published her autobiography the year before, Hurston must have been impressed by the extent to which the two autobiographies resemble each other, especially in the way they associate the place they live with their identity. The identification of self and community itself is a representative trait of Southern autobiography.[3] Many Southern autobiographers, male and female, explore their inner selves through their relationship with particular geographical spaces, e.g., their hometown, home state, or the South itself. While American autobiographical

convention since Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* has created an extremely individualistic narratives about self, the South, or "Southernness," as Peggy Whitman Prenshaw precisely sums up, "disposes both male and female autobiographers to experience and express a relational rather than an individualistic sense of self."[4] Hurston and Rawlings are no exception to this tendency in their premise that the Southern communities to which they belong have shaped their identities. Both of them open their autobiographies by telling about the mythic Southern communities with which they deeply identify. In the opening passage of *Cross Creek*, Rawlings describes the location and the people of her community: "Cross Creek is a bend in a country road, by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove, nine miles east of a turpentine still and on the other sides we do not count distance at all, for the two lakes and the broad marshes create an infinite space between us and the horizon. We are five white families; 'Old Boss' Brice, the Glissons, the Mackays and the Bernie Basses; and two colored families, Henry Woodward and the Mickenses" (9). As is often mentioned, Rawlings's repetitive use of the pronoun "we" here indicates how significantly her identification with the Creek influences her autobiographical self. Rather than describing herself as a writer/outsider observing Cross Creek, Rawlings chooses to present herself as a part of the community.

The role of group identification in self-construction is equally evident in Hurston's

autobiography. Hurston's career as a literary artist and anthropologist started with her rediscovery of her hometown Eatonville, Florida, supposedly one of the first all-black towns in the country. Thus it is no wonder that Hurston opens *Dust Tracks* by stating, "you will have to know something about the time and place where I came from, in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life" (1). Recapitulating the emphasis on the communal identity in the African-American autobiographical tradition since the time of slave narrative, Hurston describes the history of Eatonville: "I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America" (Ibid). The idiosyncratic history of Eatonville considerably influences Hurston's self image. The strong, independent female self which she attempts to create throughout her autobiography has a firm basis on the "pure Negro town," where blacks were politically and economically independent and contemporary racism was a far cry.

It should be noted, however, that Hurston's and Rawlings's autobiographical selves often seem not just Southern but also American, in their strong affirmation of individualism. The individualistic tendency of *Dust Tracks* and *Cross Creek* could be attributable to the two authors'

continuous contact with national culture which discussed in the last chapter, as well as their exceptionally successful career as female writers in the early 1940s.[5] In a sense, the two autobiographies reflect the authors' own preference for independent way of life and their readiness to accept solitude if needed. The first chapter of Rawlings's autobiography is a case in point. While Rawlings emphasizes the communal aspect of the life in Cross Creek, she also mentions the Creek residents' strong predilection for isolation and how they in turn avoid violating the privacy of others, while willing to help each other in time of crisis:

> We know one another. Our knowledge is a strange kind, totally without intimacy, for we go our separate ways and meet only when new fences are strung, or some one's stock intrudes on another, or when one of us is ill or in trouble, or when woods fires come too close, or when a shooting occurs and we must agree who is right and who must go to jail, or when the weather is so preposterous, either as to heat or cold, or rain or drought, that we seek out excuses to be together, to talk together about the common menace. . . . We do injustice among ourselves, and another of us, not directly involved, usually manages to put in a judicious word on the side of right. The one who is wrong usually ends by admitting it, and all is well again, and I have done my share of the eating of humble pie. And when the great enemies of Old Starvation and Old Death come skulking down on us, we put up a united front and fight them side by side, as we fight the woods fires. (12)

Rawlings describes Cross Creek as a small self-governing body in which community members share policing, judicial, and mutual-aid responsibilities. Yet at the same time she stresses how there is a strange lack of intimacy between the residents and how they allow themselves and others in the community to "go [their] separate ways." The Creek people's preference for "a certain remoteness from urban confusion" (11) certainly matched Rawlings's own. As I

discussed in Chapter One, in her early years in Cross Creek, Rawlings had been struggling to achieve economic and psychological independence as a female writer and secure herself an isolated and quiet environment for writing. The small community of the Creek and its atmosphere not only gave her materials for her literary work but also met her demand for independence perfectly, which was probably why she decided to stay after her divorce with her husband. In a highly paradoxical way, Rawlings found in the Southern rural community something that fits her modern urban individualism and her tendency to go against accepted social standards. Or more precisely, Rawlings reinterpreted the Creek people's non-conformism through her urbanite-individualistic perspective and reinvented Cross Creek as a place that offers a refuge for a single, female writer like her.

Hurston too dramatizes her autobiographical self as one that is inevitably in conflict with communal interests; she describes her distance from the community, her individualistic sense of value at odds with the collective one, the loss or dispersion of family, and so on. Her embracement of individualism also refers to a significant shift in the meaning of community among contemporary Southern blacks that had taken place at the time the autobiography was written. As mentioned before, Hurston opens *Dust Tracks* with the history of Eatonville as an all-black community which is the basis of her cultural identity. According to the author, the earliest stage of the town's development began by the settlement of black migrants around

Maitland area where they found “profitable employment” by white employers. Hurston describes how black migrants surged in, looking for a new economic opportunity and less oppressive atmosphere: “No more back-bending over rows of cotton; no more fear of the fury of the Reconstruction. Good pay, sympathetic White folks and cheap land, soft to the touch of a plow. Relatives and friends were sent for” (5). As the black population in Maitland increased, they began to participate in politics and as a result, a black man Tony Taylor was elected as Maitland’s first mayor. Blacks thus gained a certain extent of power in municipal government, which convinced Joe Clarke, the mythic founder of Eatonville, that they should independently build an all-black town. With the aid of Maitland whites, Eatonville was successfully incorporated on August 18, 1886 (6).

Lillios’ study on the autobiography, however, reveals a very different version of the town history. The Eatonville town booklet published in 1987 she quotes states:

> This all-Black community was an outgrowth of the white municipality of Maitland which had been incorporated three years earlier in 1884. It appears that the all-white community of Maitland found the Blacks and the area they inhabited to be somewhat ‘unsightly’ and wanted them to move to another area. It was at this time that one Josiah Eaton, who had helped established Maitland, offered to sell the Blacks a rather large parcel of land one mile to the west of Maitland.[6]

As seen here, Hurston apparently revised some historical facts in her illustration of the town’s mythic origin. The first mayor of Maitland was not the black Tony Taylor as she described but Josiah Eaton. The town’s founding date is wrong too.[7] Hurston also seems to overemphasize

the sympathetic attitude of whites toward the black residents of Eatonville: "White Maitland and Negro Eatonville, have lived side by side for fifty-five years without a single instance of enmity" (6). A statement like this seems to give justification to the doctrine of "separate but equal" than showing the cordial relations between whites and blacks as she intended to. Hurston's distortion of town history and her evasiveness about race question have negatively influenced the critical evaluation of the autobiography.[8] Yet Hurston's problematic revision of historical facts about Southern black life shows the extent to which she attempted to create an autobiographical self liberated from the burden of the Southern past. Nellie McKay points out that *Dust Tracks* is a "transitional text, in which Hurston makes a radical break with rhetorical patterns in the slave narrative and opens the way for even bolder experiments with form and content."[9] *Dust Tracks* does follows the basic settings of the slave narrative in that it describes the autobiographer's south-to-north movement, yet what is truly radical about the autobiography is that it neither describes the South as a place that incites only the memory of oppression. Hurston tries to picture an alternative life for herself and other Southern blacks that is not necessarily defined by economic dependence, racial inequality, and the fear of violence. Just as she did earlier in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she presents in *Dust Tracks* a modern, individual black self which is sometimes at odds with its community, yet whose isolation and mobility paradoxically lead to the liberation from the history of oppression.

Significantly, Hurston opens the autobiography by recapitulating the history of Florida as a "bloody country since the mid-seventeen hundreds. Spanish, French, English, Indian, and American blood had been bountifully shed" (2). According to Hurston, runaway Negro slaves became a center of "contact" in the war between white planters and Native Americans. They joined the ranks of Native Americans and eventually became unable to "be settled satisfactorily to either side. Who was an Indian and who was a Negro? The whites contended all who had negro blood. The Indians contended all who spoke their language belonged to the tribe. Since it was an easy matter to teach a slave to speak enough of the language to pass in a short time, the question could never be settled. So the wars went on" (Ibid). Hurston describes how easily the slaves cross racial boundaries and change their identity through acquiring a language other than their own, which might embody the model of identity politics she intends to embrace in her autobiography. Through representing the slaves' changing roles and identities in the midst of cultural confrontation and negotiation, she brings to light a heterogynous picture of Southern space that disproves the conventional image of the South completely divided, segregated, and rigidly circumscribed.

No more back-bending over rows of cotton. Hurston shows how the perspective of individualistic and mobile black self changes the Southern landscape. This individual I/eye is also the perspective of a traveler defined by the free movement in and out of the South.

Hurston's and Rawlings's experience of traveling within and beyond Southern communities enabled them to capture the South, through which they represent themselves, not as a space defined solely by oppression and rigid social stratification but as a contact zone where people with disparate cultural backgrounds meet and interact with each other. The Southern black self represented by Hurston is marked by its mobility and subjectivity. *Dust Tracks* describes the contemporary Southern space in which a black subject (Hurston herself) is no longer an obscure background of white world. Being both "the waif of Eatonville" and a university-educated anthropologist, she actively works as a contact between the South and the world beyond and comes to terms with people with differing ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds. Rawlings too sheds light on a relatively uncharted territory in the South; the rural Creek community where poor whites and blacks lived adjacently and though not always in an amicable manner, interacted and negotiated with each other. As the title of each autobiography—*Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Cross Creek*—clearly suggests, Hurston and Rawlings focused on different aspects of traveling in their autobiographies, that is, wandering and relocation respectively. Nevertheless, they similarly depict the unexpectedly heterogeneous picture of the South and in doing so reconstruct a fluid Southern identity that is closely tied to their sense of place.

In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston describes herself as a little girl who has an "inside urge to go places" (22), which one time even causes her to go and "see the end of the world" (27). The rhetoric of

traveling—comparing life to travel and self to a traveler—is of course not rare at all in autobiographical writing in general, yet it should be noted that Hurston frequently uses that rhetoric for pointing to the shifting cultural role of Southern blacks in the early twentieth century. Throughout her autobiography, Hurston presents herself as a black traveler moving within and beyond Southern spaces, an embodiment of a modern, individual self moving independently not only beyond geographical boundaries but also beyond social and cultural ones. The famous gate post scene in the chapter titled "Inside Search" is a germane example:

> I used to take a seat on top of the gate post and watch the world go by. One way to Orlando ran past my house, so the carriages and cars would pass before me. The movement made me glad to see it. Often the white travelers would hail me, but more often I hailed them, and asked, "Don't you want me to go a piece of the way with you?" (33-34)

The situation itself seems quite similar to the one Franz Fanon described in *Black Skin, White Masks*, marked by "the white gaze" objectifying and othering a black subject.[10] What is striking about this passage, however, is the way Hurston rewrites this classic (post)colonial encounter between white travelers and "natives" in rural south from a perspective of a Southern black subject which is herself. Young Zora, who might have been a classic picturesque "pickaninny," a passive object of gaze who smiles and waves at the passing cars here in fact gazes back and opens up a conversation, as if she was playfully suggesting that she could also be a traveler: "Don't you want me to go a piece of the way with you?" Zora's boldness upsets her grandmother who remembers slavery and makes her exclaim, "Git down offa dat gate post!

You li'l sow, you! Git down! Setting up dere looking dem white folks right in de face! . . . And don't stand in dat doorway gazing out at 'em neither. Youse too brazen to live long" (34).[11] Nevertheless, the girl "kept right on gazing at them, and 'going a little piece of way' wherever [she] could make it" because "[t]he village seemed dull to me most of the time. If the village was singing a chorus, I must have missed the tune" (Ibid.). What this short anecdote reveals is that by the time Hurston wrote her autobiography the form and the meaning of traveling had changed and been diversified so much that whites were no longer the only people that could afford its privilege. In other words, through young Zora's perspective she reverses the colonial gaze of white travelers and redefines traveling for Southern black subjects in the early twentieth century as something other than forced relocation.

It is significant that the beginning of Zora's traveling is prompted by her mother's death. Hurston mentions this in the chapter titled "Wandering" in which she retells Lucy's death in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as a factual account: "That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as in spirit. Mama died at sundown and changed a world. That is, the world which had been built out of her body and her heart. Even the physical aspects fell apart with a suddenness that was startling" (67). Fran□oise Lionett discusses that "the death of the mother and subsequent dispersion of the siblings echo the collective memory of her people's separation from Africa-as-mother and their ineluctable

diaspora" (112).[12] According to Lionett, the folk custom of veiling the mirror originated from the patriarchal tradition that severs the mother-daughter tie, and Hurston's recount of the event is her "painstaking effort" to retrieve that tie and "to be the voice of [the] occluded past, to fill the void of collective memory" (118). Lionett's reading has been significant in reconsidering Hurston as a writer/anthropologist who, from a female perspective, records, rewrites and speaks for the collective past of Southern black communities on the verge of oblivion. It should be also noted, however, that in *Dust Tracks*, Hurston also revisits the problem of fatherhood in terms of individualism. As discussed in Chapter One, in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston critiques John, modeled after her father, as a modern man whose urge to travel and upward social mobility result in the alienation from nature often linked with femininity. In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston again puts a great emphasis on how the presence (and the absence) of her mother influenced her life, yet significantly, she also mentions how she inherited her father's "inside urge to go places":

> [My mother] used to say that she believed a woman who was an enemy of hers had sprinkled 'travel dust' around the doorstep the day I was born. That was the only explanation she could find. I don't know why it never occurred to her to connect my tendency with my father, who didn't have a thing on his mind but this town and the next one. That should have given her a sort of hint. Some children are just bound to take after their fathers in spite of women's prayers (23).

That Hurston set her father's tendency to wander, his social mobility, and individualistic predisposition at the basis of her self-construction suggests that she finally achieved an

emotional reconciliation with the father who failed his children after his wife's death and broke up the family.

The emphasis on mobility and individualism could also be linked with a shift in Hurston's political and philosophical standpoint at the time she was writing her autobiography. Throughout the originally unpublished chapter "Seeing the World as It Is," Hurston praises the "the richer gift of individualism" which she received instead of "the solace of easy generalization": "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" (248). She fiercely attacks the idea of "Race Pride" and "Race Solidarity," terms in popular use since Marcus Garvey's black separatist movement in the 1920s, and asserts that "[w]hat the world is crying and dying for at this moment is less race consciousness" (250). To her, race "is a loose classification of physical characteristics" and "tells nothing about the insides of people" (249).[13] And it is not only race that she denounces. She also presents nation as a totalizing concept that could be misused against individual values: "I know that goodness, ability, vice, and dumbness know nothing about race lives or geography. I do not wish to close the frontiers of life upon my own self. I do not wish to deny myself the expansion of seeking into individual capabilities and depths by living in a space whose boundaries are race and nation" (253).

Hurston's emphasis on individualism and her subsequent rejection of collectivism based on

race and nation have often puzzled the scholars who try to situate her work on an African American maternal literary ancestry. As Annette Trefzer points out, they should be understood against the backdrop of the national and international political circumstances of early 1940s which exposed the flagrant contradiction of the United States, that is, "the lack of democratic equality on the national scene at a time when the US was fighting a war for democracy in the international arena."[14] As if anticipating the extermination campaign of Nazis Germany, Hurston warned against overpraising race since it could be "the root of misunderstanding and hence misery and injustice" (250). She was also aware how the US professed itself to be "Arsenal of Democracy" while allowing the most undemocratic domestic policy of segregation. As such, she detected the same hypocrisy when people were offended by the Nazi invasion of neighboring countries while overlooking Europe's own history of colonization in Asia and Africa (258-262). Whereas many Hurston scholars since Hemenway have criticized *Dust Tracks* for being evasive on race issues, a *Saturday Review* article which announces the autobiography as the winner of the 1943 John Anisfield Awards in Racial Relations in fact shows the author's vocality about race in the national and international context:

> The awards have an especial timeliness this year. Racial relations intertwined with nationalism might almost be said to be the theme of this war and one of the major problems of the peace. . . . Nothing has more sharply emphasized the democratic problem which we inherited from slavery than the pressures of our present crisis and the obvious need of putting our own house in order before we talk too much of Americanism as a cultural and political success.[15]

Unlike other black intellectuals who aligned themselves with the Communist party, Hurston remained independent in her political struggle: “I see many good points in, let us say, the Communist Party. Anyone would be a liar and a fool to claim that there was no good in it. But I am so put together that I do not have much of a herd instinct” (262). As shown in Chapter Two, her reluctance to associate herself with Communism should not simply be interpreted as a sign of political conservatism. The point is rather that she considered individualism as a last stronghold against the contemporary crisis deeply implicated with racism, fascism, and colonialism.

And it was though her experience of continuous movement that she developed her peculiar individualism. Let me again cite the key passage from “Seeing the World as It Is”: “I know that goodness, ability, vice, and dumbness know nothing about race lives or geography. I do not wish to close the frontiers of life upon my own self. I do not wish to deny myself the expansion of seeking into individual capabilities and depths by living in a space whose boundaries are race and nation.” What is worth noting here is Hurston’s repetitive use of the words related to travel and movement: transcending and opening up “geography,” “frontiers,” “space,” and “boundaries.” Exploration of inner spaces is compared to traveling and literal crossing of boundaries. As an alternative to the essentialist idea of race and nation, Hurston presents a philosophy of traveling, that is, to keep moving and in so doing expanding the boundaries of self.

Dust Tracks illustrates how such a boundary-crossing autobiographical self is constructed through traveling. She closely observes contemporary Southern landscapes which are, considering the period in which the book was published, naturally those of segregation. The beginning of her travel is marked by her figurative exile from the all-black hometown and the recognition of self as a black child in the segregated South: "Jacksonville made me know that I was a little colored girl" (70). With the mother's death as a starting point, Hurston describes young Zora's movement and her psychological development through her travel from Eatonville to Jacksonville, Memphis, Boston, Baltimore, Washington D.C., New York, and finally back to the South again, where she does her anthropological research and gets reunited with her family. The "School Again" chapter, which is the last chapter of loosely chronological autobiographical narrative, ends with the scene of reunion, in which Zora's experience of Southern diaspora is finally, and spiritually, redeemed:

> I felt the warm embrace of kin and kind from the first time since the night after my mother's funeral, when we had huddled about the organ all sodden and bewildered, with the walls of our home suddenly blown down. On September 18th, that house had been a hovering home. September 19th, it had turned into a bleak place of desolation with unknown dangers creeping upon us from unseen quarters that made of us a whimpering huddle, though then we could not see why. But now, that was all over. We could touch each other in the spirit if not in the flesh. (142)

In her reading of this passage, Lionett points out that "[i]t is thanks to [Hurston's] research and professional travels that she becomes . . . the link that reunites, reconnects the dispersed siblings,

who can now 'touch each other in the spirit if not in the flesh.' The imagery that describes the disintegration of the family unit is a clear reminder of the conditions of the Middle Passage."[16] However, such redemption of diasporic experience points not only to the past but also to the future. The last passage of the originally published version of the book which symbolically represents the hope for the future echoes this image of spiritual reunion: "Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbecue" (232). Through the image of integrated dinner table, Hurston links the past, the present and the future of the Southern black social lives.

As previously mentioned, Hurston scholarship has always problematized the evasiveness of *Dust Tracks* on the contemporary race issues (partly because of the author's positivist strategy), especially about segregation, racial inequality, and violence. Hemenway states that Hurston "refuses to write about the race problem," while Alice Walker is frustrated about the book's "unctuousness," and Maya Angelou points out that "she does not mention even one unpleasant racial incident" in her autobiography even though she "most certainly lived through the race riots and other atrocities of her time."[17] Considering the period in which the book was published and the fact that it was awarded the literary prize for race relations, *Dust Tracks* does spend considerably small number of pages describing segregated public spaces and none on lynching incidents (or the threatening possibility of it).[18] Hurston depicts train a few times either as a

part of her fond childhood memory (83) or a symbol of a significant turning point of her life (99), but not as the epitome of segregated Southern space, which led John C. Inscoe to criticize the book for lacking racial element and compassion for fellow blacks.[19] Quoting Hurston's description on a Jim Crow coach in the originally abridged chapter "My People, My People," he claims that Hurston ridicules unrefined blacks on the train. Here is the passage in question:

> Certain of My people have come to dread such scenes more than they do the dirty upholstery and other inconveniences of a Jim Crow coach. They detest the forced grouping. The railroad company feels "you are all colored aren't you? So why not all together?". . . So when sensitive souls are forced to travel that way they sit there numb and when some free soul takes off his shoes and socks, they mutter "My race but not My taste." When someone eats fried fish, bananas and a mess of peanuts and throws all the leavings on the floor, they gasp, "My skinfolks but not my kinfolks." (237)

Insisting that "Hurston's eliticism is never more in evidence than in this passage," Inscoe concludes that she "seemed to think [herself] entitled by class and accomplishment to better treatment than other blacks and resented having to share the indignities imposed on all members of their race by sheer commonality of color."[20] What is overlooked in Inscoe's argument, however, is that in this passage and throughout this chapter Hurston actually mocks the anxiety of the middle-class blacks about being identified with seemingly unsophisticated working-class blacks. In so doing, she displays the differentiation and diversification of the social lives of contemporary blacks which made it difficult for them to simply identify with each other.

The opening episode of the same chapter is also a case in point. Hurston illustrates a volatile

situation including different social class and ethnic groups, this time not in a classic Jim Crow setting, but in an urban desegregated one. She depicts a "well-dressed, well-mannered, and good to look at" black couple, supposedly Barnard and Yale students, get on the subway only to feel embarrassed by other black passengers, "[t]wo scabby looking Negroes" who "woof, bookoo, broadcast and otherwise distriminate [*sic*] from one end of the coach to the other" (236). Fearing that white passengers would think all of them to be the same kind, "Barnard and Yale shake their heads and moan, 'My People, My People!'" Inscoe mistakenly considers this episode as autobiographical and claims that through this parable Hurston is making "efforts to distance herself from others of her race."[21] Yet there is no indication of whether "Barnard" in the passage is the author herself, and here again she equally satirizes each group involved in the event. Significantly, Hurston the narrator uses the slang "distriminate" in describing the working-class pair. As she explains later in the same chapter, "distriminate" is not a typo but a coined word which means "*slander*" (240, italics original). In the subway episode, Hurston uses her own perspective as an autobiographer but the very narrative consciousness is somehow mixed with that of the "distriminating" pair. Exemplifying Hurstonian free indirect speech, this passage arguably shows that the narrator understands and shares the pair's vocabulary, rather than dismissing their non-standard word choice. As Hurston aptly states, "[w]hen you find a man chewing up the dictionary and spitting out language, that's My People" (240). Perhaps the

narrator's position is closest to that of "another couple" in the train who also witness the event and exclaim, "My People, My People!", but from a totally different context; they say that in both amusement and sympathy, "in the same tone of voice that a proud father uses when he boasts to other about that bad little boy of his at home" (237).

Through these episodes, Hurston suggests that black experience has become so diversified that it might not be incorporated into the traditional South-to-North / oppression-to-freedom pattern of migration narratives. She attempts to invalidate the dichotomy between North / South and integration / segregation and describe the spaces she travels through as multiple contact zones in which often uncomfortable encounters between varying social groups take place. In the autobiography, Hurston initially becomes aware of such spaces when she is sent home from a Jacksonville school by a steamer *City of Jacksonville*:

> White-clad waiters dashed about with trays for the first class upstairs. There was an almost ceaseless rattle of dishes. Red carpet underfoot. Big, shiny lights overhead. White men in greasy overalls popping up from down below now and then to lean on the deck rail for a breath of air. A mulatto waiter with a patch over one eye who kept bringing me slabs of pie and cake and chicken and steak sandwiches, and sent me astern to eat them. . . . A group of turpentine hands with queer haircuts, in blue overalls with read handkerchiefs around their necks, who huddled around a tall, black man with a guitar round his neck. They ate out of shoe boxes and sang between drinks out of a common bottle. A stocking-foot woman was with them with a dirk in her garter. Her new shoes were in a basket beside her. She dipped snuff and kept missing the spittoon. The glitter of brass and red carpet made her nervous. The captain kept passing through and pulling my hair gently and asking me to spell something, and kept being surprised when I did. (82)

Through the perspective of herself as a teenager, Hurston here vividly describes a tapestry of people on board coming from different racial and class backgrounds. While there are visible boundaries between classes ("first class upstairs," people in "greasy overalls popping up from down below"), Hurston's closeness to the waiter and the captain suggests that she, because of her youth and her literacy, is tolerated crossing these boundaries to observe both sides of people. Especially important here is her first encounter with "turpentine hands" whose culture she would revisit years later as an anthropologist. People with "queer haircuts," a blues guitarist, and a woman "with a dirk in her garter" evoke both uneasiness and admiration within Hurston. As Adam Gussow in his study on Hurston and blues culture notes, "[t]hese are not common people, but *uncommon* people—as is Hurston herself, a self-conscious exception to the rules people have made for her—and what separates them from her is what draws her to them. Hurston's investigation into blues culture was her attempt to discover this 'somewhere else,' this frontier-within-a frontier that had called to her as a teenager."[22] Since she was born in a rural all-black town, blues culture is not something young Zora was familiar with. And yet, through her experience of "wandering," she comes to share the mobility of blues people and their desire to be mobile, which, according to R. A. Lawson is "an essential feature of the Southern black experience and cultural expression" in the era of Great Migration.[23]

The theme of boundary-crossing becomes even clearer when Zora moves to Memphis, which

was known as an interchange for black migrants (including many blues musicians) moving north. According to Pam Bordelon, Memphis at that time "was attracting droves of rural black Southerners looking for economic opportunity" and for Hurston, it "was a providential first stop on the way north."[24] Frustrated with living with her brother's family while not being able to go to school, she finds a job as a lady's maid for a traveling theater actress, who would take her to northern cities and introduce her to a new kind of community:

> I saw thirty-odd people made up of all classes and races living a communal life. There were little touches of professional jealousy and a catty crack now and then, but let sickness or trouble touch any member and the whole cast rallied around to help out. It was a marvelous thing to see. There were a few there from good families and well-to-do homes who slept in shabby hotels and made meals on sandwiches without a murmur. From what they said and did, you would think they were as poor as the rest. (118)

Here Hurston illustrates an ideal community in which every member helps each other and, more significantly, speak and act similarly in spite of their dissimilar cultural backgrounds. Their sense of community based on mobility and plurality represents the cross-cultural autobiographical self Hurston sought to create in *Dust Tracks*.

It is suggested that the troupe which is made mostly of Northerners is free of rigid social structure inherent in the South, although they definitely use "a lot of racial gags" on each other (118). While noting that she never felt uncomfortable because of her race, Hurston admits that her blackness attracts people's curiosity: "I was the only Negro around. But that did not worry me in the least. I had no chance to be lonesome, because the company welcomed me like, or as,

a new play-pretty" (104). Right after commenting on her blackness, however, Hurston goes on to state that she could adapt herself to the new environment paradoxically because of her Southern background:

> In the first place, I was a Southerner, and had the map of Dixie on my tongue. They were all northerners except the orchestra leader, who came from Pensacola. It was not that my grammar was bad, it was the idioms. They did not know of the way an average Southern child, white and black, is raised on simile and invective. They know how to call names. . . . They can tell you in simile exactly how you walk and smell. They can furnish a picture gallery of your ancestors, and a notion of what your children will be like. What ought to happen to you is full of images and flavor. Since that stratum of the Southern population is not given to book-reading, they take comparison right out of the barn yard and the woods. When they get through with you, you and your whole family look like an acre of totem-poles. (104-5)

It seems that Hurston is trying to distract readers' attention from race to region while overemphasizing the crudeness of her culture. Yet her very overemphasis on Southernness here shows the degree to which she is aware of cultural expectation her presence arouses in the troupe. What Hurston demonstrates through acting the role of a Southerner with "the map of Dixie on [her] tongue" is that she made her way into this cosmopolitan traveling troupe not by highlighting her essential cultural difference but by "simile and invective," that is, linguistic performance and exaggeration—or in Hurstonian parlance, crayon enlargement of life. As Trefzer posits, "neither race nor region alone defines Hurston's identity precisely because she is a product of cross-cultural influences that slip categorical definitions."[25] Through the act of acting, Hurston foregrounds her self as a site for negotiating multiple cultural identities.

While *Dust Tracks* is structured around Hurston's autobiographical wandering, Rawlings, in *Cross Creek*, focuses on the process of relocation and rediscovery of home, which is part of her strategy to differentiate her work from typical travel writing. In her discussion on travel writing, Mary Louise Pratt states that the metropolitan culture displays an "obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself" and how "[t]ravel writing . . . is heavily organized in the service of that imperative."[26] Rawlings was acutely aware of such "othering" tendency prevailing in the contemporary Florida travel writing. Tourist discourse about the state emphasizes the attention-grabbing images of tropical paradise while either marginalizing the backwoods "crackers" by spitefully considering them as some type of human subspecies or completely obliterating their presence.[27] To avoid such marginalization, Rawlings stresses the process through which she becomes part of the community and in so doing tries to create the counter-narrative against the discourse of tourism. The opening of the first chapter titled "For This Is an Enchanted Land" exemplifies her attempt:

> Any grove or any wood is a fine thing to see. But the magic here, strangely, is not apparent from the road. It is necessary to leave the impersonal highway, to step inside the rusty gate and close it behind. By this an act of faith is committed, through which one accepts blindly the communion cup of beauty. One is now inside the grove, out of one world and in the mysterious heart of another. Enchantment lies in different things for each of us. For me, it is in this: to step out of the bright sunlight into the shade of orange trees; to walk under the arched canopy of their jadelike leaves; to see the long aisles of lichened trunks stretch ahead in a geometric rhythm to feel the mystery of a seclusion that yet has shafts of light striking through it. This is the essence of an ancient and secret magic. It goes back, perhaps, to the fairy tales of childhood, to Hansel and Gretel, to Babes in the Wood, to Alice in Wonderland,

> to all half-luminous places that pleased the imagination as a child. It may go back still farther, to racial Druid memories, to an atavistic sense of safety and delight in an open forest. And after long years of spiritual homelessness, of nostalgia, here is that mystic loveliness of childhood again. Here is home. An old thread, long tangled, comes straight again. (15-16)

Here Rawlings tries to attract readers' attention to shades and the geometrical pattern of tree trunks, not sunlight and oranges. The passage is decidedly that of a pastoral narrative which emphasizes quietness and seclusion in contrast to fun tourist activities. It is worth noting that Rawlings repeatedly uses the word "inside" to emphasize the initiation process through which she leaves "the impersonal highway" behind and becomes a Creek resident. This process continues well over to the subsequent chapters; she gradually gets used to strange Creek customs ("Taking up the Slack," "The Pound Party") and goes on a trip throughout the area helping her friend Zelma Cason taking the census data, which serves well "for learning a new territory and people as quickly as possible" ("The Census," 56). Also striking about the passage above is the fact that she relates the Creek to her childhood memories and defines the place as "home," which sets the book apart from the prevailing discourse on Florida of that period that defines the state as a temporary tourist destination.

Ironically, however, Rawlings's narrative unwittingly repeats the othering tendency of travel writing she pursues to avoid. While she resists the tropical otherness emphasized in the discourse of tourism, she creates a different otherness which made Florida a primitive, pre-modern, nature-oriented space with "crackers" as mythic self-reliant farmers. According to

history scholar David J. Nelson, these images solidified by Rawlings's work do not necessarily contradict "the one that chambers of commerce, fair exhibits, advertisers, and state parks offered visitors."[28]

If Rawlings' representation of the Creek poor whites inadvertently involves a kind of romanticization, her treatment of black characters could be considered as a more obvious example of cultural othering. In the chapter called "Black Shadows" which describes a line of blacks working for her she writes:

> I am not of the race of Southerners who claim to understand the Negro. There are a few platitudes dear to the hearts of these that seem reasonably accurate. The Negro is just a child. The Negro is carefree and gay. The Negro is religious in an amusing way. The Negro is a congenital liar. There is no dependence to be put in the best of them. Back of these superficial truths lies the mystery of the primitive African nature, subjected precipitously first to slavery and then to so-called civilization" (189).

Although she refuses the classic Southern stereotype of blacks by announcing that she would not claim to understand the mindsets of blacks, Rawlings still slips into yet another stereotype: Blacks have retained their primitive culture in the heart of civilization and therefore their presence remains enigmatic. Later in the same chapter she says, "[t]he long line of Negroes has come and gone like a string of exploding firecrackers, each one arriving on the smoking heels of another and departing as violently. Most have gone in insanity, mad love affairs, delirious drunkenness and shootings. Their shadows lie long and black against the pattern of the Creek" (191). Here again Rawlings is trapped by her own tendency to highlight the difference of her

cultural "other," casually relating black characters with insanity, lovesickness, alcoholism, and violence. Although Rawlings makes clear that the behavioral pattern of Southern blacks was constructed through the history of slavery and the lack of economic independence, her attitude towards blacks often resembles "the race of Southerners" who she tries to critique. She begins the "Catching One Young" chapter with the following passage: "I bought Georgia of her father for five dollars. The surest way to keep a maid at the Creek, my new friends told me, was to take over a very young Negro girl and train her in my ways" (85). While Rawlings stress throughout the text that "crackers" never accept paid work for the fellow whites, here she quite casually says she "bought" the black girl, which suggests that uneven racial relations since slavery has not drastically changed in the Creek area, as well as that Rawlings seems to have fully adopted the race consciousness of the Creek whites to assume that blacks should be guided and refined by the hands of whites, to become civilized.

Probably because of this problematic tendency of othering on the part of Rawlings, *Cross Creek*, while it is a counter-narrative to tourist writings, has its own counter-counter-narratives written by other Creek residents such as Idella Parker and J.T. Glisson.[29] Parker, who Rawlings mentioned briefly in *Cross Creek* as her "perfect maid," reveals complicated race relations in the Creek community which Rawlings's book fails to grapple with.[30] For example, she indicates that racial violence, though it is rarely mentioned in *Cross Creek*, would have been

a daily occurrence in the areas surrounding the Creek: “I’d been hearing stories about how sometimes colored folks mysteriously disappeared in Island Grove ever since I was a child, and those scary tales came rushing into my mind. Island Grove was a white man’s town, a place where colored people were not welcome.”[31] She also recalls when Hurston came over to Cross Creek to visit Rawlings. While the two women had a great deal of fun together during day time, when it was decided that Hurston would spend the night, Rawlings sent her to the tenant house to share the bed with Parker.[32] Parker does mention how liberal Rawlings was compared the contemporary Southern standard and how often she ignores the Jim Craw law by accompanying her in public. And yet, her memoir as a whole tells of “the barrier of color” that ultimately prevented Rawlings from treating blacks equally: “She became the rich, white lady author, and I became quiet, reserved, and slipped back into her shadow, ‘the perfect maid.’”[33]

J.T.Glisson, the son of Rawlings’s neighbor Tom Glisson whose name appears in *Cross Creek*, wrote a similar type of counter-memoir titled *The Creek*. Glisson recalls that Rawlings “had little contact with most of the Crackers, having set herself apart from by displaying an air of intellectual and social superiority. Whether or not this was deliberate, she was perceived as wanting to keep herself distant from the local inhabitants.”[34] He also suggests that some descriptions of the “crackers” in Rawlings’s book show her lack of understanding of their culture. For example, in the chapter “Pound Party,” Rawlings rather comically describes how a proud

"cracker" family invited her to a pot-luck party instead of directly begging for food, but according to Glisson, Rawlings's speculation is all wrong: "[W]ell-meaning families attempted to draw her into their community of friends, only to have her misinterpret their overtures as attempts to obtain charity. She would later write of those sincere offers of friendship from the bias of her own misunderstanding."[35]

What should be noted here, however, is less the fact that Rawlings's real life betrays her descriptions in the book and more the reasons she felt so attached to Cross Creek despite frequent miscommunication with the locals and recreated it as a community of proud and independent "crackers." Parker's and Glisson's memoirs are quite informative about an eccentric side of Rawlings's personality, her quickness to quarrel with others, her mood swing, and drinking problem that were never told in *Cross Creek*. Glisson reports Rawlings's unconventional behavior that would shock other women of the Creek community: "She smoked in public at a time when most women smoked in secret and publicized her taste for good liquor when most of the country buried their empty bottles. Her fast driving, reckless accusations, and occasional profanity all created an image not always admired but never ignored."[36] Given that Rawlings fiercely went against the contemporary gender norms as a divorced female writer, Cross Creek might have been like a kind of haven to her, and perhaps that was why she projected her own ideal of independence and individualism onto Florida "crackers." The Creek people

ultimately accepted the eccentric Yankee woman's presence which was sometimes puzzling and controversial in the small rural community. As Glisson explains, her preference for independence and privacy after all "fit[s] most everybody at the Creek."[37]

Significantly, Rawlings herself expresses a sense of affinity she felt to the Cross Creek community members with the words "queer," "crazy," and "madness":

> People in Island Grove consider us just a little biggety and more than a little queer. Black Kate and I between us once misplaced some household object, quite unreasonably.
> I said, "Kate, am I crazy, or are you?"
> She gave me her quick sideways glance that was never entirely impudent.
> "Likely most two of us. Don't you reckon it take somebody a little bit crazy to live out here at the Creek?"
> At one time or another most of us at the Creek have been suspected of a degree of madness. Madness is only a variety of mental nonconformity and we are all individualists here. (9-10)

Concerning Rawlings's frequent use of the word "queer," Trefzer contends that "Rawlings explored the strategy of queering communal and personal identities as one way to cross sexual and racial boundaries."[38] Though "queer" here does not exactly have a sexual undertone in the context of the book, it is interesting to suppose that Rawlings was, as an independent woman who often defied expected gender roles of the era, attracted by the word's connotation of something outside social norms and boundaries. She uses the word a few more times in the book to further highlight the eccentricity of the Creek people including her, and even calls *Cross Creek* itself "a *queer* book" (italics original) whose "effect on readers would be to take them into a totally strange world, and that they should feel a certain delight and enchantment in the

strangeness."[39] Rawlings certainly gives the word "queer," along with "crazy" and "madness," a positive implication for the boundary-breaking quality and describes how that quality actually ties the Cross Creek people together, just as the mutual recognition of craziness ties her to the black maid Kate beyond racial and class difference. Thus the descriptions of queerness and madness of the Creek residents provide a fine example of how Rawlings, in spite of her othering tendency, ultimately recognizes a striking similarity between herself and her "other," and sets such a moment of recognition as the basis of communal identity.

In this sense, it is important to rethink why Rawlings puts significance on the role of Martha Mickens in the book. Rawlings describes Martha as "a dusky Fate, spinning away at the threads of our Creek existence" (25). Martha is used as a central character who holds together the otherwise highly episodic chapters, and introduces to Rawlings the history and the nature of Cross Creek from old legends and fairy tales as well as the practical knowledge about its flora and fauna, animals and "vermints." Rawlings thus sometimes identifies Martha with nature in the same way she relates other black characters with mysterious primitiveness. As problematic as this might be, Martha's closeness to nature should be reconsidered in relation to the shift of Rawlings's model of identity from an individualistic one to a communal one. While Rawlings emphasizes the Creek people's self-sufficient and individualistic way of life at the beginning of *Cross Creek*, in the latter part of the book she reveals a more nature-centered world view, on

which she and other Creek residents base their lives. And it is Martha who plays a significant role in introducing such a perspective. In the chapter titled "Fall," which is one of the four chapters dealing with each season, Rawlings describes how she came to "put stock in Martha's voodoo."[40] In the Creek area, the first stormy rain signals the beginning of fall, which is the time for planting crops. One year when the storms are late and a long drought postpones the planting, Rawlings starts to listen to Martha's various age-old methods for inducing rain and avoiding bad luck. Like Hurston in the second part of *Mules and Men*, Rawlings becomes an apprentice of voodoo; she listens to Martha and tries a variety of practices from avoiding cleaning the fireplace every Friday to hanging up a dead chicken snake on a tree. And like in Hurston's work, voodoo here symbolizes the irresistible power of nature. Through her voodoo methods and folk legends, Martha teaches Rawlings how to live in harmony with nature by reading its signs very carefully, and how one should accept its power in awe. Though half in doubt, Rawlings obeys Martha's commands and eventually the long-awaited storm comes to the Creek.

The same narrative pattern is repeated in the penultimate chapter, "Hyacinth Drift." After the divorce from Charles, Rawlings confesses that she sunk in deep depression and "lost touch with the Creek. . . . I loved the Creek, I loved the grove, I loved the shabby farmhouse. Suddenly there were nothing" (354). Desperately trying to find the way out, she goes on a boat trip on St.

Johns River with her friend Dessie Smith. Rawlings is in charge of map and compass, but since half the channels charted disappeared after the long draught, she is unable to follow the chart and eventually gets lost in the middle of maze-like water. After camping for a night, they realize that the water hyacinths are drifting in the direction of the right channel:

> From that instant we were never very long lost. Forever after, where the river sprawled in confusion, we might shut off the motor and study the floating hyacinths until we caught, in one direction, a swifter pulsing, as though we put our hands close and closer to the river's heart. It was very simple. Like all simple facts, it was necessary to discover it for oneself. (359)

The ironic lesson Rawlings learns here is that she is saved not by using man-made tools, but by making nature itself her guide. In order to commune with nature, she has to first cut her ties with civilization by literally turning off the motor. Then for the first time she can immerse herself into nature and let it guide her, which is the only way she can find her the right channel.

Also significant is the personality of Dessie, Rawlings's traveling partner. Rawlings describes her as a woman with a deep knowledge of nature and hunting who casually ignores the gender roles imposed by society:

> She was born and raised in rural Florida and guns and campfires and fishing-rods and creeks are corpuscular in her blood. She lives a sophisticate's life among worldly people. At the slightest excuse she steps out of civilization, naked and relieved, as I should step out of a soiled chemise. She is ten years my junior, but she calls me, with much tenderness, pitying my incapabilities, 'Young un.' 'Young un,' she called, 'it's mighty fine to be traveling.' (357)

Through her travel with Dessie, Rawlings too "steps out of a soiled chemise," immersing herself

into nature and feeling liberated from depression and obligation as a divorced woman. After successfully finishing their adventurous trip, Rawlings rediscovers the loveliness of the land again: "Because I had known intimately a river, the earth pulsed under me. The Creek was home. . . . I knew, for a moment, that the only nightmare is the masochistic human mind" (370). As Christopher Rieger suggests, this chapter "represents a mini pastoral retreat in itself: a withdrawal into nature that permits a clearer vision upon return."[41] The pastoral structure of the episode parallels that of the whole book, which records Rawlings's relocating to Cross Creek and the subsequent rediscovery of home. Rawlings's narratives of traveling from metropolis through a nature-oriented rural community leads her to critique her own individualistic way of life and ultimately address an important question in the last chapter "Who Owns Cross Creek?":

> Who owns Cross Creek? The red-birds, I think, more than I, for they will have their nests even in the face of delinquent mortgages. And after I am dead, who am childless, the human ownership of grove and field and hammock is hypothetical. But a long line of red-birds and whippoorwills and blue-jays and ground doves will descend from the present owners of nests in the orange trees, and their claim will be less subject to dispute than that of any human heirs. Houses are individual and can be owned, like nests, and fought for. But what of the land? It seems to me that the earth may be borrowed but not bought. It may be used, but not owned. It gives itself in response to love and tending, offers its seasonal flowering and fruiting. But we are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. Cross Creek belongs to the wind and the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time. (380)

Here Rawlings imagines the nature of Cross Creek that would well survive her, and reconsiders the role of human in the natural world: Humans can use natural recourses but cannot own them,

he or she can tend nature but should not rule it. By foregrounding nature as the owner of Cross Creek and the central subject of the book, Rawlings envisions a communal self constructed through an intricate connection with the lives of others.

Significantly, one year after the publication of *Cross Creek*, Rawlings wrote one more book about the Creek, this time with a special emphasis on food and cooking. It is titled *Cross Creek Cookery* (1943, hereafter abbreviated as *Cookery*), which, when read along with the autobiography, provides a significant insight on Rawlings's autobiographical self. The book tells us how food and foodways are closely associated with cultural identity. It is thus important to reread it as an autobiography written in the form of cookbook. Just like in *Cross Creek*, in *Cookery* Rawlings contemplates on Southern space, yet this time through rethinking Southern foodways. The dishes introduced by the author reflect diverse cultures she immerses herself in; on the whole, they foreground an autobiographical self in cultural contact zone, a multi-dimensional self constructed through memories, new experiences, and encounters. *Cookery* is originally developed from a *Cross Creek* chapter titled "Our Daily Bread," which deals with the Southern dishes Rawlings discovered after moving to the Creek. The types of dishes and their recipes introduced in these two food writings are threefold: Traditional Southern and Florida local dishes; dishes associated with metropolitan culture and sophistication; and dishes based on Rawlings's childhood memories. They are presented sometimes with

illustrations and anecdotes related to the particular food and dishes. The three varieties of dishes sometimes appear independently, at other times in combination, and altogether represent the multiple cultures with which Rawlings identifies. One good example is what Rawlings calls "Okra A La Cross Creek," which combines a conspicuously Southern ingredient (okra) and metropolitan flavor with hollandaise sauce typically served in fancy hotels and restaurants such as Ritz Carlton and Waldorf (225-26, *Cookery* 51-52). Many of the recipes recorded in *Cookery* could be classified as "Southern," however on the whole they show the diversity of Southernness. As John Egerton, author of *Southern Food* aptly argues, Southern food is "integrated food—black and white, soul and country, Creole and Cajun, mountain and coastal, plain and fancy."[42] Rawlings's recipes similarly integrate influences from different Southern cultures. They are roughly divided into traditional Southern food such as corn bread, collard greens and pecan pie; local / backwoods dishes using game, seafood, exotic fruits and vegetables; and dishes reflecting Florida's history of migration and cultural diversity (Cuban, Greek, Minorcan, and so on). Even one Southern dish could have multiple versions. For example, the chapter "Hot Breads" introduces multiple recipes for biscuits and cornbread, which explain the diverse foodways among Southerners who eat them. For biscuits, Rawlings introduces two different recipes: one is "backwoods" that is "thick, substantial, and very good for the extremely hungry," while the other is "made by the best of Negro cooks," more specifically

by Idella (*Cookery* 19-22).[43] It is suggested the latter biscuits are served at a rather formal dinner table. The ingredients for the two recipes are very similar—flour, baking powder, salt, shortening and milk—although the ratio of each ingredient is made slightly different to change the texture. To make a contrast with these two recipes, Rawlings also records her mother's version of biscuit which is Crisco-less and thus seems more delicate: they are "fluffy, tender, falling apart in layers" (*Cookery* 21). Cornbread has even more variations, or rather "gradations," as Rawlings states. She introduces Hoe Cake which is from "slavery and Civil War times, when the Negroes baked it on hoes before an open flame and the soldiers baked it on their bayonets before the bivouac fires," Corn Pone, the dressier version of Hoe Cake, regular oven-baked Cornbread, Cornmeal Muffins, and Spoonbread (*Cookery*, 23-27). The spectrum goes from simple and bland to rather lavish, depending on the amount of milk and the number of eggs added to cornmeal.

Rawlings was keenly aware of how foodways could be a marker of racial and class difference. Different ways of making biscuits and cornbread indicate the different needs, customs, preferences and economic conditions of people who eat them. The process by which Rawlings learned these various recipes parallels the process in which she learned about the diversity of Southern culture and gradually adjusted herself to it. In one *Cross Creek* episode, Rawlings tells about her first Christmas dinner at the Creek. When she is busily cooking her fancy dinner

of turkey, squash, potatoes and plum pudding for guests, a “cracker” man Moe with his friend visits to offer his holiday greetings. Expecting them to leave soon, Rawlings asks them, “Dinner is ready. Won’t you men join in?” To her surprise, Moe accepts her offer and comes in, because, as she learned later, “in rural Florida, to refuse an invitation to a meal, if one is there at the time it is ready or nearly so, is to insult hospitality so grievously that the damage can seldom be repaired” (117). After watching the men with worn clothes and rough speech manner dutifully plow through her best dinner, she asks again, “You men have just eaten a typical Yankee Christmas dinner. Now tell me, what is the usual Cracker Christmas dinner?” Moe curtly replies, “Whatever we can git, Ma’am, whatever we can git” (118). The episode comically shows Rawlings’s initial ignorance about the “cracker” culture, and how her vanity about fancy food and her cooking skill fail her when these backwoods men do not even care. Later she would learn what it means to have “whatever we can git” for Christmas, and understand how food becomes an indicator of cultural and economic difference, and how people of different social strata still appreciate food on a dinner table, no matter what kind of food that is, in the exact same manner.

Writing a cookbook itself is Rawlings’s attempt to transcend such difference. The letters exchanged between Rawlings and Maxwell Perkins on the cookbook show how she revised “the Gourmand and Gourmet” tendency of the introduction based on Perkins’s advice and decided to

simplify, or in her words “emphasize Cross Creekified angle” of the book more.[44] Through the process of reserving “Gourmet” expertise and focusing more on local food, Rawlings avoids making herself look too uptight, and successfully shows the audience that she understands and fully enjoys Southern food. One good example is an episode on collard greens, one of the most basic Southern vegetable dishes. Introducing poor Southerners’ custom to dip cornbread in the pot liquor (Southern jargon for the broth made in the process of cooking) of collard greens, Rawlings tells how that combination which is “a mark of the plain people” cost her her “only elegant servant” she ever had *(Cookery* 57). Rawlings once had a male servant named Godfrey, an elegant and intelligent black man who had a lot of expectations for the high life of professional writer. He gets very upset when Rawlings makes him serve collard greens and cornbread for lunch, because they seem so different from what he thinks she should be eating. Disappointed by the fact that she does not regularly have “the buffet supper of jellied fruit cup, ham baked in sherry, roast wild duck, sweet potato baskets and so forth,” he leaves Cross Creek (*Cookery* 59). What this story tells with irony is that one’s food preference is not essentially determined by race, class, and cultural group, though it could be predicted to some degree. Whatever the cultural stereotype expected of a white Yankee woman writer, she might not feel like having a fabulous luncheon every day and could instead be perfectly content with the plainest dish imaginable in the same manner that a black servant might hate such an idea.

Rawlings shows that each recipe in *Cookery* has an equal cultural value and is enjoyable not only to her but to most anyone.

Another interesting series of recipes comes from Rawlings's mother. These are mostly the luncheon dishes which Rawlings's mother cooked for her Embroidery Club meeting and the sweets she frequently made for her children. Even though they are not Southern dishes, the mother's recipes play a major role in the cookbook, for they constitute a significant part of Rawlings's cultural identity. Rawlings introduces the recipes with her memories about her mother: how she and other Victorian ladies used their Embroidery Club meetings for chatting over nice luncheon dishes such as egg croquettes and jellied chicken; how she made special cakes for her daughter's birthdays and Thanksgiving. Rawlings kept her childhood cookbook, in which her mother sometimes wrote down her recipes, but some of the recipes were completely lost over the years. In *Cookery,* the daughter tries to recreate these recipes, summoning up her memories and imagination. For "Mother's Almond Cake," she presents all the ingredients for the cake, almond paste filling and boiled frosting in exact measurement. Even though she is aware that the original recipe is not completely retrievable, she still does her best to get close to it. The condition of the "Watermelon Cake" recipe is even worse that Rawlings has never actually tried to duplicate. The cake in the daughter's memory "was a deep loaf cake. Its base was white, it was thickly streaked with watermelon-pink, and chocolate blobs were scattered

through it to represent seeds. It was iced with pistachio frosting in a delicate green" (154). Part of the recipe on her childhood cookbook is missing because "Florida cockroaches have eaten away both edges" (155):

> White Part
> 1 cup sugar
> 1/3 cup butter
> 1/3 cup milk
> Whites of 3 eggs
> ups flour
> easoons baking-p
> Red Part
> 1/2 cup sugar
> 1/4 cup butter
> 1/4 cup mi
> 1 cup fl
> 1/2 teaspoon
> Whites of 3 e (154)

By visualizing the fragmented recipe on the text, Rawlings shows the extent of fragmentation of her memory about the cake. And since she was too small to actually observe the way her mother made the cake, a lot of details about the procedure is also missing: "it does not tell how much vegetable coloring is used for the 'red part,' how to blend both parts so that they do not run together, and of what the chocolate seeds consist" (155). Nevertheless, she tries to fill in the missing part by guessing and restores the lost and fragmented past memory:

> one and one-half cups flour and two and one-half teaspoons of baking powder for the white part, and one-half teaspoon of baking-powder (it could not be soda, with sweet milk) and the whites, of course, of three eggs for the red part. The white and red parts must have been

> spread alternately in the deep loaf pan, and a tiny spot of the chocolate batter dropped here and there between layers. (155)

Here again Rawlings shows a considerable persistence on presenting the exact measurement for the recipe. Because by doing so she can give a concrete form to her fragmented memories and thus revive them. In "Our Daily Bread," she confesses how turn-of-the-century culinary expert Fannie Farmer and her *Boston Cook Book*, which is said to have standardized the measurement system in the US cooking, greatly improved her culinary skill: "Lo and behold, my memories of my mother's dishes suddenly fitted in with the new exactness and I could duplicate her secret recipes. . . . Science, art and instinct joined hands in a happy ring-around-the rosy. I had solid rock under me" (217).[45] Just as writing an autobiography gives a writer a chance to redefine his or her self, writing the recipes helped Rawlings probe the depths of her cultural memory and find a new meaning, which would become a major component of her identity. Therefore, the recipes of her mother that she rediscovered, though they are purely personal, play a central role in the whole book.

Finally, through the cookbook, Rawlings also presents a vision of a dinner table which begins at a personal level but ultimately acquires universal appeal. The introduction of the cookbook titled "To Our Bodies' Good" reveals the significant context on which it was based. Rawlings confesses that she has received many letters from the US soldiers overseas praising the dishes she mentioned in the "Our Daily Bread" chapter in *Cross Creek*:

> Men in the service have written me from Hawaii, the Philippines, Australia, Ireland and Egypt. Always there was a wistful comment on my talk of foods; often a mention of a boyhood kitchen memory. Eight out of ten letters about *Cross Creek* ask for a recipe, or pass on a recipe, or speak of suffering over my chat of Cross Creek dishes.
> "Bless us," I thought, "the world must be hungry." (2)

Country dishes introduced in "Our Daily Bread" stimulates the hunger of soldiers away from home, but as Rawlings goes on to explain, it is "not only the squab-sized chickens stuffed with pecans, the crab Newburg and Dora's ice cream for which [the soldiers] longed, but the convivial gathering together of folk of good will. Country foods, such as those of Cross Creek, have in them not only Dora's cream and butter and a dash of cooking sherry, but the peace and plenty for which we are all homesick" (Ibid.). Thus the recipes in *Cookery* were written not only for satisfying physical hunger but also for providing the warmness of the family dinner table and sense of abundance for which the wartime America was starving. Even though many of the dishes introduced by Rawlings are considered Southern, they have a wider cultural appeal to those who are away from home and missing it.

Interestingly, Charles Scribner's Sons published a Southern cookbook in the same year *Cookery* came out: The Duchess of Windsor's *Some Favorite Southern Recipes* (1942), whose royalties were donated to British Wartime Relief. In a quite unexpected way for a cookbook related to royalty, the Duchess's book presents traditional Southern recipes from fried chicken to the colonial Williamsburg style pork cake as quintessential American food that is simple and

nutritious. According to the Baltimore-raised Duchess, Southern dishes are "the simple dishes of my homeland which are most popular . . . and which are the ones most frequently served at my table."[46] In her introduction to the book, Eleanor Roosevelt clarifies that the simplicity and scientific preparation of American dishes like the Duchess's meet wartime necessity, and they "have been applied in planning and preparing the rations for our armed forces, which are best fed in the world."[47] Rawlings briefly mentions the Duchess's cookbook in *Cookery*, while no direct influence can be seen except for the fact that she recommends her "Maryland Beaten Biscuit" recipe in the "Hot Breads" chapter (*Cookery* 19). Nevertheless, Rawlings's cookbook shares the spirit of *Some Favorite Southern Recipes* in that both books advocate simple dishes and use the South as the symbol of "home," for the value of which the Americans were supposed to be fighting the war.

Cookery, however, is drastically different from typical wartime cookbooks. Jessamyn Neuhaus's study on cookbooks and the Second World War points out that "cookbooks published during the war years depicted food preparation in the home as a woman's most important wartime job—indeed, a job critical to the defense of the nation and to victory."[48] American cookbooks from this period had increasingly describe kitchen as the home front and emphasize the significance of practicing home cooking as a patriotic effort. Specifically, they include detailed instructions for saving, rationing, substituting, and general praise for thriftiness. As

Neuhaus shows, "cookery instruction" in wartime "helped reinforce traditional gender norms by presenting cooking as the most important wartime employment of women."[49] This is exemplified in the "Wartime Cookery" section of *The Victory Binding of the American Woman's Cookbook Wartime Edition*, which along with other cookbooks specializing in wartime home cooking was produced by the Culinary Arts Institute:

> Food shortages in this as in all wars will be due to lack of man power for production, lack of transportation facilities for distribution and reservation of shippable foods for the armed forces. This war is only complicated by multiplication . . . the number of places from which food cannot be shipped must be wide scattering of places to which our food supplies must be distributed to feed our own and allied military forces. Many of the imports are in the condiment class and we will learn to do without them for the duration. Some are valuable foods—sugar, bananas, chocolate—and for these we will need to substitute. Among beverages, mate can easily replace Oriental tea.
>
> Besides these fundamental difficulties always associated with wartime, the modern woman in America has become accustomed to foods prepared outside the home to be purchased by her in tin cans. Metal shortages are threatening these supplies and if they become acute, may cut them off altogether.
>
> Since fats and oils are the basis both for soaps and gunpowder as well as for foods, the household will probably be called upon to curtail their use.
>
> On the bright side is the eagerness of the modern woman to pit her intelligence against a knotty problem. She will need to learn not only to prepare all the food needed in her household, but to raise her own garden and poultry and to save every last bit, as has not been done in several generations.[50]

Here one could see considerable encouragement for substituting and curtailing particular products that could be made into weapons. Especially impressive is that the book strongly recommends for women to prepare food at home by discouraging the use of tin cans, which was convenient for working women. This type of patriotism, which also emphasizes women's

domestic role, is completely lacking in *Cookery*. In fact, even in the war years Rawlings herself was quite reluctant to write anything that could be considered to be propaganda: in a 1942 letter to Perkins, she confesses that "the forced Americanism is both disgusting and unnecessary . . . and I can do no more than write as I always do."[51] And she never considers her cooking as domestic chore. She cooks because she enjoys feeding company, not because she considers it to be a patriotic duty of American women. Reflecting her standpoint, *Cookery* did not turn out to be a wartime cookbook per se. With "Mother's Eggless Cake" as the only exception, she did not include any recipe that would directly refer to wartime scarcity, or rationing which had been going on at the time the book was written.

Ultimately, Rawlings differentiates *Cookery* from other wartime cookbooks by emphasizing its role of creating communal pleasure at dinner table. The book includes rather elaborated recipes featuring abundant local produce for the period rationing was going on. In the afterword of the book, Rawlings explains that "any sin of richness or expense of many of these recipes must be laid to the fact that they are 'company dishes' (*Cookery* 217). According to her, not only food but also guests—friends, family, strangers, whoever they are—are essential elements for successful gatherings: "At the moment of dining, the assembled group stands for a little while as a safe unit, under a safe roof, against the perils and enmities of the world. The group will break up and scatter, later. For this short time, let them eat, drink, and be merry"

(Ibid). For this reason, hosts and hostesses should avoid a sense of obligation or "duty function" in preparation: instead, they should convey "the hearty pleasure of host and hostess in having company share their fare" (*Cookery* 17-18). This sense of pleasure is what Rawlings learned from the Creek and backwoods people, who do not have much to serve because of their economic hardship and yet are always ready to share whatever they have with others. They would say, "'Tain't much, but it's the best we got, and you're sure welcome" (*Cookery* 218). By adopting as its basis such humble hospitality that is seen everyday in rural Southern community, Rawlings's cookbook demonstrates how Southern food, and Southernness in general, could go beyond the South to contact and communicate a wider audience in the early 1940s.

Through the two autobiographies and one cookbook, Hurston and Rawlings show their autobiographical selves as contact zones of different cultures constructed through their mobility. Though the type of their movement ("wandering" and relocation, respectively) is innately different, the two writers share the idea that their relationship with Southern space is at the core of their cultural identity, and they, as autobiographers, work as a cultural "contact" that cross the boundaries of different cultures practice negotiation. Identification of self and place is characteristic to Southern autobiography in general, but Hurston's and Rawlings's autobiographical selves could not be reduced into monolithic Southernness: they embrace the diversity of Southern black and poor white culture they came to identify with, and ultimately

points to a wider communal, American self. In *Dust Tracks* such a view appears in the community of traveling troupe, while in *Cookery* it is represented in an image of a pleasant dinner table with company in the face of world war. Their experience of writing autobiographies, through which they rediscovered the plurality of Southern culture at the heart of their identities, further propelled them to grapple with the contemporary social problem the South faces, namely, race relations during segregation. I will discuss this issue in greater detail in the next chapter which deals with Hurston's last novel *Seraph on the Suwannee* (1948) and how her actual contact and friendship with Rawlings possibly influenced it.

Notes

[1] Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 116.

[2] Kaplan, *A Life in Letters*, 486.

[3] For critical studies on Southern autobiography, see J. Bill Berry, "The Southern Autobiographical Impulse," *Southern Cultures* 6, no. 1 (2000): 7–22. See also the two anthologies on Southern autobiography edited by Berry; *Home Ground: Southern Autobiography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991) and *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Between Individualism and Community: Autobiographies of Southern Women," in *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 20–38; John C. Inscoe, *Writing the South Through the Self: Explorations in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

[4] Prenshaw, *Composing Selves*, 37.

[5] Scholars have mentioned the coexistence of group identification and individualism in Hurston's and Rawlings's autobiographies. See Nellie McKay, "Race, Gender and Cultural Context in Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*," in Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds, *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 175-188; Francoise Lionnet, "Autoethnography"; and Annette Trefzer, "Floating Homes and Signifiers in Hurston's and Rawlings's Autobiographies" *Southern Quarterly* 36.3 (Spring 1998), 68-76.

[6] Qtd. in Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 118.

[7] Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 118.

[8] The argument that Hurston's autobiography is not truthful enough often revolves around the editorial intervention and the writer's seemingly compromising attitude toward the implied (white) audience. See Alice Walker, Foreword to Hemenway, x-xviii, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Myth and History: Discourse of Origins in Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou," *Black American Literature Forum* 24.2 (Summer 1990), 221-235.

[9] McKay, 180.

[10] In *Black Skin, White Masks* (Berkeley, Calif.: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), Fanon describes how black subjects' traumatic internalization of the white gaze which leads them to see themselves as an "other": "The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!" (95)

[11] A similar generation gap is used to contrast Janie and her grandmother in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

[12] See also my discussion on the deathbed scene in Chapter One.

[13] Lionett mentions the closeness of Hurston's philosophical standpoint to that of Fanon: "Warning that the undefined and vague entity of 'African Culture' was a creation of European colonialism, Fanon chose to emphasize local historically and geographically specific contingencies, rather than 'race' as a general and abstract concept" (105).

[14] Annette Trefzer, "'Let Us All Be Kissing-Friends?': Zora Neale Hurston's Race Politics in Dixie," *Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 1 (1997), 76.

[15] "1943 Anisfield Awards," *Saturday Review of Literature* 26, no. 8 (February 1943), 11.

[16] Lionett, 112.

[17] Hemenway, 281. Walker, xvii, Maya Angelou, Foreword to *Dust Tracks*, vii-xii.

[18] It should be noted, however, that Hurston had published articles on Jim Crow and lynching in the same period. See "Ocoee Riot" and "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience," in Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, 894-896, 935-936.

[19] John C. Inscoe, "Railroad, Race, and Remembrance: The Traumas of Train Travel in the Jim Crow South," *Writing the South Through the Self* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 98-130.

[20] Inscoe, 121, 128.

[21] Inscoe, 120.

[22] Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition*, 1st ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 236. See also Ted Ownby, "'A Crude and Raw Past': Work, Folklife, and Anti-Agrarianism in Twentieth Century African American Autobiography," in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 27–53. Ownby suggests that it is "useful to consider Hurston as a blues writer . . . for she also wrote about life on the road, without nostalgia about rural life" (48).

[23] R. A. Lawson, *Jim Crow's Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890-1945* (Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 87.

[24] Pam Bordelon, "New Tracks on Dust Tracks: Toward a Reassessment of the Life of Zora Neale Hurston," *African American Review* 31, no. 1 (April 1, 1997), 12.

[25] Trefzer, "Let us all be Kissing-Friends," 75.

[26] Pratt, 6. For the basic critical agenda of travel writing, see also Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011). Especially for American context, see Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Justin D. Edwards, *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840-1930* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England [for] University of New Hampshire, 2001).

[27] One of the most unsympathetic descriptions about "crackers" can be found in George Barbour's *Florida for Tourists, Invalids, and Settlers:*, Rev. ed. (New York: D. Appleton Company, 1882), a pioneering post-Civil War travel guides:

> The only human being living anywhere along the road [were] four or five families of Florida natives, the genuine, unadulterated 'cracker'—the clay-eating, gaunt, pale, tallowy, leather-skinned sort—stupid, stolid, staring eyes, dead and lusterless; unkempt hair, generally tow-colored; and such a shiftless, slouching manner! Simply white savages—or living white mummies would, perhaps, better indicate their dead-alive looks and actions. . . . Stupid and shiftless, yet shy and vindictive, they are a block in the pathway of civilization, settlement, and enterprise wherever they exist. Fortunately, however, they are very few and rapidly decreasing in numbers, for they cannot exist near civilized settlements. (65)

[28] David Nelson, "Florida Crackers and Yankee Tourists: The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Florida Park Service, and the Emergence of Modern Florida Tourism," PhD Dissertation, Florida State University (March 26, 2008), 243.

[29] J.T. Glisson, *The Creek* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993); Idella Parker, *Idella: Marjorie Rawlings' Perfect Maid* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992).

[30] Rawlings's race consciousness will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[31] Parker, 17.

[32] Parker, 69. See also Introduction of this dissertation which mentions Rawlings's reaction to Hurston's visits.

[33] Parker, 129.

[34] Glisson, , 85.

[35] Glisson, 86.

[36] Glisson, 86-87.

[37] Glisson, 87.

[38] Trefzer, "Floating Homes and Signifiers," 72.

[39] *Max and Marjorie*, 499.

[40] Interestingly, Rawlings also mentions Hurston's *Tell My Horse* as a reference in this chapter (311) It is tempting to presuppose that even before their actual encounter Hurston's literary presence had some influence on Rawlings.

[41] Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 89.

[42] John Egerton and Ann Bleidt Egerton, *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 344. For recipes and critical studies on Southern foodways, see also John Egerton and John T. Edge, *Cornbread Nation 1: The Best of Southern Food Writing* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Ernest Matthew Mickler, *White Trash Cooking: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2011).

[43] Parker's autobiography suggests that many of the *Cross Creek Cookery* recipes are hers, although Rawlings credited her for only three of them.

[44] *Max and Marjorie*, 522.

[45] For Fannie Farmer's culinary style, see Laura Shapiro, "The Mother of Level Measurements," in *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Modern Library, 1996), 106–126.

[46] The Duchess of Windsor, *Some Favorite Southern Recipes of the Duchess of Windsor* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), xi.

[47] Ibid, viii.

[48] Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 102.

[49] Ibid, 138.

[50] Ruth Berolzheimer, *The Victory Binding of the American Woman's Cookbook*, Wartime ed. (Chicago: Consolidated Books, 1942), A.

[51] Bigelow and Monti, 225.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seraph on the Suwanee, "Lord Bill of the Suwannee River," and the Shifting Dynamics of Race in the Segregated South

Since the 1990s, scholars in humanities have acknowledged whiteness as a racial and cultural category and explored how its conception, cultural images, and stereotypes are constructed.[1] Amidst the increase of academic interest in whiteness studies and accumulation of research specifically on Southern poor white culture, Hurston's last published novel *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) reemerged as one of the significant texts that deal with "cracker" culture.

Seraph is arguably Hurston's most controversial work partly because it deals with poor white culture. Instead of focusing on Southern black folk culture as Hurston's most works do, the novel chronicles the continuous failed attempts of Arvay Henson, a poor white "cracker" woman, to make her marriage work and her tedious journey to regain self-confidence and constructing identity. The author's characterization of the protagonist highly disturbed the critics of early Hurston studies. The earliest critique came from Hurston's biographer Hemenway in 1977: Hemenway bitterly comments that "Hurston largely turned her back on the source of her creativity. She escaped the stereotype of the 'picturesque' black by giving up the celebration of black folklife, replacing the storytellers on Joe Clarke's porch with a family of upwardly mobile

Florida crackers."[2] His frustration was shared by Mary Helen Washington and Alice Walker, both pioneers of feminist rereading of Hurston's work. For these critics, the dismaying fact is that *Seraph* is about a poor white heroine who, unlike Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* could in no way be called a "feminist."[3] One should consider these earlier critics' disappointment on the novel in relation to their effort to rediscover and canonize Hurston's work. The novel about a poor white woman was puzzling enough for these commentators who tried to historicize Hurston's work as representative modern African-American literature. Later on, John Lowe and Janet St. Clair presented the more positive view that the novel is in fact pro-feminist because Arvay, albeit within a limited sphere of domesticity, finally obtains self-fulfillment in her life with her husband Jim Meserve. In recent years, more and more scholars consider that in *Seraph* Hurston presents a legitimate critique of Southern poor white culture by focusing on the complex dynamics of race, class, and gender in the modern South.[4]

This chapter will likewise examine the Southern cultural dynamics Hurston witnessed and incorporated into her work, with special attention to her personal and literary friendship with Rawlings, to whom Hurston dedicated the novel. Since their first meeting in St. Augustine sometime in the spring of 1942, the two writers developed their friendship in the years prior to the publication of *Seraph*. Both being well acquainted with Southern folk culture, they must have found a kindred spirit in each other, although the social geography of race in the segregated

South inevitably affected their relationship. Remember their encounter 1942 mentioned in the introduction of this study, at Rawlings's hotel room into which Hurston got by sneaking through the back door of the building. Or their next meeting at Rawlings's residence in Cross Creek which occurred shortly after that. Rawlings's servant Idella Parker records how Rawlings treated Hurston in a very nice and equal manner, until that night when she sent her to the tenant house to share the bed with the maid, Parker herself:

> Imagine this now! Here was a black author who had come to visit Mrs. Rawlings and had been treated like an equal all day long, talking, laughing, and drinking together on the porch for all the world to see. But when it came to spending the night, Zora would be sent out to sleep with the servants. This was not for lack of bedrooms, mind you. Mrs. Rawlings had two empty bedrooms in the house, and no one else staying in either one.[5]

These two incidents are repeatedly mentioned by the critics as a proof of Rawlings's racism, but given the time frame during which the two writers came to know each other, it would be unfair to expect Rawlings to be completely exceptional or unaffected by the racial norms of the 1940s South. Furthermore, Annette Trefzer notes that these episodes on Hurston's visits rather show that "Hurston knew how to play by the rules of segregation."[6] Being a born Southerner, Hurston knew how to act accordingly in segregated Southern spaces without making a scene which is unnecessary either for her hostess or for herself. Just as when she came in through the back door and went up to the hotel penthouse to have tea with Rawlings, Hurston knew how to make the most of her situation and cunningly change a segregated space into a contact zone.

There were always segregated Southern spaces between the two women writers, but that did not hinder Hurston from developing the long-term friendship with Rawlings. Rawlings, in turn, cultivated her liberalism and her understanding about race relations through her friendship with Hurston, which later made her the strongest opponent of segregation and racial inequality.[7]

Hurston's attitude toward Rawlings seems sometimes very casual, intimate, and honest, while at other times condescending and ingratiating. In one letter written in 1943 she even offered to work for Rawlings instead of Parker who left the job as Rawlings's maid:

> How I wish that I were not doing a book too at this time! I would be so glad to come and take everything off your hands until you are through with yours. I know just what you need. You are certainly a genius and need a buffer while you are in labor. Idella is much less intelligent than I took her to be. What a privilege she had! Well, it is inevitable that people like you will waste a lot of jewelry by chunking it into hog pens. Even though I am busy, if it gets too awful, give a whoop and holler and I will do what I can for you. I really mean that. I am already looking around for somebody who would really do for you permanently. . . . Really, now, Miss Rawlings, if you find yourself losing your stride, let me help you out. I know so tragically what it means to be trying to concentrate and being nagged by the necessity of living. Of course yours is not financial as mine was at one time, but still with the scarcity of help in these war days, it might call for all sorts of annoyance to just get fed and bedded.[8]

Passages like these might seem to be one of the many examples of Hurston trying to benefit from a relationship with a well-connected and financially successful white person. Yet a more careful reading will reveal that she is not simply offering to be Rawlings's maid here: As Anna Lillios suggests, Hurston here might be using her classic "doublespeak."[9] She expresses her understanding as a fellow writer that Rawlings needs to focus on writing while having other

people take care of her, and also preemptively apologizes that she would not be able to come because she is too occupied with her own work. Huston must have known that she was making a very generous, maybe too generous, an offer here, but at the same time she is cunningly avoiding the visit from actually taking place. She thus accomplishes two things at one time with this letter—impressing Rawlings with her generosity and personal care but also keeping their friendship equal and professional. Meanwhile, Rawlings engages in her own "doublespeak" in response to Huston's letter. She is deeply moved (and also certainly confused) by her offer, but in her private letters to her husband Norton Baskin, she confesses, "I shed tears over the woman's offer. She is an artist in her own right, and if ever the 'nigger' was going to come out, it would presumably be in one who had gone as high professionally as she has. . . . Her offer settles in my mind all doubts I have had about throwing myself into the fight for an honest chance for the Negro."[10] What is ironic here is that Rawlings is not even aware, at least at this point, of her casual use of the contemporarily disparaging term "nigger" to describe her fellow writer. And although she decided to become a defender of Negro rights as a result of this incident, about four months later she would get upset again when Hurston showed up at Cross Creek, this time without notice, and worried her to death about the bedroom situation and the possible harm the whole event could do to her "invasion of privacy" lawsuit.[11]

Hurston's motivation behind this sudden second visit which occurred in December 1943 is

unclear, other than that they exchanged Christmas cards right before and Rawlings's message, according to her own explanation, sounded "depressed and blue."[12] Before Rawlings even had time to think about it, Hurston already arranged that she would go to spend the night at Martha's tenant house, and left her bags there. Embarrassed to let her stay in the tenant house already full with the Mickens family, Rawlings finally announced that Zora should sleep in a main house guestroom.[13] Here again Hurston played her role well and carefully, which in the end made Rawlings acknowledge her equality.

Perhaps it was Hurston's subtle method of negotiation that kept the two writers close over the years with no major friction. Though in a rather sporadic manner, Hurston and Rawlings kept in touch with each other until the latter's death in 1953. Rawlings arguably had a great influence on Hurston in choosing to write a novel about Florida poor white "crackers." It was a challenging task for Hurston not only because poor white culture is a completely new literary subject but also because she was aiming at something more than simply publishing a novel that sells well; the possibility for later film adaptation was in her mind when she was working on *Seraph*. As is often mentioned, in the days prior to writing the novel, Hurston had sought her way into film industry, doing a contract work for Paramount for a short time. In November 1942, she writes to Carl Van Vechten that she has "a tiny wedge in Hollywood."[14] While it is generally assumed that the film industry of the 1930s and the 1940s did not afford so many

opportunities to African Americans, Elizabeth Binggeli points out that the major film studios actually reviewed a lot of literary works by black writers, including Hurston's major novels and the autobiography, for adaptation.[15] Hurston's experience in Hollywood, albeit a short-lived one, must have convinced her that she would have a chance if only she picked the right plot and material. The success of the film version of Rawlings's *The Yearling* (1946), along with the contemporary film audience's tendency for what Binggeli calls "Crackerphilia," further propelled her to step into Rawlings's literary territory.[16]

Hurston's attempt to write a poor white novel also reflects her passion to write beyond her racial background. In the letter to Van Vechten cited above, she says, "I have hopes of breaking that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people."[17] Quite suggestively, in a letter to Rawlings she also praises her representations of black characters in *Cross Creek*: "You have written the best thing on Negroes of any white writer who has ever lived. Maybe you have bettered me, but I hope not, for my own salvation."[18] Is she just ingratiating here? Or is she, almost prophetically, implying that she could do the same about white characters because the race of a writer, after all, does not matter? Hazel Carby notes that Hurston was not the only black writer who challenged to use white characters in their work. During the 1940s and the 1950s, many writers from Ann Petry and Willard Motley to Frank Yerby and Richard Wright wrote fiction about whites aiming at wider audience. As Carby points out, their challenge was

largely welcomed by white literary critics who seemed to consider fiction about the white world as more universal and thus requires greater literary skills, which further sent those black writers to ponder on the contradiction of being a Negro and an American.[19] Behind Hurston's passion for writing a novel about poor whites was this current in black literary culture, and as one of these writers attempting to explore poor white culture, she shared other black writers' motivation to capture an American experience that is full of contradictions. Moreover, Hurston, thanks to Rawlings's introduction, got to work with Maxwell Perkins at Scribner's for the publication of *Seraph*. Although they did not actually have time to work together because of Perkins's sudden death in June 1947, Hurston was excited to have the talented editor who worked with a host of famous writers including Scott F. Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Rawlings. Rawlings must have told Hurston about how Perkins's editorial skill totally improved her work when she started writing about "cracker" culture, and there is little wonder if Hurston strongly expected him to guide her through her new literary direction.

In addition to these factors, Hurston's 1943 essay "The 'Pet Negro' system" should be taken into consideration in examining her exploration of race relations in the segregated South and the contemporary Southern poor white culture.[20] In the essay, Hurston introduces the idea of pet Negro system which is at the basis of race relations in the modern South. According to Hurston, whites in the South tend to take in a certain black as their pet Negro and give him or her special

treatment, while being largely indifferent or conservative concerning the basic social rights of African Americans on the whole. The pet Negro system, she states, "symbolizes the web of feelings and mutual dependencies spun by generations and generations of living together and natural adjustment. It isn't half as pretty as the ideal adjustment of theorizers, but it's a lot more real and durable, and a lot of black folk, I'm afraid, find it mighty cosy" (*Folklore, Memoirs and Other Writings* 915). What is most provocative about the essay is her focus on the mutuality of the system that complicates the black/white relation. Hurston notes, "the Negroes have their pet whites, so to speak. It works both ways. Class-consciousness of Negroes is an angle to be reckoned with in the South" (*Folklore, Memoirs and Other Writings* 917). Her argument that people with different racial identities interact and in some cases even develop friendship under the pet Negro system was and still is quite radical in two different levels. First, her idea of racial interaction would have made both white and black audience in the 1940s uncomfortable: the former would not like to believe they are somehow psychologically dependent on blacks, while the latter find it impossible to admit that they are benefiting from what oppresses their race on daily basis. Second, today's audience might also be disturbed by the fact that Hurston, not only in this essay but elsewhere too, seems to give a certain justification to the Jim Crow system. Yet as Delia Caparoso Konzett suggests, critiquing her conception of racial identity that way "fails to appreciate the partial progress towards racial justice and equality achieved in this

particular period with its unique context and limited repertoire of solutions."[21] Through the idea of pet Negro system, Hurston tried to show that race relations under the Jim Crow laws were much more complex than people usually consider, and amidst this complexity, blacks sought to interact with influential whites and negotiate their way to gaining a certain social power, however limited that would have been. Moreover, it would not be too far-fetched to presume that Hurston's complicated friendship with Rawlings led her to further contemplating on interracial relations in the South. The "Pet Negro" essay was published in *American Mercury* in May 1943, around the time Hurston wrote a passionate letter to Rawlings praising her book *Cross Creek*. In that letter she calls Rawlings her "sister," while a few months later she would offer to replace her housemaid.[22] Through the process in which she developed friendship with Rawlings, Hurston must have learned how to negotiate her way to the personal and literary connection she needed, and in so doing explored the subtle workings of interracial relations through her own experience. Today's reader would find it puzzling that Hurston could so casually accept and even encourage the constant shift of her roles in her relationship with Rawlings, but this very changeability, which highlights her social mobility, enables her to create a space of negotiation where racial identity, though it seems so essential in Southern social relations, does not necessarily indicate who has the power.

Taking these historical and personal contexts into consideration, I examine *Seraph* as

Hurston's exploration of race relations and the shifting concept of race itself under the pet Negro system in a form of fiction. As Konzett succinctly sums up, the novel "articulates what [Hurston] sees as the unspoken golden rule of the South and thus lays bare a messy system in which traditional oppositions of perpetrator and victim, master and slave, white and black, overlap and are at times indistinguishable from one another."[23] Such a complicated form of racial interaction can especially be seen between Arvay's husband Jim Meserve and his non-white employees. By emphasizing the mutuality of blacks and whites in benefiting from the pet Negro system, Hurston reveals a Southern space as the site for interaction and negotiation, a contact zone in which power relations are less stable, racial and class identities negotiable.

In the opening of the novel, Hurston makes clear Jim's class difference from the poor whites of Sawley:

> The man was Jim Meserve, whose ancestors had held plantations upon the Alabama River before the War. In that respect, Jim Meserve differed from the rest of the inhabitants of Sawley, who had always been of the poor whites who had scratched out some kind of an existence in the scrub oaks and pines, far removed from the ease of the big estates.
> Not that Jim Meserve had come among the people of Sawley with anything. He had brought little more than the suit he had on, the high laced boots, and the broad-brimmed felt hat, which he wore so rakishly on his curly head. The fortunes of the War had wiped Jim's grand-father clean. His own father had had no chance to even inherit. Jim had come to town three months ago with only a small bundle, containing his changing clothes. But Jim had a flavor about him. He was like a hamstring. He was not meat any longer, but he smelled of what he had once been associated with. (7)

As his last name "Meserve" suggests, Jim has both a spirit of independent, self-made man (serve-myself) and an aristocratic air (serve-me). Though he has scarcely any material possessions at the point he comes to Sawley, his presence is dignified because of his plantation-owning ancestors. His social and economic success, however, depends on his lack of persistence in his aristocratic heritage and his willingness for class descent. When Arvay asks why he "broke off [from his family], took to knocking around, worked in teppentime, and married somebody like [her]," Jim replies, "While my old man was sitting around reading and taking notes trying to trace up who did what in the Civil War, and my two brothers were poising around waiting for the good old times that they had heard went on before the War to come back again, I shucked out to get in touch with the New South" (203). With no emotional involvement in the Lost Cause, he immerses himself in a new social setting which provides more jobs and opportunities for success.

Rawlings similarly creates a typical modern Southern entrepreneur in her unpublished short story "Lord Bill of the Suwanee River."[24] The character of Bill Boyle, also known as "Lord Bill," is based on a legendary railroad foreman William E. Bell, about whom Rawlings learned through her research in western and central Florida. Bill is "about the size of Two Teddy Roosevelts" and weighs "three hundred pounds most of the time." His voice is "deep as thunder and as rich as flat-woods honey" (*Short Stories by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, hereafter

abbreviated as *SS*, 109). Building railroads and towns, he brought prosperity to one whole area in the Suwannee River country. People remember him and pass on a variety of stories about him, all of which are magnified and with slightly different details. He is described as a man who "loved money and power and men and railroads and food and drink and jesting. Life spread all these things before him on the broad table of the Florida frontier and he bolted them raw" (*SS* 115), which is reminiscent of the larger-than-life character of Jim in *Seraph* who likewise enjoys huge entrepreneurial success in multiple industries in the state. Although no evidence has been found concerning whether Hurston read "Lord Bill" before working on her novel, there are clear resemblances between the two works. It is possible that Hurston read it sometime in 1943 during her two visits at Cross Creek, or at least learned about it from Rawlings. Both Jim and Bill have a bold and magnanimous personality and large-scale enterprise. They represent a new generation of Southern whites seeking a new capitalist frontier, working and developing rich lands of Florida while making use of its abundant natural resources. To borrow Bill's words, they like to "see the wilderness under cultivation" (*SS* 110).

Hurston and Rawlings characterize their protagonists against the backdrop of the change in economy in the South during the 1930s and the 1940s. Jim's and Bill's entrepreneurship, in short, represents the advent of Southern capitalism after the Great Depression. Sharecropping and tenancy, which had been the basis for the post-Civil War agricultural economy of the South,

significantly declined during and after the Depression years when the rural poverty literally hit the bottom. Federal relief from the New Deal administration, mechanization of farming, and the decrease in labor force during the Second World War because of the draft accelerated the already collapsed system of tenancy, while gradual industrialization and the movement of rural population into urban area built a basis for new capitalism.[25]

What characterizes Jim and Bill as entrepreneurs is their mobility, i.e., the lack of attachment to land. Both Hurston and Rawlings emphasize Jim's and Bill's physical mobility as a metaphor for their economic success. While most poor white characters in *Seraph* are stuck in the small turpentine town with no prospect for improving their economic condition, Jim consistently climbs up the social ladder by moving from one place to another and seeking a new business opportunity. Being highly mobile, he works his way up from Sawley's turpentine camp to the booming citrus industry in Citrabelle and finally to the fishing business on the Atlantic Coast. Similarly, Rawlings's Bill moves from central to coastal Florida in his houseboat known as the "floatin' palace," seeking an even bigger economic success (*SS* 108). Building a town here and railroads there, he constantly moves "up and down the Suwannee River" (Ibid.). Mobility, especially mobility on water, functions not only as a symbol of prosperity but also a metaphorical site for racial and class fluidity and connection. In *Seraph*, shrimp boats are described as sites of the Melvillesque contact zone where multiracial crews

work together and casually curse the owners:

> Alfredo was captain of the *Angeline*, and a husky Negro around twenty-five was in command of the *Kenny M*. Arvay was surprised at that, but soon learned that it was a common thing. There were as many if not more colored captains than white. It was who could go out there and come back with the shrimp. And nobody thought anything about it. White and Negro captains were friendly together and compared notes. Some boats had mixed crews. They all talked about the same things, and they all cursed out the owners. Everything that went wrong on a boat was named after the owner. Did the fuel pump on the engine go bad? It was a Toomer, Meserve or whatever the owner's name so-and-so of a bastard! It was that way about everything. Arvay found that Jim knew all about it, as did the other owners and laughed it off. (323)

The idea of integrated boats echoes Hurston's positive experience in her houseboat *Wanago* (wanna go) which she owned during the 1940s. In 1943, she writes to Rawlings: "All the other boat-owners are very nice to me. Not a word about race."[26] Here the boat is illustrated as an exception from segregated Southern spaces and a site for egalitarian racial relationship. The name *Wanago* itself neatly suggests Hurston's orientation for mobile and fluid identity. Interestingly, Hurston once invited Rawlings on a boat trip on the Indian river and St. John's river. Though the plan never realized, it is tempting to speculate that Hurston imagined her houseboat to be a perfect space for develop the interracial friendship with Rawlings.

In both *Seraph* and "Lord Bill," the key to the protagonists' social and economic success is their creation of an egalitarian workspace based on new capitalism. Both Jim and Bill find the black labor force indispensable for their enterprise and develop a certain intimacy with them, for they know the need for cheap labor and efficiency surpasses racial pride. In *Seraph*, Jim works

with whoever is competent enough regardless of his or her race, class, ethnicity or nationality, as long as it helps him maximize profit. He can easily cross the racial and class boundaries set by Jim Crow for his own benefits, though not necessarily for social justice. His basic strategy is to develop intimacy with those who work for him and derive necessary information from them. When he tries to research about citrus business, he frequently has "taken up around the jooks and gathering places in Colored Town, and swapped stories, and stood treats, and eased in questions," expecting that "since the colored men did all the manual work, they were the ones who actually knew how things were done" (74). He is always good with his work men, and never forgets to supply them with a little bit extra of something—moonshine, grocery items, just anything—to keep them close. In short, he makes the most of pet Negro system for the capitalist cause. He knows how the pet system works, and he uses it to enhance his entrepreneurial accomplishments. And it is Joe Kelsy, Jim's "right-hand man," who most benefits from this system. Jim and Joe develop a relationship that is very close to friendship. They treat each other very casually, and help each other because they both know that that will benefit themselves. Despite their race difference, their friendship is mutual—or at least Jim considers so; as he says, "He had made a friend out of the Negro, or the Negro had made a friend out of him, one or the other" (43).

"Lord Bill" likewise depicts the blurred racial lines. Just like Jim, Bill "takes good care" of

his black workers, while he strictly controls their off-time activities by imposing rules and regulations on drinking, gambling, and buying prostitutes. According to one black man Tobe who used to work for him, workers in the Quarters started calling him "Lord Bill": "We tole him, 'You Lawd to us.'" (*SS* 119). It was both fear and a sense of awe that keep black workers held to Bill's camp:

> The Negroes feared Bill's strength. They worshiped his person and his power. They loved him because he took care of them. Money never meant much to a nigger, but he likes to be taken care of. And nothing on earth will love a man the way a black can, unless it's a pointer dog. He would send fifty miles for a doctor and spend a hundred dollars to save the life of the most worthless black. (*SS* 119)

One should focus less on Rawlings's racist overtone than on the striking similarity of the race relations depicted here to the ones in *Seraph*. Bill knows the degree of his power and influence on blacks and uses them for his capitalist enterprise, while blacks likewise use his protection for their own survival and economic stability. Hurston and Rawlings acknowledge this type of race relation peculiar to the contemporary South and depict these in-between spaces where black and white workers work together and negotiate for their own benefits. One scene in "Lord Bill" in which Bill has a weekend-night wrestling match in the light of a huge bonfire is one good example for such spaces. Bill is known to let anyone wrestle for money, but it is usually his favorite black "dwarf" who wins, with his deceiving size and surprising strength: "He liked to see his wrestling boy fool them all, and scoop up the money from the sand with his long black

monkey-fingers." As if in a Bakhtinian social space of the carnivalesque, here racial and class boundaries become porous and "[e]verybody, blacks and white company and Lord Bill, had such a good time the camp was in a delirium all night. Big nights" (*SS* 121). Hurston describes a similarly lavish and boundary-blurring pay-night spree through Joe's words:

> "I know, I know," Jim retorted in mock sternness. "It's Saturday nights that's your trouble, Joe. Saturday pay-night, you spend all you got on likker and women. Before draw-day, you're pestering my life out of me for more money. Pretty nearly ever man on the camp is the same way. Saturday night! Saturday night! Look like that's all you colored folks live for on this camp. Saturday night!" . . .
> "I speck youse right about that Saturday night business, Mister Jim. Fact of the matter is, I knows youse dead right. But if you ever was to be a Negro just *one* Saturday night, you'd never want to be white no more." (44)

In a very subtle way, Joe suggests the paradoxical richness of black workers' lives despite their poverty. In a crazy atmosphere of Saturday pay-night, a black man can enjoy his life probably much better than any white person would do. One might call it pseudo-egalitarianism, yet Jim and Bill allows workers to create a contact zone where the daytime power relationship based on race and class can disappear or be cancelled out under a shared sense of festivity.

While Hurston depicts Southern spaces with less rigid racial and class boundaries, the novel's heroine Arvay apparently exists outside such spaces. Unable to situate herself in a new capitalist system where rich whites and blacks benefit from working with each other, Arvay represents the Southern poor white as the social abject. In the "Pet Negro" essay, Hurston explains how poor whites are excluded from the interracial mutual dependency of the pet system,

using the example of a rich Southern white Colonel Cary and his "pet Negro" John Harper:

> If ever it came to the kin of violent showdown the orators hint at, you could count on all the Colonel Carys tipping off and protecting their John Harpers; and you could count on all the John Harpers and Aunt Sues to exempt their special white folk. And that means pretty nearly everybody on both sides would be exempt, except the "pore white trash" and "stray niggers," and not all of them. (*Folklore, Memoirs and Other Writings* 917)

"Pore white trash" exists completely outside the Southern power structure and thus is not allowed to benefit from it, which makes their situation quite similar to that of "stray niggers." Even though their race has historically signified the absolute power in the South, poverty and their general lack of cultural refinement signified as "trashiness" deny them of all the privileges whiteness would accord. To follow the definition by Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, the category of white trash is not only racially marked but also

> marked as trash, as something that must be discarded, expelled, and disposed of in order for whiteness to achieve and maintain social dominance. Thus, white trash must be understood as both an external and an internal threat to whiteness. It is externalized by class difference but made through racial identification. White trash lies simultaneously inside and outside whiteness, becoming the difference within, the white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness.[27]

Through the figure of its poor white heroine, *Seraph* grapples with the complexity of poor whiteness examined here by Newitz and Wray. Being white but not quite enough, Arvay and her poor white community are left behind from the upward social mobility created by new capitalism. The novel's opening passage describes Sawley as a space deadlocked with economic stagnation and no possibility for development.

> [F]ew of these fields were intensively cultivated. For the most part they were scratchy plantings, the people being mostly occupied in the production of turpentine and lumber. The life of Sawley streamed out from the sawmill and the "teppentime 'still." Then too, there was ignorance and poverty, and the ever-present hookworm. The farms and the scanty flowers in front yards in tin cans and buckets looked like the people. Trees and plants always look like the people they live with, somehow. (1)

Arvay's hometown is described as a space trapped by everlasting poverty, futility and rigidity. There is no growing industry in the town, and the only surviving ones there—turpentine and lumbering—indicate that their land is not for cultivation and future reproduction but just for consumption. The desolate town mirrors the people who live there. Like flowers potted in tin cans and buckets, the people look shabby and lifeless.

Throughout the novel, Arvay and her family members fulfill a variety of negative cultural stereotypes of poor whites from birth defects, feeblemindedness, mood swings, to ugliness, and general uncleanliness. These cultural myths about the poor whites' physical, mental and behavioral abnormalities could be directly linked with theories and practices of eugenics that began to develop around the early twentieth century in the United States and became popular in the South by the Depression years. When the dire poverty of the rural South became not only a regional but also national concern, contemporary eugenicists related poor whites' depravity to hereditary impurities caused by inbred and miscegenation. Their hereditary explanation was quickly adapted by the Southern states, and led to institutionalization and involuntary sterilization of many poor whites in the whole region.[28] In Hurston studies, Chuck Jackson, for

one, discusses how Huston, with her career as an anthropologist, may have possibly been familiar with eugenic studies on poor whites and used its ideas in *Seraph*.[29] Many of the cultural stereotypes used by Hurston do seem to reflect the eugenic conceptions of poor whites as a race and a class that had already become common by the time the novel was published. Arvay's continuous inner anguish and bitterness are caused by the extent to which she thoroughly internalizes these stereotypes even though they stigmatize herself and her people as white trash. Throughout her married life with Jim, she is trapped in a process of circular thinking about her absolute and unchangeable inferiority to her husband who is, with upward social mobility, leading a successful middle-class life.

As in her other literary works, Hurston again presents how the issue of race is conflated with other categories, e.g., gender and class. In *Seraph*, poor whiteness and some of stereotypes are closely associated with femininity and expressed through Arvay's female body. Since the Depression years, poor white women in the South, because of their reproductive ability and the actual high birth rate of the region, became a central focus when considering Southern poverty, and Southern authors frequently depict poor white female characters that represent the region's economic problem through them.[30] Arvay to some degree reflects the cultural image of the stigmatized poor white female body. Her behavioral abnormalities are often associated with her maternal family line, and represent the inerasable biological inferiority of poor white. The first

chapter of the novel reveals that young Arvay suffers from hysterical seizures either during or after she is in church on Sunday. Her mother, who is very religious, had the same tendency in her girlhood. It is hinted that the seizures are associated not only with religious exultation but also adolescent nervousness because they happen usually right after Arvay comes home escorted by a young man: "No one thought too much about the seizures. Fits were things that happened to some young girls, but they grew out of them sooner or later. It was usually taken as a sign of a girl being 'highstrung.' Marriage would straighten her out" (6). Until Jim miraculously cures it, Arvay keeps giving an intense physical response to men who tries to court her, and her nervousness ties her closely to her mother. Another thing that ties her to her mother is the habit of clay-eating. After she marries Jim and gets pregnant with their first son Earl, she starts eating clay like her mother used to do:

> Arvay developed strange moods and appetites. A great craving for meat, and for clay. Arvay had seen many people in Sawley eat clay, but she had never touched it herself. Now she had a taste for clay, that fine, cream-colored clay which she had seen her mother eating all her life. There was not much clay in Florida, but there was a deposit not too far from Sawley, to the north of town. Many a time Arvay had gone with her mother and seen her eat it hungrily after a rain. She had even seen her mother bake it into little cakes and sigh with satisfaction afterwards. It had tasted so smooth and good! (65)

J. Wayne Flynt notes that the habit of clay-eating was deep-rooted in the Southern poor white culture: "Many men believed that eating clay increased sexual prowess, and some females claimed that eating clay helped pregnant women to have an easy delivery."[31] With its literal

closeness to soil and association with sexuality, clay-eating incites a spiteful response. Jim in the novel expresses his disgust when he finds out pregnant Arvay is eating clay. Clay-eating as a practice was also predominant among African Americans.[32] The fact that poor white and black cultures share this one practice points to the rather unexplored similarity between them. Clay-eating thus does a lot of cultural work in *Seraph*; it associates poor whites with excessive sexuality, while also hinting on Arvay's closeness to black culture in spite of herself. As I discuss later, the unexpected association between Arvay and blackness is significant when one reconsiders her poor white identity construction.

Arvay's deep-rooted sexual anxiety is a key to understanding her constant inner turmoil. At sixteen, she helplessly falls in love with Carl Middleton, the new pastor at the town's Baptist church, but he marries her sister Larraine who is more plump, feminine, and popular. While she announces to everyone that she will become a missionary to leave the sinful world behind, Arvay cannot forget her love and keeps "living in mental adultery" with Carl, dreaming about him abandoning Larraine for her (34). Her body also acts in a weird way as a response to her secret inner desire: "[W]hat got the matter with her every time that Larraine got pregnant? Some imp of Satan seemed to grab hold of her and drag her right into the darkened room where Carl and 'Raine were, and made her look and see and hear from beginning to the end. It was after 'Raine's second announcement that Arvay felt her spasms coming on" (12). Later when

she marries Jim and has their first son Earl, the deformed baby comes to embody her guilt toward her past passion for Middleton. Arvay thinks that the son "is the punishment for the way I used to be" (69). Earl also represents the curse of poor white blood from which she cannot get away: the baby reminds her of her Uncle Chester "who was sort of queer in his head" (69). Earl makes her feel even stronger the blood of her mother's side of family, and even though she has two more children, Angeline and Kenny, he remains her special one all the more because of his defects. When Jim suggests that Earl should be institutionalized, Arvay opposes: "Naw, I'll never give my consent for Earl to be put away. Never so long as my head is warm. Earl is always wrong because he's like my folks. 'Taint never nothing wrong with Angeline and Kenny because they take after your side. But I'm here to tell you that I'll wade in blood to my knees for him" (126). Her attempts to defend Earl end in futility, however, when he attacks the girl Lucy Ann from the Corregio family who tends Jim's orange groves. Though Arvay secretly tried to let her son escape, he eventually gets hunted down in the swamp and shot to death. Earl's sudden aggression marks the moment of the return of the repressed. It is as if he symbolizes sexual desire repressed within Arvay for fear that a tainted blood of the Henson family would come to the surface to contaminate others.

Significantly, the same scene also exposes Arvay's racial anxiety. Arvay hears one man say, "We know who did it. What we need is a posse to run the so-and-so down and string him up.

Can't a clean-living, pretty white girl like Lucy Ann get no more protection than that? Don't need no damn Sheriff. Let's go, men!" (144). Notably, these words come very close to the classic discourse of lynching used by Southern white supremacists aiming at a defense of white womanhood from black rapists. They know Earl is technically considered white but they also know that he, because of deformities, is outside the realm of ideal whiteness. In this sense, Earl also embodies Arvay's constant fear that because of her poor white origin, she is not quite white enough and thus becomes closer to blacks whom she despise. Throughout the novel, Hurston links Arvay and her poor white culture with black culture. As is often pointed out, the language of Arvay and other white characters in the novel is quite close to that of Southern blacks. In her introduction to the collection of Huston's FWP writings, Pam Bordelon claims that "Hurston lifted sentences from her FWP field notes and placed them in the mouths of [*Seraph*'s] characters."[33] Though the fact that she used the black folk expressions she found in the field on her white characters might offend some readers who consider her to be a spokesperson of "authentic" Southern black culture, but it is possible that Hurston did that on purpose, in order to show how black and white poor cultures intersect and influence each other much more than they are usually considered to. In fact, she was quite aware of the similarity of black and poor white languages and wrote to her editor and her friends about that. Here is one example from Hurston's letter to Rawlings sent soon after the novel was published:

> About the idiom of the book, I too thought that when I went out to dwell among the poor white in Dixie County that they were copying up. But I found their colorful speech so general that I began to see that it belonged to them. After my jealousy was cooled off, I realized that Negroes introduced into N. America spoke no English at all, and learned from the whites. Our sense of rhythm points it up a bit, but the expressions for the most part are English held over from the Colonial period. I began to read English literature and found much of the picture talk in there. The black face minstrels of the past sold America on the notion that all colorful idioms originated with Negroes. Just stand around where poor whites work, or around the village stores of Saturday nights & listen & you will hear something.[34]

It seems that Hurston here is writing in response to Rawlings's comment on the novel's use of the language of "crackers" quite resembling that of Southern blacks. While Hurston's reasoning (Africans learned English from whites and thus their language is not original) is a little confusing, her intention to avoid essentializing Southern black expression is clear. In fact, she applies the same logic when she talks about the music used in the novel:

> There is no more Negro music in the U.S. It has been fused and merged and become the national expression, and displaced the worship of European expression. In fact, it is now denied, (and with some truth) that it never was pure Negro music, but an adaptation of white music. That is as over-simplified as the former claim that it was something purely negroid. But the fact remains that what has evolved here is something American, and has come to be the national expression, and is as such influencing the music of the world.[35]

To prove her point, Hurston uses Arvay's second son Kenny, who learns to play music from Joe and eventually becomes a successful jazz musician in New York. Kenny embodies the contemporary South as contact zone developed through the constant cultural exchange between whites and blacks, and his success shows how such a hybrid culture is getting accepted by broader audience and making its appearance on national stage. In the draft, Hurston actually

added one chapter about Kenny in New York, which suggests that the idea of the South as contact zone was central to the novel.[36]

Interestingly, Jim celebrates and supports Kenny's musical expedition because he knows embracing a contact zone culture, in his words "taking over darky music," is a way to "making more money" (202). By contrast, Arvay is unable to admit there is intersection or mutual influence between her culture and that of blacks. Thus she takes on a racist attitude to salvage poor white pride. Despite her talent and preference for music, Arvay cannot stand Joe's influence on Kenny's music because in her mind African-American music is associated with vulgarity.

Arvay is also afraid that Joe has too much influence on Jim. Their long-time business partnership and interracial intimacy makes Arvay jealous and stimulates her anxiety about Joe's superiority over herself as a born-cracker. Arvay tells Jim:

> I know so well that you don't think I got no sense, and my folks don't amount to a hill of beans in your sight. You come from some big high muck-de-mucks, and we ain't nothing but piney-woods Crackers and poor white trash. Even niggers is better than we is, according to your kind. Joe Kelsy's word stands higher than mine any old day. You give him more credit for sense than you do me. (126)

She feels left out from Jim's close companionship with Jim not only because of her class but also she is a woman—the sense of permanent inferiority she feels is based on her inability to participate in the act of male bonding. This form of male bonding is, in fact, exemplified in the

rape scene. As is often pointed out, Joe's opinion is behind Jim's decision to rape Arvay who remains indecisive about their relationship. Joe knowingly advises, "Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make'em knuckle under. Form the very first jump, get the bridle in they mouth and ride 'em hard and stop 'em short. They's all alike, Boss. Take 'em and break 'em" (46). Arvay is therefore doubly alienated from the intimate society of men based on the pet system, while constantly considered as Jim's personal "property" (216). Such a relationship between Jim and Arvay is suggested in the earliest stage of their relationship:

> In so many words he had said, "Love and marry me and sleep with me. That is all I need you for. Your brains are not sufficient to help me with my work; you can't think with me. Let's get this thing straight in the beginning. Putting your head on the same pillow with mine is not the same thing as mingling your brains with mine anymore than crying when I cry is giving you the power to feel my sorrow. You can feel my sympathy but not my sorrow." All in all, that meant that if she married Jim Meserve, her whole duty as a wife was to just love him good, be nice and kind around the house and have children for him. (35-36)

By marrying Jim, Arvay knows she would be assured of happiness as a woman, and social status as a wife of a successful business man, but her gender and her poor white origin would not allow her to be his accomplice. This pattern of the marital relationship is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel, and in every case Arvay fails to fulfill her duty as a loving wife and mother because serving others totally destroys her self-value.

Having constantly devaluing herself as a woman and a poor white, Arvay displaces her

anguish toward non-whites who work for Jim. Arvay despises not only Joe but also the Coreggios, whom she associates with foreign, less sophisticated culture and thus considers to be less white:

> Jim had said that they were white folks, but the man turned out to be a Portuguese, and his name was Coreggio. That made them foreigners, and no foreigners were ever quite white to Arvay. Real white people talked English and without any funny sounds to it. The fact that his wife was a Georgia-born girl that he had married up around Savannah did not help the case a bit, so far as Arvay could see. The woman had gone back on her kind and fallen from grace. (120)

Throughout the novel, Arvay stubbornly sticks to this deeply biased conception of race mixed with xenophobia, which reflects her fear that people who are non-white from her perspective would have more influence over Jim than she does despite their racial (thus essential) inferiority. When the Coreggios invite the Meserve family to their special seafood dinner and Jim loves the food, Arvay, stubbornly declining the invitation, calls their dishes "Geechy messes" (a loose association with the Gullah blacks in costal Georgia) and thinks that the "Corregio woman was 'fly' and doing her level best to bait Jim Meserve in" (128). A passage like this is exemplary for Hurston's careful examination on the psychological workings behind poor white racism and how they displace their sense of inferiority in the social hierarchy onto that of racial superiority. The ultimate irony is that hating non-whites would not liberate Arvay from the sense of being outside the social system: in doing so, she rather reinforces what she hopes to undermine, that is, the rigid social and cultural boundaries which mark her out as a poor white trash.

Hurston makes clear the status of poor white women as the most abject social class which is at the depth of Arvay's psychic disorientation. Unable to fit into the middle class life her husband and her children enjoy, she eventually finds an escape in reasserting poor white pride, which is based on the religious glorification of her cultural background she had been ashamed of whole her life:

> The Bible said, "Everything after its own kind," and her kind was up there in the piney woods around Sawley. Her family, and the folks she used to know before she fooled herself and linked up with a man who was not her kind. Arvay tossed her head defiantly and rhymed out that she was a Cracker bred and a Cracker born, and when she was dead there'd be a Cracker gone. Jim's and even her own children's ways were not her ways. She had tried and tried but she did not fit in. Let Jim and them have their ways. She would go back and let them strain with his house and his impudent, biggity niggers his ownself. . . . As always, she had been trying to defend her background and justify it so that Jim could accept it and her along with it. She had been on the defensive ever since her marriage. The coring poverty of her childhood became a glowing virtue, and a state to be desired. Arvay scorned off learning as a source evil knowledge and thought fondly of ignorance as the foundation of good-heartedness and honesty. Peace, contentment and virtue hung like a rainbow over turpentine shacks and shanties. There love and free-giving abided and not on decorated sun-porches. Even Larraine and her family stood glorified in this distant light. Arvay felt eager to get back in the atmosphere of her humble beginnings. God was showing favor to His handmaiden. (271-72)

As Konzett points out, Hurston "unmasks this onto-theological recovery of a pure cultural origin as an anachronistic illusion in the face of overwhelming economic decline and cultural disintegration." By overlaying the Christian context, Arvay reaffirms poverty as the virtues of humbleness, and ignorance as "the foundation of good-heartedness and honesty." She even voluntarily pushes aside her long-time hatred toward Larraine, which shows the level of her

delusion. While doing all that, she also vilifies the middle-class life Jim provided her as a morally hazardous condition in which she has to work with blacks and treat them as her equals. Hurston presents an in-depth analysis on the patterns of thinking of poor white female subject which inevitably includes illusory religiosity and white supremacy.

Through Arvay's futile life struggle, Hurston highlights the existing racial, class, and gender boundaries in the Southern space which blocks poor white woman from a successful middle-class life. But the novel ultimately shows that those boundaries are, despite their apparent rigidity, malleable; through her psychological growth and the acquisition of social mobility, Arvay actually manages to cross and redraw the racial and class lines. Toward the end of the novel, Hurston shows how Arvay eventually becomes cured of her racial, class, and sexual anxieties.

The latter part of the novel carefully describes how Arvay gradually breaks away from poor white identity to embrace middle-class life. The first sign of her internal change is represented by the sleeping porch newly added to her house. At first she is unable to enjoy spending time there because in her mind that kind of porch belongs to "a class of folks whom she thought of as too high-toned for her to compare with. For the used-to-be Arvay Henson, that kind of a thing was a mighty high kick for a low cow" (233). With its décor carefully chosen by her sophisticated daughter Angeline, the porch "put her in mind of an inside flower garden"(234).

Arvay gradually learns to make herself comfortable there and starts inviting her lady friends to sit there and have some lemonade. The gorgeous sleeping porch separated from living room by glass doors literally functions as a liminal space that opens up the world of Arvay to outside from her self-imposed psychological confinement. In her mind it is a symbol of high life which she could never fully enjoy, and learning to do so literally means stepping up a social ladder while leaving behind her old self as Arvay Henson, poor white "cracker" woman.

Yet the drastic change would not come to Arvay until Jim leaves her, after the critical incident of a rattlesnake attacking Jim. He catches a huge rattlesnake outside and tries to show it to Arvay, but the snake in turn traps him with its strong coil. He asks for help, but Arvay cannot move or say a word, and even feels angry with Jim because he brought such a trouble by catching the snake in the first place. Thanks to the help of Joe's son Jeff, Jim escapes the bite by a hairbreadth, while Arvay standing there numb. Jeff does not hide his utter contempt for her, while Jim is deeply hurt by her failure to respond to his love. Jim leaves her and goes to the Atlantic Coast, and Arvay is left alone in the house. She eventually gets a message from Larraine telling her their mother is sick, and decides to go home. Her visit to Sawley for the first time in years makes her realize the changes the town had gone through. The town is embracing the late economic development; they found new crops for farming and built a new highway which brings in business, while turpentine camps are gone along with the poor whites

working there. The change of her hometown somewhat ruins Arvay's nostalgic feeling, but she is in fact shocked to find how trashy her own people are: "If that chuckle-head of yours was a hog head, I'd be willing to work for it for a solid year. Good God! I wonder if I have changed as bad as they have!" (275). With their physical ugliness and greediness over the mother's property, Larraine, Carl Middleton and their three children disgust her. After her mother's death, Arvay eventually finds out that Carl, her first love, had been telling people he courted her before he married Larraine, which leaves her with a strange sense of triumph and pity over her sister. Thus liberated from her long-time obsession over her unrequited love and inferiority toward Larraine, she now consciously stands above poor white "crackers" including her own family, and gets acquainted with the town's big shots such as Banker Bradford Cary. Holding a big funeral service for her mother with the aid of Cary, she feels she is completely changed inside, surrounded by rich and well-educated people. That is when she attributes her success to Jim's presence:

> What put her ahead of Larraine and the other girls who had come along with her? Seemed like it was Jim Meserve. She had caught the choicest man of them all. How had she managed to do it? The only thing that she could see was her face and her body, and maybe her ways too. Then it could be that she wasn't too ugly after all, and her difference from the first she used to envy was not a mistake as she had thought. (298)

Arvay quickly reinterpret her marriage with Jim as a blessing, so that she could finally fit into the middle-class life in which she had felt so out of place for years.

But recreating her memory about married life is not just enough. Arvay still has to completely erase her poor white origin by breaking the ties with her family. Thus she burns down the Henson house which in her mind is

> no house at all. It was an evil, ill-deformed monstropolous accumulation of time and scum. It had soaked in so much of doing-without, of soul starvation, of brutish vacancy of aim, of absent dreams, envy of trifles, ambitions for littleness, smothered cries and trampled love, that is was a sanctuary of tiny and sanctioned vices. . . .
> By a lucky chance, she had been carried away from it at a fairly young age, but still, its fumes and vapors had stuck to her sufficiently to scar Jim and bruise her children. . . . The house had caught a distemper from the people who had lived in it, and had then diseased up the people. No, it was no longer just a building. It had caught a soul of its own now. It caught people and twisted the limbs of their minds. What was in its craw gave off a bad breath. (306)

The house appears as the accumulation of negative values the poor Hensons who lived in there represent. And it eventually becomes like a diseased soul and breathes in and out the vapors which further contaminate the family and warp their minds. Burning it down is a symbolic act through which Arvay is able to eliminate all the negativities her poor white blood denotes, and cleanse herself to start over as a middle-class white woman. Significantly, she starts lighting fires in the bedroom of her dead mother, who had for so long represented the bad seeds and abject femininity.

After this cathartic ritual, Arvay goes home feeling rejuvenated. There she reconciles with Jeff, who before scorned her for not helping Jim when he was attacked by the rattlesnake. She talks to Jeff and his wife Janie the way Jim would do: “Hello there, Jeff, you old rascal, you!

Hi there, Janie! . . . You all look like new money in town to me. I sure am glad to see you" (311). Though they are at first puzzled by Arvay's sudden change, Jeff and Janie soon learn how they are supposed to respond. When Arvay shows them the ham and the bag of pecans she brought for them, they starts raving over her:

> "I declare, Miss Arvay, but you sure is folks."
> "Sure is," Jeff added sincerely. "Just like Mister Jim, ain't she, Janie? And everybody knows that Mister Jim is quality first-class. Knows how to carry hisself, and then how to treat everybody. Miss Arvay's done come to be just like him." (314)

The act of giving Jeff and Janie a souvenir as a sign of gratitude and care marks Arvay's symbolic entrance to the pet Negro system. Jeff's words confirm this; he admits that Arvay has finally learned to act like "quality first class" and thus is able to treat people around her in an appropriate way, "just like Mister Jim." By identifying Jim and her, Jeff allows her into the system of power from which she had been excluded. It is worth noting that in this scene Arvay is on the porch which, as mentioned before, symbolizes the ease of middle-class life. With Jeff and Janie as her "pets," she finally feels completely at home sitting there.

Arvay's class ascent will not be completed until she voluntarily moves to the coast with Jim. Moving there is to trace the roads through which Jim traveled in accordance with his economic success, and to positively accept mobility as a way of life. It is thus important to closely examine the final boat trip scene, though it is rarely discussed in critical studies of the novel. When she gets to the shrimp docks where Jim works, Arvay tells him that she wants to see how

he works, which she has never done before, and volunteers to tag along on their shrimp catching trip. Jim buys her some fishermen's clothes, which is a significant symbol of him giving her a sanction to come into the men's world (323). It is suggested that this trip itself is a trial for Arvay. Jim's boat the *Arvay Henson* crosses the bar right before dawn. The wave is so rough there that it scares the Mate, one of the crews, to death. Amidst the turmoil, he clings onto Jim and asks him to go back, which makes it hard for Jim to keep his grip on the wheel. Seeing this, Arvay moves

> almost instinctively. She flung the door open, leaped upon the Mate and grabbed him by his hair to pull him away from Jim's leg.
> "Let go of my husband's leg!" She pounded the man about the face with her fists then yanked and pulled again. "You want to make him wreck his boat? Turn loose!" (329)

Unlike when the rattlesnake attacked Jim, Arvay is not petrified with fear anymore and tries to help him without hesitation. She also knows that Jim tried to cross the bar before dawn though it is easier to do so later because he wanted to show her the sun rise. She is given a second chance, and this time she succeeds in saving him and appreciating his efforts to please her. After this incident, Arvay and Jim have a long conversation about a drop of water going back home to the sea:

> ". . . Don't you realize that the sea is the home of water? All water is off on a journey unlessen it's in the sea, and it's homesick, and bound to make its way home some day.
> ". . . The very same water that you see out there was right here when the world was formed. Changed places and forms too many thousands of times for you to imagine, been off from home and come back just that many times. It'll always be water, though, and always come back home. It's million times stronger and more durable than anything that ever lived in it

> nor passed over it. I look at it and think about it, and I never get tired of looking and thinking."
> "That's something to think about, Jim. It's never entered my mind before. Maybe it's like that with everything and everybody. If it's in there, it will return to its real self at last."
> "That's well-spoken, Arvay. If it's there, it'll come out some old day. Like the water in the underground cave like Silver Springs. Underground for nobody knows how many hundreds of miles, and for nobody knows how many centuries of years, to break through in that crystal clear spring at last. That's the way life is, when you come to think about it. Some folks are surface water and are easily seen and known about. Others get caught underground, and have to cut and gnaw their way out if they ever get seen by human eyes. (333-34)

It is almost too obvious that they are talking about Arvay's internal journey here. Using the metaphor of water, Jim touches on a more fluid form of identity Arvay obtains after her long struggle with her cursed and fixated poor white self. And in a very subtle way, Jim displaces the issue of class into the one of inner beauty. Even if it is invisible because of her poor whiteness, he suggests, Arvay's true self would eventually come to the surface like the "crystal clear spring." Arvay likewise sees herself in a different way now, especially in terms of her motherhood: "Earl was in her and had to come out some way or another. Arvay looked back and shuddered. Then a new feeling came. Yes, Earl had been bred in her before she was even born, but his birth had purged her flesh. He was born first. It was meant to be that way. Somebody had to pay off the debt so that the rest of the pages could be clean (350). Here Arvay reinterprets Earl's birth and the death as a long process of purification. Earl was born and died purging all the cursedness of poor white blood of her body. Thus cleansed of the sense of inferiority for good, she is able to affirm her position as a mother: "Her job was

mothering. What more could any woman want and need? No matter how much money they had or learning, or high family, they couldn't do a bit more mothering and hovering than she could. Holy Mary, who had been blessed to mother Jesus, had been no better off than she was. She had been poor and unlearnt too" (351). Arvay's rather prosaic self-redefinition as a "Seraph" in the house has frustrated many Hurston scholars. It is all the more disturbing because Hurston has indicated the possibility for a more flexible model of identity all throughout the novel and has carefully given account of Arvay's gradual internal change up to this point. And yet, it should be noted that Arvay's conclusion in the last passage of the novel that "[s]he was serving and meant to serve" comes after her realization of the unexpected mutuality of her marital relationship: "Jim Meserve, Lord, had his doubts about holding her as she had hers about him. She was not the only one who had trembled. All these years and time, Jim had been feeling his way towards her and grasping at her as she had been towards him" (348). Then she finally realizes that "Jim was not the over-powering general that she had took him for. . . . Inside he was nothing but a little boy to take care of, and he hungered for her hovering" (351). Even more significantly, she has learned not to show him her awareness: "This was a wonderful and powerful thing to know, but she must not let him know what she had perceived. Arvay trembled visibly and looked up innocently afraid and scared at Jim" (348). Hiding or faking her emotion in this exhausting game of love is something Arvay could never do before, but here she

has finally learned to do so, in order to get him back. To borrow Ann duCille's expression, now she can use "the deviousness and the duplicity" and "manipulate[s] the situation to get what *she* wants."[37] Although she accepts the seemingly submissive role of mothering, Arvay now holds the negotiating power and acknowledges her equality to her husband.

The relationship of Arvay and Jim is therefore to some extent parallel to the one between the black and the white in the pet Negro system. Though it would be too much to assume that Hurston was imagining a possible solidarity between blacks and poor white women in their mutual recognition of the post-war South's power system, it could at least be said that the author was trying to capture the modern Southern space as a contact zone where people constantly redefine and negotiate their racial, class, and sexual identities and their social positions in relation to others. Changes in social and economic structures the South during the 1930s and the 1940s enabled this newly aligned social space to emerge, and through Arvay's physical and mental journey, Hurston presents such a space in which the heroine learns to de-essentialize her identity as a poor white woman and successfully repositions herself in the ever-changing social situation. Crossing boundaries and making negotiations were in fact what Huston found herself doing when she was working on *Seraph*. The novel itself is about the poor white, but it tells how the culture of one racial group is unexpectedly in close contact with those of others despite apparent differences and the system of segregation. Her exploration of contemporary race

relations in the segregated South, and her personal and literary friendship with Rawlings, helped Hurston in her attempt to picture of the South as contact zone in all its complexity.

Notes

[1] Although I did not directly cite it, the following blog entry by "newsouthnegress" on the closeness of Southern working-class white and black cultures was very inspiring to my discussion in this chapter:"Honeybabychickeechile: Honey Boo Boo Fierce and the Language of Race & Region," accessed May 14, 2013, http://newsouthnegress.tumblr.com/post/34826530727/honeybabychickeechile-honey-boo-boo-fierce-and-the.

[2] Hemenway, 307. The critical history of the novel is well summarized in Chuck Jackson, "Waste and Whiteness: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Eugenics," *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 639 ; Christopher Rieger, "The Working-class Pastoral of Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 105-106.

[3] Mary Helen Washington, "A Woman Half in Shadow," in *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing. . .A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (Old Westerbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1979), 7–25; Alice Walker, Introduction to Hemenway, xvi.

[4] See Lowe, *Jump at the Sun*; Janet St Clair, "The Courageous Undertow of Zora Neale Hurston's Seraph on the Suwanee," *Modern Language Quarterly* 50 (March 1989): 38–57. See also Hazel V. Carby, "A True Picture of the South," in *Seraph on the Suwanee* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), PS 10–30 for her brief yet insightful comments on the novel's "sexual politics"; Meisenhelder, 92-115, who discusses that Seraph provides Hurston's veiled critique of the then dominant white culture. Laura Dubek, "The Social Geography of Race in Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee," African American Review* 30, no. 3 (October 1, 1996): 341–351, and Adrienne Akins, "'Just like Mister Jim': Class Transformation from Cracker to Aristocrat in Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 63, no. 1–2 (Winter-Spring 2010): 31-43, discuss the central role of class consciousness in the novel. See also Jackson and Rieger who respectively focus on the novel's relation to eugenic thoughts and ecocritical perspective.

[5] Parker, 87.

[6] Trefzer, "Floating Homes and Signifiers," 75.

[7] Rawlings's development of racial liberalism is well summarized by C Anita Tarr, "The Evolution of a 'Southern Liberal,'" and Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 14-41.

[8] Kaplan, 494-95.

[9] Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 24.

[10] Roger L Tarr, ed., *The Private Marjorie: The Love Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Norton S. Baskin* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004),114-15.

[11] Tarr, *The Private Marjorie*, 208-10.

[12] Ibid, 209.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Kaplan, 467.

[15] Elizabeth Binggeli, "The Unadapted: Warner Bros. Reads Zora Neale Hurston," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 5-6.

[16] Binggeli, 7.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Kaplan, 487.

[19] Carby, "A True Picture of the South," 16-18.

[20] For the essay's influence on the novel, see Delia Caparoso Konzett, "'Getting in Touch with the True South': Pet Negroes, White Crackers, and Racial Staging in Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*.," in *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 131–46; Brannon Costello, "Paternalism, Progress, and 'Pet Negroes': Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," in *Plantation Airs: Racial Paternalism and the Transformations of Class in Southern Fiction, 1945-1971* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 16–38.

[21] Konzett, "'Getting in Touch with the True South,'" 113.

[22] Kaplan, 486.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Lillios, *Crossing the Creek*, 160-64.

[25] For the agricultural and socio-economic changes in the South since the 1930s, see entries for "Great Depression," "New Deal," and "Sharecropping and Tenancy" in Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: History*, vol. 3, 24 vols. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

[26] Kaplan, 495.

[27] Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, "What Is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York□; London: New York University Press, 1997), 168-69. Followings are critical studies that deal with whiteness and cultural representation of poor whites. The latter two focus especially on poor whites in the South: Sylvia Jenkins Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976); Ashley Craig Lancaster, *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress: Poor White Women in Southern Literature of the Great Depression* (Louisiana State University Press, 2012); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

[28] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) discuss how American eugenic thoughts helped conceptualization of poor whites as a race, class, and cultural group. For the influence of eugenics on literature, see Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture, Race and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lancaster; Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche, eds, *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940: Essays on Ideological Conflict and Complicity* (Bucknell University Press, 2003).

[29] Jackson, 643.

[30] Lancaster, 8.

[31] Flynt, 40.

[32] R.K. Grigsby, "Clay Eating," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed September 29, 2013, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/science-medicine/clay-eating.

[33] Pamela Bordelon, ed. *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers' Project* (New York: Norton, 1999), x.

[34] Kaplan, 577-78.

[35] Kaplan, 563.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), 139 (italics original).

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored how Zora Neale Hurston's and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's works present a shifting Southern sense of place based on their mobility, and depict the contemporary South as a cultural contact zone of people with different race, class, and gender despite the region's systemized segregation and rigid social norms and boundaries. Each chapter has compared Hurston's and Rawlings's major works—their first novels, masterworks, autobiographies, and the works on poor whites that touches on contemporary race relations—which best reflect the two authors' ideas on mobility and Southern space.

Some of Hurston's works such as *Mules and Men* (1935), *Tell My Horse* (1938), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), were not selected for the main discussion partly because of their genres and subjects are out of the critical scope of this study. Considering the fact that these texts present an interesting overlapping of the African, African-American (Southern), and Caribbean black cultures, however, they offer a great possibility for future study in the context of mobility, contact zone, and how the Southern black culture has been constructed through its contact with other cultures. *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* are especially relevant for my future study, not just as significant subtexts to her fiction but as the main subject of discussion. The concepts

of mobility and contact zone that I utilized throughout this study are closely related with anthropology, postcolonialism and comparative cultural studies, and Hurston's two anthropological texts should be further examined in this particular context and be included in the book version of this study. Concerning Rawlings's works, *Golden Apples* (1935), *The Sojourner* (1953), and her posthumously published autobiographical novel *Blood of My Blood* (2002) were not included in this study. The latter two novels do not deal with the Southern "cracker" culture, which is arguably the best material for Rawlings, and thus was not incorporated into this study. Yet each of them offers interesting aspects that should be further explored. *The Sojourner* and *Blood of My Blood* together present Rawlings's sense of place closely related to her Northern family home which shapes significant part of her cultural identity. These works should be taken into consideration in how Rawlings constructed her peculiar sense of self through the places which she lived in and wrote about. *Golden Apples*, which is often undervalued because of its melodramatic quality, also deserves more critical attention. Published between *South Moon Under* and *The Yearling*, the novel shows Rawlings's transition as a literary artist and her ambition to write beyond "cracker" culture. It presents an interesting contrast between the world of English emigrant Richard Tordell and a "cracker" sister and brother Allie and Luke Brinley, and could be reread as the author's experiment to capture Florida as a contact zone of different cultures and traditions.

By paring the major works of Hurston and Rawlings, I have examined how the socio-economic and cultural changes of the South from the 1920s through the 1940s affected the two writers' representation of the region, and how their works present a shift in the sense of place which is at the heart of the Southern literary tradition. Their first novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under,* were written when the two authors relocated to the South in the late 1920s. Seeing the region undergoing rapid modernization, Hurston and Rawlings contemplate how modernity changes the relationship of human and nature. While following the pastoral literary tradition in their narratives, the two writers made a significant revision to the genre by focusing on the association between nature and women. Associating the history of male domination over women with the process of modernization, Hurston and Rawlings ask an important question: Is a non-hierarchical relation between human and nature (and men and women) possible? As a possibility for such a relationship, the two novels present a pastoral middle ground, a kind of contact zone where human and nature harmoniously coexist. Rather than nostalgically idealizing the antebellum rural community as the Agrarians did, Hurston and Rawlings vividly depict the South's transitional period in which the old and the new came in contact and modernity is incorporated into rural Southern communities.

In the late 1930s, Hurston and Rawlings published their masterworks *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *The Yearling* that I reexamined as Depression narratives. The novels show

how the two writers, against the charge that they were either politically conservative or apolitical, were in contact with the contemporary literary culture and responded to the period's demand for representing the contemporary socio-economic crisis and the nation's increasing concern with the South as its "No.1 economic problem." I examined how Hurston and Rawlings use the typical bildungsroman plot to depict the psychological growth of their protagonists Janie and Jody. Through obtaining mobility, they come into contact with larger and more diverse social units. As I show, the two novels can be reread as typical Depression narratives in that both of them depict a variety of communal practices by Southern rural folk to survive poverty, and that they also feature natural disaster as a metaphor for economic crisis, which provides Janie and Jody an opportunity to face the harsh reality of life and come into maturity. While the novels emphasize the sense of community and the protagonists' growing social awareness, the individualistic tendency of Hurston and Rawlings (and of bildungsroman as a literary genre) complicates their Depression narratives. At the end of the novels both writers focus less on the communal survival than on the protagonists' isolation and introspection, which reveals the difficulty they had in incorporating the context of socio-economic crisis into the narrative frame of individualistic bildungsroman. Such a narrative complication is closely related to Hurston's and Rawlings' self-positioning as writers. Moving back and forth between the Southern rural communities and the Northern literary society, they may have had a strange sense of being

attached to two different places and not really belonging to either of them. Hurston and Rawlings kept working on this dilemma between communalism and individualism through writing their next major work, which are their autobiographies.

Dust Tracks on a Road and *Cross Creek* are key texts in this dissertation in that they best present Hurston's and Rawlings's attempts to represent the South, and their autobiographical selves, as contact zone. Like many other Southern autobiographers, the two writers' sense of self is in close association with Southern space and the communities to which they belong. Here again, however, their autobiographical selves are marked by strong individualism which sometimes is at odds with communal value. While in their masterworks this coexistence of the individual and the communal shows the two writers' ambivalent positions in the national and regional cultures, in their autobiographies they resolve this dilemma by creating an image of a boundary-crossing self in contact with multiple cultures. *Dust Tracks* follows the narrative pattern of black autobiographical tradition in its embrace of communal identity. However, Hurston also presents her autobiographical self as a modern, mobile, and individualistic Southern black subject marked by new upward social mobility and defined not solely by the history of racial oppression. In the process of reconstructing her identity, she refigures herself, and the South as a site for cultural interaction where various subjects cross racial, class, and sexual boundaries to meet and communicate with each other. The traveling troupe of actors that

Hurston joins at the end of the first part of the book embodies such a space where individuals with multiple cultural backgrounds are united, though it should be noted that such a space does not lead to complete liberation of black subjects living in the segregated South.

In *Cross Creek*, Rawlings's peculiar individualism coordinates with the "queerness" of the Creek people. Despite her initial position as an outsider, Rawlings describes the process through which she becomes a member of the community by sharing the "queerness" beyond race, class, and gender. Though Rawlings sometimes lapses into othering the Creek residents, especially blacks whom she associates with nature and the lack of cultural refinement, she learns a nature-centered world view and simple way of life from them which marks her turning point toward a more communal sense of self. Through her daily contact with them, she reconsiders the self as more relational than individual, and presents her identity as something constructed through the constant contact with others. Rawlings in fact presents such a tapestry-like, relational sense of self again in her cookbook *Cross Creek Cookery*, which, like the author's identity, is constructed by various cultures and their foodways—the Southern "cracker" folk culture, Northern metropolitan one, and that of her childhood memories.

Interestingly, *Dust Tracks* shifts its focus from the communal to the individual, while in *Cross Creek* the process is reversed, which might reflect the difference in the ways the two writers frame their autobiographical narratives. At the heart of Hurston's autobiography is a diasporic

experience of loss of home, which is figuratively depicted through the death of her mother which occurred when Hurston was nine years old. This experience marks Hurston's separation from her community, the beginning of her "wandering" as a mobile individual traveling within and beyond the South to become a writer/ anthropologist. By contrast, in Rawlings's autobiography, her relocation to Cross Creek at the opening of the book is clearly defined as the rediscovery of home, a sense of warmth and communal pleasure felt in childhood: "And after long years of spiritual homelessness, of nostalgia, here is that mystic loveliness of childhood again. Here is home. An old thread, long tangled, comes straight again" (6). Moreover, *Durst Tracks* and *Cross Creek* share one significant historical context—World War II—but this historical event affects each autobiography's perception of community very differently. Against the backdrop of the rise of Nazi Germany in Europe, Hurston consciously avoids overemphasizing race and racial group identity for she believes that that is "the root of misunderstanding and hence misery and injustice" (250). While so doing, she reclaims individualism as a bulwark against the contemporary domestic and international crisis. Conversely, Rawlings finds it a mission to provide wartime America with an uplifting sense of family and community. She had a lot of emotional responses from the US soldiers abroad moved by the vivid descriptions of food in the "Our Daily Bread" chapter of *Cross Creek*, and that is one of the major reasons she decided to extend the idea of the chapter into *Cross Creek Cookery*. The cookbook presents not only the

recipes but also an image of a family dinner table, where everyone shares the abundance of food and the sense of unity. While having thus different approaches to reconsider the meaning of community, however, both *Durst Tracks* and *Cross Creek* ultimately present a similarly new image of the South and the autobiographical self constructed in relation to its Southern "home." Both writers represent the South, and their Southern selves, as a space made of interaction between plural cultural identities, a contact zone of many different selves. Against the monolithic and unchanging image of the Southern sense of self and the seemingly static Southern sense of place, Hurston and Rawlings explore regional identities malleably shaped by particular social, cultural, and historical conditions. Their exploration of malleable Southern identities continued through the decade, during which the two writers actually met and became friends with each other. The two writers' personal friendship and Hurston's continuous contemplation on cultural identities in the segregated South is directly reflected in her 1948 novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*.

The last chapter of this study has examined how *Seraph*, through its narrative of poor white heroine Arvay Henson, explores the social construction of race, class, and gender in the segregated South and how subjects redefine themselves through their encounter and contact with others. My study has shown the significance Hurston's and Rawlings's friendship in examining the novel, for the way they interacted with each other directly reflects the shifting racial

dynamics of the 1940s South. If, as suggested in the introduction of this dissertation, the two writers' encounter at Rawlings's Saint Augustine hotel room exemplifies how Hurston transforms a segregated space into a contact zone through negotiation, *Seraph* further explores such a site of cultural negotiation in a form of fiction. Hurston's novel, along with Rawlings's unpublished story "Lord Bill of the Suwannee River," depicts the South as a contact zone with blurred racial and class boundaries and unstable power relations. As shown in that chapter, the characters of Jim Meserve and Bill Boyle are created against the backdrop of socio-economic condition of the South from the Depression years through the 1940s, during which sharecropping and tenancy declined and new type of capitalism gradually developed. Acknowledging this new social circumstance, the two characters make a great entrepreneurial success based on their mobility and less rigid view on race relations. *Seraph*'s major focus is the struggle of Arvay from the socially abject class of poor white to relocate her self in this new capitalist Southern space. Through Arvay's almost neurotic inner conflict, the novel provides an in-depth analysis on how poor whites displace their sense of inferiority into racial superiority to non-whites. The only way out that Hurston allows her, it seems, is to become aware of the social construction and changeability of identities and how her Southern poor white world is constructed through continuous contact with multiple cultural others. The most significant task of the last chapter was to examine how, just like Hurston and Rawlings developed a friendship beyond racial

difference, in Seraph and “Lord Bill,” the two writers’ literary imagination is in contact with each other, regardless of actual, direct influence. To find such contact zones in their literary and personal friendship is particularly crucial if we, as critics of Hurston and Rawlings, really try to end the “critical segregation” and read their works in relation to each other, as Annette Trefzer has suggested. And though this study has focused on the particular two Southern women writers in the 1930s and the 1940s, the same principle is applicable to any future Southern literary studies examining works beyond traditional critical frames, canons, and categories. Through exploring Hurston’s and Rawlings’s mobility and the literary imagination, this study has presented a possibility for a comparative analytical method which would open up critical contact zones among numerous Southern and non-Southern writers and texts.

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