

Anxious Origins: Zora Neale Hurston and the Global South, 1927-1942
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ABSTRACT

Zora Neale Hurston's autoethnographic trilogy of the Global South – *Mules and Men* (1935), *Tell My Horse* (1938), and *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) – charts a geocultural terrain that recovers transgressive histories otherwise erased from public historical discourse. The medium is the message: penned in dialect obscuring the subversive “inside meanin’ of words,” her folklore collections split the historical archive wide open by incorporating the lives and deaths of “unreal” bodies into a preexisting narrative of Southern subjugation. These politically subversive tales of agency and resistance enact a dynamic, malleable, intergenerational mode of oral history that suggests the unfinished work of mourning for that which is no longer there. Trained as an anthropologist at Columbia University yet distrustful of the profession's intentions, Hurston confronts her own ambivalence towards the ethnographic archive throughout her career dedicated to (re)tracing these anxious origins, prefigured as both genetically specific and racially mythologized, across a region beset by a politics of racialized loss. In fighting to make these “unreal” lives legible, her autoethnographic trilogy offers a model of the interplay between the affective state of melancholia and the literary imagination. Within this multifaceted portrait of the Global South, Hurston reconciles private memory with public history in order to underscore the social dynamics at work in determining the contours of acceptable loss.

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“The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it.”

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (88)

Abbreviations

“C”	“Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaver” (1927)
<i>DT</i>	<i>Dust Tracks on a Road</i> (1942)
<i>JV</i>	<i>Jonah’s Gourd Vine</i> (1934)
<i>GG</i>	<i>Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings from Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers’ Project</i> (1999)
<i>L</i>	<i>Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters</i> (2002)
<i>M</i>	<i>Moses, Man of the Mountain</i> (1939)
<i>MM</i>	<i>Mules and Men</i> (1934)
“PN”	“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” (1943)
“S”	“Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals” (1934)
<i>TE</i>	<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (1937)
<i>TH</i>	<i>Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica</i> (1938)

Introduction

Hurston and the Reverse Slave Narrative

“The need to remember can overwhelm history itself: the aspiration to express certain feeling states, or to achieve or dispel others, may bring into play fantasy, imagination, and reconstruction that are hardly synonymous with the past.”

Jeffrey Prager, *Presenting the Past* (111)

“I depart for the South to chisel out a figure in art. I want it to have all the rhythm, harmony, and asymmetry of an African sculptured figure.”

Zora Neale Hurston, *A Life in Letters* (274)

For Isie Watts, a “little brown figure perched upon the gate” of her family’s yard staring out past the fence in Zora Neale Hurston’s early short story “Drenched in Light” (1924), the quest for identity and a voice makes her take to “the gleaming shell road that led to Orlando” (CS, 17). Like Hurston herself, Isie understands that mobility is the means by which she discovers herself on the road in ways unavailable to a life of domesticity.¹ For an author who grew up amidst the Great Migration, travel was crucial to her restless career as a novelist and anthropologist who seldom lived in the same city for more than five years at a time. (In the mid 1940s, she lived aboard houseboats near Daytona Beach in case she needed to set sail for open waters.) As the title of her autobiography – *Dust Tracks on a Road* – suggests, hers was a life spent in the field rather than behind a desk because her ethnographic training under the tutelage of the renowned Dr. Franz Boas at Columbia University opened her eyes – through the “spy-glass of Anthropology” (MM, 2) – to the muses lying in plain sight within the Global South. Her

¹ Cf. Hurston’s autobiography: “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” (DT, 33).

multi-decade research expeditions ultimately took her down through the Jim Crow South of Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida before venturing further South still: to the Bahamas and the West Indies in October 1929, to Jamaica and Haiti from 1936-1937, and onward to Honduras in 1947. (Despite her best intentions, her planned trips to Africa never materialized.) This crucible of material – ethnographic data collected on research expeditions that could be converted into fiction – attests to the interplay between literature and scholarship. Her metaphorical home between 118th Street (home to Columbia University) and 135th Street (the nexus of literary Harlem) refused to separate her two passions as the plasticity of the folk suffused her writings. Oral testimony, folklore, history, and the like appear and reappear with surprising resiliency as she returns her these histories that adrenalized her literary career.² Like the eponymous vagabond of her unfinished manuscript *The Lives of Barney Turk* (1949-51), travel inspired writing: after leaving his native Florida to explore Central America, he settles down in Hollywood as a script writer based on his experiences. As his, Isie's, and Hurston's "feet learned roads" (*JV*, 147), the cross-fertilization between travel and literary production sparked creativity that grew in proportion to the amount of wandering.

As in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), "nothing ever happens once and is finished" (210) in the repetition compulsion that fuels Hurston's sustained writings on the Global South. The repetition compulsion – defined by Freud as the unconscious reenactment of traumas in displaced or negated form – helps contextualize why Hurston returned so compulsively to the

² One particularly fertile time was 1929-1935. During this time she published her first scholarly monograph, "Hoodoo in America" (1931), debut novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), and folklore collection *Mules and Men* (1935) in addition to several essays ("Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals" and "Characteristics of Negro Expression"), a co-authored play with Langston Hughes, *Mule Bone* (1930-32), and two theatrical revues, *Fast and Furious* (1931) and *The Great Day* (1932). She also completed a manuscript based on the life of Cudjo Lewis, *Barracoon* (1931), which was never published. Much of this material emerged from her earlier fieldwork from 1926-1930.

gaps and silences of collective history that denied, or at least willfully forgot, lives and experiences that could not, or would not, fit into an accepted historical discourse about the black experience in the Global South. These repressed traumas return with a vengeance in what I consider to be an autoethnographic trilogy: *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road*. These three texts, documenting the Jim Crow South, Caribbean South, and autobiographical South respectively, orbit around sites of political resistance and female agency. In staging and restaging these figures and spaces from 1935 to 1942, Hurston is consumed by what David Marshall has diagnosed as the “representation compulsion.” Calling upon – indeed, signifyin(g) – Freud’s definition of the repetition compulsion, Marshall traces the representation compulsion back to the eighteenth century as a response to the crisis of aesthetic experience wherein “[r]epetition compulsion and representation compulsion come together as works of art seem to reproduce other works of art in a vertiginous chain of models and copies” (11). Within this intertextual paradigm, characters in novels like Rousseau’s *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) relate to their surroundings through a lens of artistic vocabulary: they stage their lives as if they were fictional characters. This slippage between lived experience and fictional tableaux in which one can “design the world as if it were a work of art” (13) bestows a lofty sense of significance onto the everyday. Marshall’s representation compulsion precedes and informs Hurston’s own dramatizing impulse because she refracts the Global South in *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* through this aesthetic lens; ethnographic material becomes fictional creation as both visions are haunted by an anxious history made visible only as it fades from view.

Anxiety is the subtext for Hurston’s autoethnographic trilogy because she fears that these alternative histories will one day be forgotten. Taking these texts as a point of departure, I am

interested in how the affective state of anxiety gets mapped with her tableaux of the Global South.³ Because anxiety evades any stable conception or definition, a brief aside is necessary. Understood psychoanalytically, anxiety is a diffuse combination of fears that have yet to come to fruition. Indeed, the very fact that our worst fears have yet to happen – but could theoretically occur at any given moment – only increases anxiety all the more because of the possibility of these fears coming to fruition despite all other signs pointing to the futility of our suspicions. The anxious subject is an alienated one because he alone is privy to the dangerous threats that run rampant everyday. For Sianne Ngai, anxiety is an ineffable “affect without determinate object or target” (246) that is at best a suspicion and at worst a prophecy otherwise gone unnoticed by others. In Ngai’s summation, anxiety entails its own spatial logistics: the diffusiveness of anxiety climaxes in the anxious subject becoming overwhelmed by a claustrophobic environment that threatens to overwhelm any sense of autonomy. “The topologies of dispositioning produced” by anxiety, “marked by physiological motifs of dizziness or vertigo, suggest that the logic of ‘anxiety’ and that of ‘projection,’ as a form of spatial displacement, converge in the production of a distinct kind of knowledge-seeking subject” (215). Suggestive of Hurston’s travels within the Global South, this “spatial displacement” is designed to rescue the anxious subject from “the intellectual from his potential absorption in sites of asignificance or negativity” (246). Ngai’s model of anxious dispositioning offers a helpful bridge between anxiety and melancholia (referred to as “negativity”) in that the “knowledge-seeking subject” seeks to avoid the affective quicksand of not-forgetting.⁴ Anxiety is thus a response to and symptom of melancholia because

³ The temporal boundaries of this study – 1935-1942 – define only the publication dates of this trilogy. As with most psychoanalytic case studies of anxiety, the symptoms of these texts stretch far beyond these public dates, as far back as 1927 (“Cudjo’s Own Story”) and as late as the 1946.

⁴ For Ngai this restless movement characterizes the life of the male intellectual not unlike Hurston: “If the question of aversiveness *to* these embodiments of negativity is precisely what

Hurston keeps on the run in order to bear the unbearable: the return of the repressed histories and hauntings of a suppressed black history that emerges in her interviews with the folk. Slowly but inevitably these alternative histories suggest a rupture in the cultural archive because they have been kept hidden from view but return regardless. As she writes in March 1936, “I am glad in a way to see my beloved southland coming into so much prominence in literature. I wish some of it was more considered. I observe that some writers are playing to the gallery. That is, certain notions have gotten in circulation about conditions in the south and so these writers take this formula and work out so-called true stories” (*L*, 367). In venturing outside of this “gallery” of outdated minstrelsy and comfortable narratives (satirized as Hurston in 1943 as the “Pet Negro system”), her ethnographic texts recover a space to voice this untapped resource of the folk.

Hurston’s descent into the Global South functions as a geographic metaphor for her journey into blackness, a pilgrimage to Africa by way of its dispersed transnational communities across the United States and Caribbean islands. A narrative of rebirth⁵ through travel, Hurston’s ethnographic career is a reversal of the Global Migration in that she, unlike millions of others, ventured in the opposite direction: South, not North. Characterizing this immersion into an alternate history of the Global South as a “reverse slave narrative,” Candace Waid suggests that Hurston undertakes “a return to repression undertaken to face the repressed – to go back into the trauma of social slavery to escape the captivity of its psychological bonds – to realize freedom or

anxiety veers away from or postpones, it may be that this form of distancing plays some role in the affect’s general prominence in cultural narratives of intellectual life, and more specifically in its codification as the male knowledge-seeker’s distinctive yet basic state of mind” (Ngai’s italics, 247).

⁵ Hurston claimed 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, and 1910 as her birth years. (She was born in 1891.)

die trying” (40).⁶ To arrive at a greater understanding of racial and historical ancestry, she must venture through the repressed histories of slavery housed in migrant camps, phosphate mines, turpentine forests, Hoodoo communities, Vodou congregations, and various initiation ceremonies in order to uncover and recover these histories through ethnographic writing. Hurston’s reverse slave narrative of 1935-1942 is a baptismal transformation: echoing her initiation into Hoodoo (she recounts five of them), her rebirth of anxious origins in the Global South is a response to discovering that which is not there: tales of slave agency and female empowerment stricken from the record of historical discourse. As an interlocutor for these tales, she fights to preserve a radical conception of racial identity: because “negroness is being rubbed off by close contact with white culture” (*L*, 97) in the United States, the Caribbean is somehow more African as its islands possess “a strong primitive survival deeply buried from the sight of prying official eyes, but very much here” (*L*, 384). Equating geographic with cultural proximity to Africa, Hurston’s descent into the Global South entailed a personal metamorphosis of identity: armed with just a pack of Pall Malls and a chrome-plated pistol, Hurston became the author capable of writing *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* as she realized that her contribution to the Harlem Renaissance to black literature at large was to preserve and bear witness to these transgressive and deeply subversive histories.

⁶ While Waid refers to Hurston’s fictional heroines with respect to the reverse slave narrative, Hurston herself also fits within this schema of Southern literature as her life mirrors her protagonists’ journeys of self-discovery. Building off of Robert Stepto’s work, Waid complicates what he refers to as the Immersion narrative, a journey in which the black subject escapes from the liberatory North (that paradoxically ends in estrangement from earlier racial communities) back to a collective solidarity of the South. See Stepto 167 for definitions of the Ascent and Immersion narratives.

Because this project investigates the psychological aftershocks of collective melancholia, I turn to a psychoanalytic and post-psychoanalytic paradigm to excavate Hurston's buried symptoms of the anxiety of forgetting. Freud's monumental essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) forms the crux of this project as it proffers a binary model of grief anticipating the social forces at work behind grief. For Hurston, melancholia is a form of thwarted or denied mourning on the basis that the loss is deemed impermissible. Like Hurston, post-psychoanalytic theorists such as Teresa Brennan, Judith Butler, and Seth Moglen enrich Freud's outline in "Mourning and Melancholia"; their contributions to the field of trauma studies provide a theoretical compass for Hurston's writings. Given that psychoanalysis has been accused of having an unconscious investment in whiteness, Eurocentrism, and phallocentrism, my turn to Freud and his inheritors might seem strange.⁷ A woman who likely never darkened the door of a practicing psychoanalyst, Hurston avoided mentioning Freud at all until the 1950s.⁸ Nevertheless she was entrenched within 1920s modernist New York: as other critics have made clear, the Harlem Renaissance absorbed, to some degree or another, the impact of psychoanalytic culture like a cell in osmosis.⁹ The convergence between psychoanalysis and Hurston's privileged field of anthropology offers a helpful entry point into the dialogue occurring between these two scientific minds. Freud himself insists upon the analogies between anthropology and psychoanalysis in comparing the analyst to an archaeologist:

His [the analyst's] work of construction, or, if it is preferred, of reconstruction, resembles to a great extent an archaeologist's excavation of some dwelling-place that has been

⁷ Freud's (in)famous remark that female sexuality is the "dark continent of psychoanalysis" reveals the extent to which psychoanalysis lay embedded within anthropology, archeology, imperialism, and the male gaze. See "The Question of Lay Analysis" (1926).

⁸ Her first explicit to Freud was in a letter dated January 7, 1955 (*L*, 724-727).

⁹ See Ahad, Comprone, and Johnson.

destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice. The two processes are in fact identical, except that the analyst works under better conditions and has more material at his command to assist him, since what he is dealing with is not something destroyed but something that is still alive [...] Both of them have an undisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains. (“Constructions,” 259)

Hurston and Freud “excavate” their research data in sifting through manifest appearances in order to sense what Hurston calls “de inside meanin’ of words” hidden underneath the rubble. In positioning herself as a qualified anthropologist on loan from Columbia University, Hurston situates herself in the same dynamic as analyst/analysand with the folk because the ethnographer/subject dyad involves many of the same activities: working with oral testimony, constructing a coherent narrative out of past experience, and arriving at some kind of insight as to topics discussed.¹⁰

Chapter One, “‘A familiar strangeness’: Hurston’s Throwaway Bodies,” arises out of this likeness between ethnographer and psychoanalyst; Hurston’s diagnosis of the Global South in *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* is that it has swept certain deaths and losses under the rug. Taking her own family members as a point of departure, she follows what Judith Butler calls “violence through omission,” that is to say, the erasure of lives (and deaths) of bodies that fall outside the parameters of socially permissible loss. These enigmatic

¹⁰ Women of color and other disenfranchised minorities often worked behind enemy lines in anthropology and psychoanalysis as the fields occasionally offered an opportunity for well-educated (or at least well-connected and well-financed) individuals to join a historically white male profession. According to Jean Walton, white female psychoanalysts and anthropologists had to “negotiate the tension between this discourse that undermines their authority and their own desire to be legitimated by that same discourse” (13). In a spirited reading of Margaret Mead’s closeted homosexuality, Walton finds that she worked through her complex intersectionalities (white, upper-class, educated, lesbian) through fieldwork that marked her as other albeit from her own perspective within the scientific community.

ghosts haunt her ethnographies because they hover on the realm of legibility; the folk lack the vocabulary with which to articulate their grief. In finessing Freud's model of mourning and melancholia, Hurston offers a model of what Seth Moglen refers to as a triadic model of grief: the affective subject, the lost object, and the social forces that determine the legibility of particular losses. She suggests that collective melancholia arises not out of masochism or ambivalence but out of larger politics of grief that negate or refute the legitimacy of certain types of death. The recurrence of threshold figures like the matriarch (Lucy Potts Hurston, Mother Catherine, Marie Laveaux, Big Sweet, and Felicia Felix-Mentor, a zombie in Haiti) and the specter (Cousin Jimmie, Cudjo Lewis, and Luke Turner, Laveaux's nephew) evidence a rupture in the historical archive, suggesting that until an alternative rhetoric of loss comes about, these "unreal lives" will remain hidden in plain sight.

The relationship between Chapter One and Chapter Two, "'De inside meanin' of words': Orality and the Archive," is that of call-and-response: the threat of forgetting tinged with larger social politics influences Hurston's relationship to what Derrida refers to as the archive. As historical record (or archive), her ethnographies of the folk appear to be trapped within what she dismisses as the "Pet Negro system" stifling this alternative rhetoric of loss. Under the "Pet Negro" model of interracial patronage of the Harlem Renaissance, white benefactors agreed to fund black artistic productions if they valorized an outdated narrative of Northern liberation and Southern subjugation. (As the reverse slave narrative makes clear, this narrative obscured the freedom to be found in staying in the South and confronting the legacies of slavery.) Faced with this vocabulary of minstrelsy, Hurston turned to dialect as a means to work within this system and reap its benefits – she had an especially strenuous relationship with her patron, "Godmother" Charlotte Osgood Mason – while subverting its aims by presenting folklore that split the "Pet

Negro system” wide open. In offering accounts of slave resistance and political agency, Hurston’s folklore collections help correct the problem diagnosed in Chapter One. In appropriating dialect to articulate this transgressive history, Hurston undermines the historical archive in offering a model of history that is open-ended and ongoing. But despite the radical politics of remembrance in *Mules and Men*, she succumbs to the archival impulse in *Tell My Horse*, her neo-imperialist slant on Caribbean history that pivots on her latent jingoism. Hurston’s tumultuous relationship to the archive grew and waned as she grappled with the racism, sexism, and nativism inherent in late-1930s American/Caribbean politics.

My goal in this project is to demonstrate how Hurston both enacts and refines the processes of anxious melancholia outlined by Freud and disseminated throughout Butler, Derrida, and Moglen. This is not to say that these theorists are mistaken, but rather that lived experience and textual models of these processes reveal the nuances of collective memory that is complicated by broader forces of race, gender, and class within the Global South. Because Hurston’s own relationship to these forces changed throughout her lifetime, this project is an intertextual exegesis that draws upon the near-entirety of her literary career. Throughout this project I turn to material as diverse as published works, unpublished manuscript fragments, letters, diaries, working notes, academic articles, anthologized essays, book reviews, aborted plays, and even a Christmas card. I do so because her decades-long meditation on historical erasure assumed a myriad of forms that have seldom been brought into dialogue with each other; understandably, her texts reflect larger critical trends of canonization and selective attention: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is among the most discussed of her works. But because her ethnographic and literary interests are two ends of the same spectrum, I amass the two genres together to reveal the interstitial threads suturing together a career shaped by a larger project:

sculpting a three-dimensional figure of the Global South out of the material found on these travel expeditions.¹¹ Texts like *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* (along with novels like *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and several of her scholarly essays) focalize her concern with anxious origins and collective memory. But while the majority of her writings surface throughout these chapters, my project is not an exercise in biographical criticism nor the evolution of a pattern throughout her career. I do not consider her later writings to be more adept at expressing these anxieties as her earlier writings are more pointed in their outspoken diatribe against the “Pet Negro system.” What I am charting is a constellation of interconnected palimpsests of forgetting organized in a pattern readily found in most of Hurston’s writings. The frequency with which she documented the threat of collective amnesia suggests more continuity than transformation.

A final note: all scholarship bears the traces of its historical moment, and my project written from 2013-2014 is no different. Two terms currently in vogue require a brief definition so that my critical parameters remain clear. By “Afro-diasporic” I mean the variety of geopolitical experience of dispersed black populations outside of Africa: for Hurston, these sites include the Caribbean and the American South, but contemporary conceptions venture beyond these shores to African descendants within the Americas, Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Less ideologically centered than “Pan-African” (a term ensconced within the Zionism of the 1960s Pan-African movement), “Afro-diasporic” refers to a multitude of difference in that the only source of continuity is something as nebulous as race. The varieties of racial experience only

¹¹ My project is thus indebted to recent Hurston scholarship of the past two decades: Carla Kaplan’s *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (2002), Valerie Boyd’s *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (2004), and *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings from the Federal Writers’ Project* (1999). Critics like these have only added to an already potent discussion initiated by Robert Hemenway and Alice Walker in the 1970s.

further complicated Hurston's conception of the Global South, a term that likewise refers to a diffuse geospatial organization of what has been historically called third-world nations; the term is thus rooted in shared histories of exploitation and oppression. Often defined as the continents of Central and Latin America, Africa, and the majority of Asia, the Global South offers not a unified schema of geographical organization but a hermeneutics of subaltern identity that Hurston called upon to theorize her transnational theory of black resistance. Ultimately the discrepancies between the Haitian Revolution and Jim-Crow Reconstruction were too great to bear as she buttressed her emergent neo-imperial politics using the shortcomings of the Revolution to privilege American black communities. While the precise terminology of these concepts – Afro-diasporic and the Global South – may shift, the underlying principle of transnational solidarity remains the same: this tracing and retracing of geopolitical identity suggests a potential site of liberatory identification amidst shared histories of lived experience.

Chapter One

“A familiar strangeness”: Hurston’s Throwaway Bodies

“After great pain, a formal feeling comes – ”

Emily Dickinson, (341)

“There are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the senses refuse just as the stomach sometimes refuses what the palate has accepted but which digestion cannot compass – occurrences which stop us dead as though by some impalpable intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until we can die.”

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Faulkner’s italics, 122)

“It was bad enough for white people, but when one of your own color could be so different it put you on a wonder. It was like seeing your sister turn into a ’gator. A familiar strangeness. You keep seeing your sister in the ’gator and the ’gator in your sister, and you’d rather not.”

Their Eyes Were Watching God (48)

To borrow William Faulkner’s terminology, Hurston’s memoir *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) is short on facts and long on truth. As a fictionalized autobiography, its subject remains elusive even when charting her life, loves, and losses in near-mythic proportion. Identifying herself as “a Southerner [who] had a map of Dixie on my tongue” (*DT*, 98), this portrait of an artist as a young girl chronicles her development as someone who has “been a Negro three times – a Negro baby, a Negro girl and a Negro woman” (*DT*, 172). These successive resurrections underscore the strangeness of a text predicated upon revelation that only arrives through repetition, even as what’s repeated is the gist of the truth rather than verifiable facts. Hurston herself instructs her readers to consider *Dust Tracks* as “hear-say. Maybe some of the details of

my birth as told me might be a little inaccurate, but it is pretty well established that I really did get born” (*DT*, 19).¹² “Inaccurate” details run rampant throughout the memoir as its storyteller sacrifices specificity for narrative momentum, conflating stories and omitting details that would otherwise bog the plot down. What remains unchanged in published form – the stories that survived the passage from life to print – thus accrues even greater weight because they form what Hurston has consciously identified as her life story amidst the many “lies,”¹³ the embellishments and exaggerations mythologizing her origins. These scant personal details of her life she chose to make public – her parents, her early life with her siblings, her memories of Eatonville – helped patch life and art together.

At the heart of *Dust Tracks* is the death of Hurston’s mother as the image of the forgotten black maternal fueled her anthropology of the Global South.¹⁴ While Lula (“Lucy”) Potts Hurston’s death is a brief eight-page interlude in the memoir, the figure of the lost mother resurfaces time and again, albeit in mediated form, throughout her daughter’s oeuvre. The frequency with which Hurston returns to her mother’s death runs counter to the “formal feeling” described by Emily Dickinson in this chapter’s epigraph, instead resembling what William Faulkner describes in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a raw grief which “*the intelligence and the senses*

¹² According to the Hurstons’ Bible family record page, Zora Neal Hurston was born in January 1891, eight years before Zora Neale Hurston, the woman who enrolled at Barnard in 1925 with an added “e” to her middle name. Valerie Boyd (110) explains that several other Renaissance writers, the majority of them female, routinely lied about their age. To date, the best biographers of Hurston are Boyd and Robert Hemenway.

¹³ “Lies” is the word Hurston uses to describe the glimpses of cultural truth scattered throughout the folktales of *Mules and Men*.

¹⁴ Only Holloway (1987) acknowledges the influence of the death of Hurston’s mother in her writing (17-18). For Holloway, Hurston “maintained the legacy [of a maternal Africa] through her written word – vitalizing black women as self-assertive Janie Starks, questioning the Christian ethic by the pathos surrounding John Pearson and mythologizing the Moses myth so firmly within a black cultural schema that through its color it gained the deepened tones of a folk story” (17).

refuse” to digest. Resembling “*a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire,*” undigested events such as her mother’s death distort reality to the extent that we remain passive (“*as though in a soundless vacuum*”) as life continues, “*leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until we can die.*” The textual afterlife of Lucy Potts Hurston is a “*impalpable intervention*” as her reappearances are simultaneously palpable and peripheral, lingering on the edge of consciousness. As Zora herself makes clear in *Dust Tracks*, it was the implacable guilt she felt over her having “failed her” mother during the “sunset time” (*DT*, 65) of her life that intensified these reverberations. In failing to speak on behalf of her mother by not articulating her dying wishes, the young daughter contributed to the silencing of her mother.

The reappearances of Lucy Potts Hurston underscore larger cultural traumas of mourning, burial, and grieving what would otherwise be abject, “throwaway bodies”¹⁵ doomed to historical erasure. Attentive to the politics of memory, Hurston’s career revises Freud’s binary model of mourning (a socially sanctioned period of grief for the loss of the loved object) and melancholia (a more nebulous phenomenon in which the ego attacks itself as means to remember the loved object). Her melancholic autoethnographies are melancholic only because a Jim Crow society refuses to acknowledge the legibility of lives (and deaths) of bodies like her mother’s. The ghost of Hurston’s mother is a symptom of collective repression, an undeniable rupture in the ledgers of public memory. Hurston articulates this social dimension of grief – the idea that only certain bodies are permissible to mourn – through her mother’s resurfacings as other illegible hauntings who lie in opposition to a society predicated upon racial and gender exclusion. This awareness of

¹⁵ The term “throwaway body” is Patricia Yaeger’s and refers to the “women and men whose bodily harm does not matter enough to be registered or repressed – who are *not* symbolically central, who are looked over, looked through, who become a matter of public and private indifference” (68). Toni Morrison dramatizes these “throw-away people” (100) in *Beloved*, referring to Sethe and Amy Denver as pariahs scorned by strangers as they cross the Ohio River.

multicultural memory, the idea that different cultures grieve in different ways, lays the groundwork for her investment in making Afro-diasporic loss legible to an audience otherwise unfamiliar with the Global South. The variety of mourning rituals in Hurston's texts – Hoodoo, Vodou, Caribbean, African, and American – refuse to conclude the unfinished work of racial grief. Unresolved, illegible grief emanates outward in *Dust Tracks* as Cousin Jimmie's death, in all likelihood a hate crime committed years ago that remained ignored by authorities, initiated Lucy Hurston's demise. Her embodied grief to his murder assumes the form of physical malady so much so that she dies from her distressed state. This transmission of unresolved affect is the melancholia Freud describes in "Mourning and Melancholia," Hurston insists that her mother's death was a response to a society of denied grief and willed erasure. Ultimately, this catalytic death engendered her writing as she worked through her sorrow by giving voice to the silent dead in a decades-long prosopopoeia. The invocation of her reanimated mother in *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* becomes a channeling of social grief, articulating the erupting voices overheard in her ethnographic fieldwork: a chorus of the disenfranchised composed of African Americans, women, and the rural poor trapped within a Jim Crow culture. The resuscitation of her mother is ultimately a political act cognizant of other losses swept under the rug, bearing witness to the "throwaway bodies" hidden in plain sight within the cultural matrix of the Global South.

"From the Foot of Mama's Bed"

"She must know how I have suffered for my failure."

Dust Tracks on a Road (64)

That Hurston would write so candidly about this childhood trauma seems striking, especially when considering the ambiguity that runs throughout her autobiography. But as she conveys, the death of Lucy Hurston is a pivotal moment in *Dust Tracks* because it is the site of anxious origins for the young artist. Going as far as identifying the exact date of the death, Hurston lays herself bare in chronicling the agonizing trial. As the chapter's title ("Wandering") indicates, Lucy Hurston's death set her daughter flowing northward to Harlem (by way of Barnard University) amidst the larger exodus of the Great Migration.¹⁶ Ironically this sense of wandering also drove Lucy Potts northward, only for her it was to death: after traveling to Alabama to visit family, she returns to Florida visibly frail and suffering from exhaustion. According to Hurston, this sickness is racially contracted and diagnosed as an embodied reaction to the lingering trauma of Cousin Jimmie's death. Found alongside the railroad tracks, his body bore the marks of vigilante slaughter even as his death remained unsolved even fifty years later when *Dust Tracks* was published:

There was no blood, so the train couldn't have killed him. This had happened before I was born [...] Some said that he had been waylaid by three other young fellows and killed in a jealous rage. But nothing could be proved. It was whispered that he had been shot in the head by a white man unintentionally, and then beheaded to hide the wound. He had been shot from ambush, because his assailant mistook him for a certain white man [...] When he found out his mistake, he had forced a certain Negro to help him move the body to the railroad track without the head, so that it would look as if he had been run over by the train. Anyway, that is what the Negro wrote back after he had moved to

¹⁶ For more on the Migration and its cultural afterlives, see Griffin.

Texas years later. There was never any move to prove the charge, for obvious reasons.

Mama took the whole thing very hard. (*DT*, 62)

Despite the closure from Texas appearing “years later” after the fact, the death that Lucy knew (what “seemed to come back on Mama during her visit”) was inconclusive. Neglected in the eyes of the law and left to fend for themselves, Lucy’s family in Alabama lacked any sense of closure over Jimmie’s death because he was up for grabs: his body is “unreal,” to borrow a term from Judith Butler. For Butler, the “unreal” are those “are always already lost, or, rather, never ‘were’” (33) to begin with in the language of hegemonic discourse; the lives of “unreal” bodies are thus relegated, excluded, or altogether denied on their basis of their peripherality. For Butler and Hurston, the question remains as to what happens to the cultural memory of the “unreal” after they die.

Put frankly, do the (after)lives of unreal, throwaway bodies matter for those on the other side of the divide? For Butler, “discourse itself effects violence through omission” (34) because they were never there to begin with; theirs is a negated existence that goes against the status quo. Not only did Jimmie’s death remain unsolved – his death (and thus his life) never occurred in the first place in the eyes of the law. A body such as Jimmie’s “vanishes,” Butler writes, “not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds” (35). Within the context of the early twentieth century, female bodies, queer bodies, racialized bodies, disabled bodies, diasporic bodies, colonized bodies, and countless others were systematically repressed, delegitimized as having deviated from a heteronormative, urban, capitalist norm inextricable from the pull of modernity. But as the ghost of crawling-already? avers years later in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, “it is hard to make yourself die forever” (249) especially when your very existence threatens to undermine a society’s boundaries. To solve the mystery of Jimmie’s death

would entail acknowledging the omissions, silences, and gaps of a collective history of the South. By their implication in Jimmie's death, Hurston's family likewise becomes "unreal" as they struggle to make his a "publicly grievable life" (34). For Zora, this struggle is one of the key undercurrents of her autoethnographies that articulate and legitimize hidden histories such as his.

A pivotal aspect of these hidden histories is the contagious, intergenerational transmission of trauma. With vampiric energy the murder drains Lucy of health to the point of neurasthenic frailty: "She kept getting thinner and thinner and her chest cold never got any better. Finally, she took to bed" (*DT*, 63).¹⁷ On her deathbed the emaciated Lucy called her daughter to her side, instructing her to never "let them take the pillow from under her head until was dead. The clock was not to be covered, nor the looking-glass. She trusted me to see to it that these things were not done. I promised her as solemnly as nine¹⁸ years could do, that I would see to it" (62). These strangely specific orders reject the Hoodoo death culture of Eatonville as the practices encourage the swift departure of the spirit into the afterlife.¹⁹ Just why Lucy Potts Hurston would forsake Hoodoo practices is a mystery, but the ambiguity behind the decision (to renounce the faith or choose to remain in the material world) plagued Hurston as she wrestled with interpreting these last requests for many decades afterward.

¹⁷ To be fair, Hurston also claims that her mother was recovering from her family's disapproval of her moving to Florida (63). Ultimately this hesitation underscores the social transmission of affect – either way, her sudden death resulted from emotions associated with her visit to Alabama.

¹⁸ Hurston was actually thirteen years old when her mother died (Boyd 45, Hemenway 16).

¹⁹ Hurston contextualizes Hoodoo culture in *Mules and Men*: "The 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. The clock will never run again, nor will the mirror ever cast any more reflections if they are not covered so that the spirit cannot see them" (*MM*, 229). Holloway (2002) confirms the accuracy of these practices within the larger context of black grieving practices in the Americas (122-124).

Lucy's dying wishes placed an impossible weight upon Zora as she had to resist her "father, the village dames and village custom" on behalf of her mother. Hurston likens her responsibility to that of an interlocutor: "Her mouth was slightly open, but her breaking took up so much of her strength that she could not talk. But she looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice" (63). Despite her best intentions, Zora could not stop her neighbors from "trying to silence" (64) the request. She has no voice: her inability to speak on behalf of her mother is a crucial moment because it was this failure that initiated her quest towards her authorial voice.²⁰ Writing about the experience decades later, she reiterates the unreadable messages that remain when she hears her mother "still rasping out the last morsel of her life." Emblematic of what Jay Watson has elsewhere referred to as the "recalcitrant materiality" of Southern literature, this "morsel," evasive and unknowable, emanates outward from the past into the present because Zora still cannot decipher it even after thirty years' worth of thought. She speculates as to what her mother could mean: "Perhaps she was telling me that it was better for the pillow to be moved so that she could die easy, as they said. Perhaps she was accusing me of weakness and failure in carrying out her last wish. I do not know. I shall never know" (64). Analogous to the mysteries of Cousin Jimmie's death, Zora too struggles to understand the enigmas of the previous generation.

In this moment Lucy effectively transmits the affect of melancholia to her daughter. As it radiates downward to future generations, his unsolved murder contaminates even those who had no part in the event but who are nevertheless implicated emotionally. Writing about this "process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect" (3), Teresa Brennan describes this

²⁰ As we gleam in *Mules and Men*, "Mouths don't empty themselves unless the ears are sympathetic and knowing" (185).

transmission of affect as a phenomenon that necessitates a shift in terms of how we perceive psychological stimuli. Here's Brennan:

we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment.' But transmission does not mean that a person's particular emotional experience is irrelevant. We may influence the registration of the transmitted affect in a variety of ways; affects are not received or registered in a vacuum.

(6)²¹

This model of horizontal affect in which social factors construct our emotional response to events adds a critical missing link in the study of intergenerational trauma. The transmission of negative, melancholic affect confirms the social dimension of grief because it suggests that this emotion is so palpable that it seeps onto others. These “unreal” deaths emanate across intergenerational lines because they fall outside a framework of normalized loss. Jimmie's denied death culminates in a relentless melancholia because this melancholy is the means by which the Hurston family bears witness to his existence. Transmitting this affect of melancholy preserves the memory of his death. Zora's anxiety about failing her mother arguably stems from a similar process of transmission-as-memory: to neglect these commands is to cast off the ties that bind one generation to the next. Her guilt does not simply dissipate; it “set [her] feet in strange ways” after plaguing her consciousness: “I was to agonize over that moment for years to come. In the midst of play, in wakeful moments after midnight, on the way home from parties, and even in the classroom during lectures. My thoughts would escape occasionally from their

²¹ Judith Butler makes a similar argument in writing that grief “displays [...] the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control” (23).

confines and stare me down” (*DT*, 64).²² Seeing shame everywhere she turns, this physicality of grief aligns her with her mother in that both women, after facing similar deaths, struggle to express their affective state within the given means. They have both inherited Jimmie’s loss because it hovers at the margins of discourse; there is no language with which to express the pain of his unknowable disappearance. Stricken from record and erased from memory, his body lingers onward in and through others.

Like Jimmie living on through Lucy, Lucy lives on through Zora’s writings. These textual afterlives further transmit the affect of Jimmie’s death because they align the personal with political of Hurston’s Global South. The silence of Jimmie’s death and Lucy’s voice fostered Zora’s writing because mapping this transnational region was a means to return to family history and come to terms with – really, to explain and solve – the baffling nature of their deaths. Venturing further and further South all the way to Africa, her numerous ethnographies function as a distaff genealogy that establishes her as a descendent of otherwise “unreal” histories. But by portraying this narrative through the respected field of anthropology, she also legitimizes her subject matter and makes otherwise illegible bodies visible and tantamount. Hurston’s unfinished, intergenerational mourning²³ voices her revision of Freud’s schema of mourning and melancholia because it insists upon the social dimension behind the politics of grief. Sublimated as ethnographic research, her anxiety over what T.S. Eliot has referred to as

²² Hurston’s *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* is instructive here. Detailing the life of her father (albeit in fictionalized form), he too suffers a similar loss: “He sought Lucy thru all struggles of sleep, mewing and crying like a lost child, but she was not there. He was really searching for a lost self and crying like the old witch with her shed skin shrunken by red pepper and salt, ‘Ole skin, doncher know me?’ But the skin was never to fit her again” (183).

²³ Marianne Hirsh refers to this “inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” (106) as “postmemory.”

“the pains of turning blood into ink” (95) begat autoethnographies that grieve otherwise “unreal” lives through text.

Freud, Hurston, and the Politics of Mourning

“I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It’s not that I wouldn’t and will not it’s that it is too soon too soon too soon.”

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (120)

The seemingly inexhaustible number of ghosts populating the landscape of American literature speaks to the ongoing cultural work yet to be done in graveyards of the earth and on the page. As ruptures of history, “unreal” specters such as Hurston’s mother say what the living cannot by critiquing the politics of citizenship through the process of mourning. These “throwaway bodies” refuse to decompose because postmortem silencing would perpetuate the very processes which contributed to their erasure in the first place. Testing the limits as to what constitutes a “publicly grievable life” (Butler 34), the ghosts of ethnic literature repeatedly situate the private sphere as the unlikely site of social justice as it is at the domestic front in which intimacy initiates public mourning.²⁴ The difference between the bodies that matter at home and the bodies that matter publically run vast and deep. Family members, spouses, siblings, and distant relatives excised from public discourse live on in increasingly domestic, local memories and narratives running parallel to history. With this in mind, the figure of the black mother, too ubiquitous in Hurston’s writing to dismiss, holds the key to understanding her

²⁴ See Norman 7 for more on the twentieth-century American ghost as a critique of national citizenship and memory.

insistence upon the social dimension of mourning. While Freud holds that melancholia stems from anxious ambivalence toward the lost object, indeed an unconscious desire to maim, kill, or consume the loved object, Hurston turns her leery eye to the larger processes of cultural memory. She understood all too well the politics inherent in mourning: that there are few outlets for grieving an “unreal” or “ungrievable” life when the language you speak is designed to silence the speaker in the first place.

Published at the height of modernism and thus inextricable from larger discussions of modernist expression, Freud’s influential essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) provides a necessary framework for distinguishing between the processes of socially sanctioned mourning and a more profound, wholly devastating melancholia. While both processes involve the loss of a loved object (a person, idea, memory, or so on), the manner and severity of response varies between the two poles: mourning spans a finite amount of time whereas melancholia occupies a seemingly endless abyss of loss. The mourner differs from the melancholiac because he can withdraw libidinal energies once reserved for the lost object and displacing them onto a substitute replacement (249).²⁵ In effect, he survives grief by shifting and refocusing the affects once reserved for the lost object: this psychic recycling of libidinal energy helps cajole the mourner to continue onward. Freud’s mourner resembles John Pearson, Hurston’s literary mock-up of her father in her first novel, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*. After losing his wife, evocatively named Lucy in this thinly veiled autobiographical work, he remarries much to the chagrin of his community made up of parishioners, fellow men of the cloth, and children. His once-trusted confidante Deacon Hambo chastises the hasty lothario: “Yo’ wife ain’t been dead but three

²⁵ Freud is quick to note the regression inherent in substitution. The mourner’s narcissistic identification with the new love object ultimately says more about the mourner than the object itself. For a literary counterpart, consider Anse Bundren’s impetuous marriage to the duck-shaped second “Mrs Bundren” (261) in the conclusion of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*.

months, and you done jumped up and married befo' she got col' in her grave!" (*JV*, 138). Like Freud's mourner who recovers because of his ability to displace reserved affects, John Pearson cannot keep still because he needs the solace of a wife. After a lengthy divorce and then a subsequent (third) marriage, he prays for Lucy's pardon and begs to "Let Lucy see it too, Lawd, so she kin rest. And be so pleased as to cast certain memories in de sea of fuhgitfulness where dey will never rise tuh condemn me in de judgment. Amen and thang God" (*JV*, 191). Despite his selective Lethe that cleanses a conscience racked with guilt, the novel refuses to let John off the hook: the man who once "wrote Lucy's name in huge letters" (*JV*, 52) all across town during their courtship has moved on too quickly after her death. Scorned by his flock, the philandering preacher ultimately resigns from his post and takes to carpentering. Like John's courtship, the novel itself writes Lucy's name across its pages as it refuses to forget her presence even after her death. The first of many restagings of Lucy's death, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* articulates Hurston's dormant guilt over the death of her mother, here reflected through a critique of hasty mourning.

Contrasted with a mourner like John Pearson, melancholiacs like Lucy Hurston and her daughter Zora cannot redirect these libidinal energies onto a substitute object because they lack the language with which to express grief. Freud hints at this discrepancy between lived experience and social presence in "Mourning and Melancholia" in describing melancholia as a blurring between the ego and the outside world in which the ego "cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost" (245). He therefore struggles to reconcile two warring sentiments: bereavement for the loss (for he has lost a part of himself in this process) as well as guilt stemming from a latent, unconscious sense of triumph over the lost object. Paradoxically, grief affords the melancholiac a newfound autonomy because it liberates him from the throes of the lost object. Repressed and dormant desires resurface because the love object is no longer there to

prohibit or discourage them. The anxiety of the melancholiac stems from this very tension between grief and freedom: in the rhetoric of “grievable” mourning, there is no vocabulary for a transgressive liberatory freedom. The internalized panopticon (otherwise known as the superego) here intervenes by submitting the melancholic ego to guilt over these subversive affects. Left with no choice but to punish itself, the melancholiac’s ego “sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object” (247) in order to purge the loved object from inside to rid himself of these complex emotions. For Freud, this splitting results only in masochistic fury: “the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient’s own ego” (248). This unconscious aggression towards the internalized love object is paradoxically the means by which the melancholic ego can both rid itself of and remain close to the lost object.²⁶

Hurston complicates Freud’s understanding of mourning and melancholia in her autoethnographies by insisting upon the social dimension of grief that determines what constitutes a “publicly grievable life.” The reverberations of Lucy Hurston are melancholia incarnate in that they are the phantasms of unassailable grief forever out of reach. One such haunting surfaces in Hurston’s wanderings around Jacksonville after her mother’s death:

I saw a woman sitting on a porch who looked at a distance like Mama. Maybe it *was*

Mama! Maybe she was not dead at all. They had made some mistake. Mama had gone off

²⁶ This sense of perpetual melancholy resembles Freud’s own revision of “Mourning and Melancholia.” Twelve years after its publication, he wrote a letter to a colleague of his who had recently lost his son. In comforting his friend, he sets forth a more nuanced understanding of mourning which closely resembles melancholia: “Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. And actually this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish” (386). The letter is included in *Letters from Sigmund Freud*.

to Jacksonville and they thought that she was dead. The woman was sitting in a rocking-chair just like Mama always did. It must be Mama! But before I came abreast of the porch in my rigid place in line, the woman got up and went inside. I wanted to stop and go in. But I didn't even breathe my hope to anyone. I made up my mind to run away someday and find the house and let Mama know where I was. (*DT*, 69)

The provocative site of melancholic longing – the porch, a recurrent locale in the fiction – bridges the divide between private and public spheres. While Hurston remains in public away from her family, the lingering traces of her mother and Cousin Jimmie hover in her mind's eye. This hovering became increasingly literal and geographic as she often returned to her native Eatonville²⁷ as a metonymic “crib of negroism” (*MM*, 1) that cradled the black community affiliated with her mother's family. But despite leaving her hometown, the phantastic mother awaits her daughter's return, calling her back into the house for an unfinished conversation to “let Mama know where I was.” Hurston here moves beyond Freud's model of ambivalence → anxiety²⁸ → self-reproach towards a more productive, nuanced understanding of grief by stressing the societal forces behind the task of mourning. The discrepancy between Zora's private grief and her community's standard of mourning (or rather, what they cannot mourn) emerges from the “grievability” of bodies. The story behind the story – the palimpsestic narrative concealed beneath the surface – manifests as melancholic longing for the lost mother displaced as the woman on a porch. And while the incarnations of Lucy Hurston would assume different forms, Zora's relentless return back to this primal scene of origins, wherein the death of the

²⁷ Hurston was actually born in Notasulga, Alabama (Boyd 16-17). Nevertheless, the historically “all-Black” Eatonville appeared to Hurston for political reasons.

²⁸ Freud identifies the loss of the mother as one of the primal anxieties in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926). Denied the presence of the mother, the child experiences anxiety as “a product of the infant's mental helplessness which is a natural counterpart of its biological helplessness” (68).

mother precipitates the birth of the artist, suggests the extent to which she absorbed the impact of all-too-real bodies.

Hurston's sensitivity to the social forces behind mourning emends Freud's binary of mourning and melancholia by acknowledging the area in between, suggesting that compromised or denied mourning can lead to melancholia. Despite his otherwise keen eye for the dynamics of social psychology, Freud evades the question of collective memory in "Mourning and Melancholia" when he situates the mourner as an autonomous, self-contained subject. His telling simile for the nature of melancholia – that it "behaves like an open wound" (253) – establishes grief as a hermetically sealed experience registered at the individual level. Hurston insists upon this inherited, transmitted affect in her autoethnographies as towns and nations grieve for bodies stricken from public record. To press further, Freud's comparison begs the question of causation; wounds seldom appear on their own, after all. This semantic ambiguity (was this wound self-inflicted?) underscores the social dimension in shaping an individual's capacity (or rather, ability) to grieve. Tasked with having to grieve for that which is not there, at least within a certain discourse of acceptable loss, her writings uncover – or rather, recover – the gaps and omissions of denied loss.

Modernist cultures of the death drive championed a particular type of loss sanctioned through texts that make death into what Philip Fisher refers to as a "hard fact."²⁹ For Fisher,

²⁹ See Sánchez-Pardo (2003) for the intersection between Kleinian psychoanalysis and modernism. Her provocative argument – that in melancholia "a phantasy of dispossession of both a social and a psychic space is at work" (194) – has deeply influenced my own. Moglen 7-25 carries on the critical conversation within a Freudian framework in moving from a dyadic (mourner/lost object) to triadic (mourner/lost object/social forces) structure in ways that mirror Hurston. Sánchez-Pardo, Moglen, and my work have incurred a debt of gratitude to Anne Anlin Cheng whose *The Melancholy of Race* reads the racial subject as a lost object whose unique grief – a cultural poetics of implacable melancholia – is exacerbated by exclusion, fetishization, and ambivalence.

literary texts compulsively represent otherwise unavoidable social crises in order to work through what would be unbearable. By process of accumulation, repetition, and exposure to these social ills, an audience comes to terms with these horrors, enacting a “process by which the unimaginable becomes, finally, the obvious” (8). Within the context of the modernism, the unavoidable “hard fact” of the early twentieth century was death, only this was a wholly new phenomenon. Modernist death arrived as rampant disease and global warfare articulated a distinct type of loss admissible within a context of recognizable grief. In other words, particular deaths were deemed worthy of grief, especially those of the soldier, the destitute farmer, the dyspeptic bourgeois. In Fisher’s vocabulary, these losses become more “obvious” than “unimaginable” because of their successive appearances and heightened visibility in the arts. But what about other bodies whose deaths fall outside of this paradigm? The neglect towards lives such as Cousin Jimmie’s or Lucy Potts’ only compounded issues of melancholia because these bodies remain peripheral to the societies in which they live. In other words, mourning is possible only when society has declared your loss worthy of grief. Melancholia thus emerges as the only available option to grieve for that which was never there to begin with in terms of the public sphere. What Freud diagnoses as self-reproach and ambivalence towards the lost object are the residual symptoms of illegible mourning for the lost object. The anxiety of the melancholiac is thus a means to an end to render a death meaningful because there is no other outlet for the libidinal energies for the lost object; if the object was expendable in the first place, then there is no need for a replacement or substitute – no need to grieve at all. Hurston’s writings voice the “hard fact” of the social construction of mourning. Bearing witness to the life and death of her mother through the written word, her texts fight to reveal the undeniable influence of the politics of cultural memory lurking underneath Freud’s binary of mourning and melancholia.

The Textual Afterlives of Lucy Potts

The “hard fact” of Hurston’s numerous conjurings of her mother is that they are often associated with black culture at risk of being erased or forgotten. By overlaying Lucy Hurston with Afro-diasporic community, Hurston couples the black maternal with matriarchal religion (especially Hoodoo and Vodou) of the Global South. Autoethnography thus preserves both, fastening her subject through the written word and fixing visions of women who remind the anthropologist of “the crib of negroism” (*MM*, 1), her native region. Throughout her travels, the neophyte researcher – identifying herself as “just Lucy Hurston’s daughter” (*MM*, 2) to her interviewees – encountered woman after woman who evoke the spirit of her mother by their strength, courage, and truth. Troubling the waters of an ostensibly male-centric society, these women revise the earlier narrative of deathbed silence as they are vocal in their resistance. While these women are not direct copies of Lucy, they nevertheless conjure her presence because they represent the possibilities of matriarchy, mimicking the reverence Zora felt toward her mother. Two women stand in the center of *Mules and Men*: Big Sweet, one of the sentries standing guard to the labor communities of Polk County, and Marie Laveau, the infamous Vodou priestess. In the case of Big Sweet, her penchant for oral storytelling and blunt delivery establish her as a force to be reckoned with as her “loaded muscles” and ready access to weaponry (“Nobody gits *mah* knife”) mark her social prowess. Prone to taking matters into her own hands, Big Sweet repeatedly initiates brawls by joining – and beating – the men in storytelling capabilities. With “de law in [her] mouth,” her “specifyin’” gets her into trouble as it seduces Hurston: her insistence upon being recognized as a site of authority reverses Zora’s childhood trauma because

here both women derive power by identifying their kin: at a moment of especial pride, Big Sweet defends herself from her male counterparts by explaining that “Ah know you ain’t namin’ *my* mama’s daughter no cow” (*MM*, 125). At the other end of this extreme lies Marie Laveau, known as “Good Mother” (*MM*, 195) to her devotees, who becomes a type of second mother to Hurston as she is baptized into Hoodoo.³⁰ This transformative rebirth culminates in an initiation in which she is “naked as I came into the world” (*MM*, 199). The physically demanding ceremony – three days’ fasting, isolation, and extreme mental fatigue – mimics childbirth in that Hurston consciously depicts her initiation as a rebirth. Like the “snake skin cover” (*MM*, 199) that adorns her body, she too sheds a part of herself by baptism. Now begat as a daughter of the “Good Mother,” the one-time novitiate dedicates her time in New Orleans to studying among the other devotees, working together to learn “all of the Leveau routines” (*MM*, 202).

³⁰ Something of an enigma, Marie Laveau(x) refers to both a mother and her daughter (both named Marie) who practiced Vodou as *gens de couleur libre* (free people of color) in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Repeatedly accused of witchcraft and sorcery, they were Creole women in a slave society that feared Vodou because it was a site of subversive resistance. The majority of Vodou practitioners in New Orleans are women, and the majority of them were free and wealthy. Especially in the wake of the Haitian Revolution (1789-1804), Vodou was regarded as incendiary and dangerous because it enabled numerous Caribbean refugees to maintain a sense of continuity when they moved to Louisiana. During the arrests of the 1850s-1860s, only “Voudouiennes,” or female Vodou practitioners, were targeted. It was during these arrests that Vodou narratives proliferated local newspapers with colorful titles like “Vodous on the Rampage” which promised “Full Particulars of the Hell-Broth and Orgies.” With ethnographic obsession these newspaper columns insisted upon the triviality and barbarism of the religion to simultaneously denigrate black communities and extol the values of an anxious whiteness before and during the War. Unharmful by these raids and riots, the mother Laveau(x) ultimately died in 1881, and her daughter went missing in 1877. Both women ultimately did not see the end of Reconstruction in which Hoodoo overtook Vodou as the dominant religion of the Afro-diasporic South. For a history of Laveau(x), see Ward. For nineteenth-century Vodou culture, see Frandrich and Gordon.

But despite the strength of these women, they are tinged with a sense of fleeting transience. The structure of *Mules and Men* – split into two parts, “Folk Tales” and “Hoodoo”³¹ – pivots around Marie Laveau(x) and Big Sweet as both women lie at the center of their respective sections (Laveaux in “Hoodoo” and Big Sweet in “Folk Tales”). This pattern of doubling reinforces the mortality of the two as they are both siphoned off at the end of their section. “Folk Tales” culminates in a barroom brawl, a ruckus that descends into frenzied violence between Big Sweet and another woman named Lucy. When a “doubled back razor flew thru the air very close to Big Sweet’s head,” it becomes clear that this spectacle is a boundary-making scene that draws the line separating Hurston from her ethnographic subjects. “Blood was on the floor,” she recounts as she describes her other baptism, only this time in blood. As a male spectator explains, this is no place for “Lucy Hurston’s daughter”: “Run you chile! Run and ride! Dis is gointer be uh nasty ditch [...] Run clean off dis job! Some uh dese folks goin’ tuh judgment and some goin’ tuh jail. Come on, less run!” (*MM*, 179). Big Sweet’s presence, indeed the very existence of the labor camps, is built upon a sense of ephemeral glory that will only fade away. This same sense of impermanence concludes “Hoodoo” as Luke Turner, Marie Laveau(x)’s nephew, explains to Hurston that he knew that “one year and seventy-nine days from [her initiation] he would die” (*MM*, 205). Zora’s apprenticeship with him is thus a means to preserve the memory of his aunt in writing, of commemorating her existence for an outside audience. In all of these situations, she is responsible for immortalizing these women.

³¹ An offshoot of Vodou, Hoodoo descends from a mélange of influences ranging from Caribbean to Native American religious culture. Initially a form of home remedy that was regional and secretive, it flourished after Emancipation and throughout Reconstruction when Southern Hoodoo and Creole Hoodoo coalesced into one. After spreading northward with the Great Migration, Hoodoo became Christianized and urbanized as had become a full-fledged religious institution. Hazzard-Donald 84-116 details the history of Hoodoo in the Black Belt from Reconstruction to World War II.

It was precisely this transience that attracted Hurston to the Global South. Bodies like Cousin Jimmie's, Lucy Hurston's, Marie Laveau(x)'s, and Big Sweet's are so ephemeral that they provoke Hurston to commemorate their lives through the word. This kernel of personal investment appears in one of her earliest ethnographic works, a sketch named "Mother Catherine" (1934) published the same year as her debut novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.³² Slight only in page length, "Mother Catherine" is a crucial entry in Hurston's oeuvre because it articulates her burgeoning feminist critique of collective memory in the South. As a woman who "takes her stand as an equal with Christ" (103), the matriarchal Hoodoo priestess threatens a male-centric Judeo-Christian context as "Only God and the Mother count" (104) in her court. Because "all fathers are merely the means" (103) within her court, Mother Catherine stands for women's ability to create life through childbirth: bypassing the father entirely, Hurston (by proxy of Mother Catherine) lays claim to the distaff side of the family tree as it is the mother who serves as interlocutor between man and god, as conduit for the divine within the world of the everyday. As with Big Sweet and Marie Leveau, Mother Catherine acts as a beacon to Hurston by offering sanctuary "behind the walls of her Manger" (101). Their two-week discipleship bolstered her investment in an ethnographic archive that bears witness to the women likely to be forgotten. The final paragraph of "Mother Catherine" reiterates the fleeting quality that likewise marks the other women presented across Hurston's fiction as Mother Catherine "must set not time for her going but when the spirit gave the word" (105). Her many escape attempts – in one memorable case, through driving a car through the fence on accident – reinforce her self-contained estrangement from the outside world. Hurston's acknowledgment that Catherine "must not set

³² "Mother Catherine" is included in *The Complete Stories*. All citations refer to this edition. It was first published in Nancy Cunard's influential *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), a kind of avant garde counterpoint to Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925).

her foot on the unhallowed ground outside the Manger” (105) situates the matriarch as a safe haven incompatible with the outside world. This conjunction between religion, memory, and feminism emerged because women like these reminded Hurston of Lucy Potts Hurston as they served as a missing link between the material Americas and a mystical, evanescent Africa.

The relationship between feminist history and the Global South runs throughout the rhetoric of her 1930s ethnographic writing, especially when she was tasked with justifying her research interests with the Federal Writer’s Project in Florida. Forced to contextualize the value of ethnography within a political sphere, her brief stint with the agency from 1938-1939 involved applying for federal funds to continue with her travels.³³ In part, the justification was economic: alphabet agencies like the FWP were designed to promote tourism in states hardest hit by the Depression. Reluctant but strapped for cash, she was loath to resort back to a reductive, sentimental portrait of her ethnographic subject to appease her patrons because it was an institutional regression back to the complicated politics of white patronage of the black Renaissance. Her finished product, “Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas” (1938), depicts a romanticized South that doubles as “a frontier with its varying elements still unassimilated” within the context of mock imperial expansion. Florida thus presents “an opportunity to observe the wombs of folk culture still heavy with life” wherein the fertile stomping grounds of Africa are still available for consumer consumption in ways that would otherwise be inaccessible for white audiences. Couched in provocative gendered terms, the gravid “wombs of folk culture” gesture back to Africa:

³³ Like most of Hurston’s ethnography, it was recycled in her novels. Her fieldwork in Florida was lifted, much of it line for line, for *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). Easily her most conservative work, the novel reads like a swan song for a career whose feminist politics slowly abated after the 1930s. These essays are organized in *Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings from Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers’ Project*.

Recordings in florida [sic] will be like backtracking a large part of the United States, Europe, and Africa, for these elements have been attracted here and brought a gift to Florida culture each in its own way. The drums throb: Africa by way of Haiti and Martinique; Africa by way of Central and South America. Old Spain speaks through many interpreters. Old England speaks through black, white, and intermediate lips. Florida, the inner melting pot of the great melting pot America. (*GG*, 67)

Contrasted with the silence at her mother's deathbed, the pulsating, embodied crescendo of this essay attests to the life-giving powers of the maternal Global South. A crucible of miscegenated memory, the Florida captured here is a portal to Africa "by way of" the Caribbean. What Hurston overhears in the throbbing drums and intermediate lips is the call of her homeland: folklore and oral storytelling, the very words themselves of the mother tongue (of course problematized by Creole English), are the bridge back to the past. The "wombs of folk culture still heavy with life" bear forth a seemingly authentic, unmediated folk presence glimpsed in Mother Catherine, Marie Leveau, Big Sweet, and even Lucy Potts Hurston.³⁴ Plumbing the depths of the Caribbean was thus the means to return back to her maternal ancestry identified through the spoken word.

This anxious ancestry surfaces as the return of the repressed – zombies – in her ethnography of Haiti and Jamaica, *Tell My Horse* (1938). In acknowledging the violence inherent in the act of burial, her chapter on unearthed zombies acknowledges the "hard fact" that some bodies refuse to stay buried in the Global South. For Hurston, this sense of finitude (or lack thereof) differentiates American and African cultures:

Here in the shadow of the Empire State Building, death and the graveyard are final. It is such a positive end that we use it as a measure of nothingness and eternity. We have the

³⁴ Of course, Hurston herself problematized this notion of a fetishized primitive Africa. See Chapter Two for her dialectic ambivalence about the authenticity of "lies."

quick and the dead. But in Haiti there is the quick, the dead, and then there are the Zombies [...] They are the bodies without souls. The living dead. Once they were dead, and after that they were called back to life again. (*TH*, 179)

Hurston theorizes intergenerational trauma through the “living dead” because these spectral hauntings enact a distinctly racial melancholia. Like the afterlives of Cousin Jimmie or Lucy Potts, the zombie is a visceral reminder that history has split wide open: this “throwaway body” is anything but because it still remains despite its abandonment. Repressed to the point of being hidden in plain view, the silent body of the zombie “remains in that misty zone which divides life and death,” to quote from Alfred Métraux who historicizes the zombie as a symptom of colonial exploitation and slavery in the Caribbean. With “no memory and no knowledge of his condition” as “a beast of burden which his master exploits without mercy,” the zombie is often “seen in terms which echo the harsh existence of a slave in the old colony” (282). Like the Caribbean slave, the life of the zombie is simultaneously undeniable yet illegible, shrouded in mystery because the zombie cannot speak. Arriving on the heels of the U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), Hurston’s fieldwork in Jamaica and Haiti is couched in a moment of historical amnesia. The spike in zombie reports between 1936-37, alluded to in *Tell My Horse*, suggests the ongoing cultural work of soulless bodies – the uncanny, hyperreal³⁵ remnants of enslaved and repressed lives – which function as “the ultimate sign of loss and dispossession.” The disposability of the hyperreal zombie body mimics the “throwaway-ness” of these exploited bodies whose voice is negligible to the point of discard.³⁶ Like the “familiar strangeness” described in this chapter’s

³⁵ Extending Freud’s nuanced theory of semiotics – that the prefix “un” is always a giveaway of repression – we can sense the repressed “realness” in hyper-reality encapsulated in Baudrillard’s “hyper.”

³⁶ See Sheller 143-173 for a discussion which turns from labor politics to the fetishization of the Caribbean body in both sexual and tourist discourses. Within a similar context, Avery Gordon

epigraph, zombies are the uncanny return of a repressed materiality compromising any promise of closure toward the past.

One zombie in particular recalls the memory of Lucy Hurston when her “wretched” body returns from beyond the grave. Like Hurston’s mother, Felicia Felix-Mentor was gradually erased after her death:

In 1907 she took suddenly ill and died and was buried. There were the records to show.

The years passed. The husband married again and advanced himself in life. The little boy became a man. People had forgotten all about the wife and mother who died so long ago.

(*TH*, 196)

Though public “records” document the woman’s death, they are not enough as her personal history – the memories that live on in her family and community – disappears, so much so that when she returned as a zombie in October 1936, her husband refused to identify her body. The next month, Hurston had arrived in Gonaives, Haiti to shadow vodou doctors in hospitals and schools. Her description of Felix-Mentor, now detained in and pacified by the Service d’Hygeine, in *Tell My Horse* is tinged with forensic detachment:

Finally the doctor forcibly uncovered her and held her so that I could take her face. And the sight was dreadful. That blank face with the dead eyes. The eyelids were white all around the eyes as if they had been burned with acid. It was pronounced enough to come out in the picture. There was nothing that you could say to her or get from her except by looking at her, and the sight of this wreckage was too much to endure for long. (*TH*, 195)

has found that ghosts function as “a form of social figuration that treats as a major problem the reduction of individuals ‘to a mere sequence of instantaneous experiences which leave no trace, or rather whose trace is hated as irrational, superfluous, and ‘overtaken’” (20). For Joan Dayan, the zombie is the very “incarnation of negation or vacancy” (37) because it epitomizes the Marxist conflation of body-as-product within a regime of exploited labor and colonial occupation.

Even if it is “too much to endure for long,” the zombie’s grotesque body holds sway over Hurston who struggles to document it objectively in her field notes. As the numerous photographs of *Tell My Horse* suggest, Hurston’s interest in documentary expression had ventured into the visual by the late 1930s. These unstaged, unreadable photographs are a kind of Rorschach test that test the limits of her readers: just what are we to make of these abject bodies whose violence disrupts a narrative of finality and burial? Put simply, are they monsters or victims? Felix-Mentor’s family begs the same question when trying to unravel the motivations behind her return nearly thirty years after her death. Her distressing silence mimics the erasure of Felicia Felix-Mentor from her community in that she literally has no voice with which to communicate. Were Hurston to close her eyes, the zombie would, for all intents and purposes, disappear because of its silence. This double-play of the senses – of being able to see but never hear the dead – reenacts the ordeal of Lucy Potts’ death all the more because the zombie is material enough to see but ephemeral enough to resist interpretation.

This liminality of the zombie reiterates Hurston’s critique of Caribbean memory that represses the black maternal. For this anthropologist with vested interests in Afro-diasporic culture, the erasure of the black mother is a regression away from what makes the Global South so fecund and restorative:

When a Jamaican is born of a black woman and some English or Scotsman, the black mother is literally and figuratively kept out of sight as far as possible, but no one is allowed to forget that white father [...] You get the impression that these virile Englishmen do not require women to reproduce. They just come out to Jamaica, scratch out a nest and lay eggs that hatch out into “pink” Jamaicans. (*TH*, 8-9)

By 1942, Hurston had sharpened her tongue even more in repeating this stance in *Dust Tracks*, only this time in dialect: “You are bound to hear a lot about that Englishman or that Scot. But never a word about the black mama. It is as if she didn’t exist. Had never existed at all” (*DT*, 221). Differentiating her anthropological task as oral and feminine rather than written and masculine, Hurston refuses to cede ground when representing her ethnographic subject. In *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, matriarchy flourishes in private conversation (like those with Mother Catherine) and domestic life (like that of Lucy Potts) rather than official discourse like the history of Caribbean populations because colonial memory is invested in keeping this “hard fact” of erasure hidden from view. The residual traces of “the black mama” in Hurston’s autoethnographies decry the historical amnesia that breeds only unfinished, intergenerational traumas that seep into the present day.

For Hurston, the notion that Afro-diasporic culture could become divorced from its matriarchal roots was terrifying. Her persistent engagement with the black maternal, at times embodied in her mother, Lucy Potts, and others, refracted through a feminist lens of the Global South, reveals the limited nature of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” in that she introduces a dangerous and volatile third element into the mix: the notion that grief can be socially constructed. Wandering away from Judith Butler’s parameters for a “publicly grievable life,” a body that falls outside the norms of social decorum – what Patricia Yaeger refers to as a “throwaway body” – is systematically erased from view when its death is erased from historical discourse. What Freud diagnoses as self-reproach and ambivalence are really the vestiges of melancholia for a past that never was, for illegitimate bodies for whom mourners strive to get

public acknowledgment. For melancholiacs, the notion that one can replace or fill the lack of the lost object (who was expendable in the first place in the eyes of society) is baffling. For Hurston, melancholia is the form grief assumes when it is deemed unworthy or inappropriate, for those “throwaway bodies” insignificant enough to warrant public memorial. Her melancholic writing returns time and again to the lost mother whose grief is unending and intergenerational. The prevalence of the lost black maternal throughout Hurston’s career testifies to the unresolved work of mourning in black America of the twentieth century as she struggles to find an acceptable means to grieve for bodies stricken from the public record. The zombies of *Tell My Horse* and fictional reincarnations of her mother enact an altogether new form of mourning, one that remains attentive to the role of community as an alternate site of loss. The bonds Hurston shares with other griever within the Global South – other victims of hate crimes, other hoodoo practitioners, other ailing community members – help bear the weight of the losses unaccounted for within the public domain. The social forces at work behind melancholia can ultimately save or destroy a griever. Within these alternative communities of redress and reconciliation, Hurston found a different paradigm altogether, one attentive to the “illegible” bodies otherwise discarded within the broader context of early twentieth-century America.

Her refusal to look away from the repressed origins of the Global South stems from her willingness to listen for what these hidden histories had to say in the first place. The initial trauma of her inability to speak for her mother lay the framework for her hesitance to speak on behalf of others, fearing that she would appropriate and corrupt the message in the process. As an attentive listener and diligent transcriber, she regarded her main responsibility as dictation for the speech of others. Unlike her peers in the field of anthropology, Hurston was hesitant to coopt perspectives that went against the status quo. (The ramifications of this were understandably

immense as her philosophy went against the grain of contemporary fieldwork that tended to mediate the ethnographic subject.) A fly on the porch wall when collecting data, Hurston's account of the heteroglossic Global South bears witness to a variety of histories and experiences that thwart a homogenous, static frame. What her autoethnographic trilogy presents is not an authoritative ethnography of a people so much as a manifold assemblage that refuses to settle on a definition of the region. She wears her vantage point on her sleeve by acknowledging her complex, privileged status – as both a Northerner and a Southerner, insider and outsider, observer and participant – that necessarily grants her unique access to these communities as the self-identified “Lucy Hurston's daughter” (*MM*, 2). This in turn prevents any semblance of interpretation because she reiterates that she is an interlocutor of “lies” designed to trick and deceive. Her refusal to ventriloquize and distrust of objectivity stems from this crucial childhood trauma that taught her about the nature of silence that speaks as loud as voice. I am situating here a type of cause and effect wherein the lingering affects of grief facilitated her playing with ethnographic conventions in ways that could – and indeed should – be construed as postmodern. Her commitment to allowing the subaltern to speak in her writings revises Freud's schema of mourning and melancholia because she both recognizes and dismantles the social constructions of acceptable loss. Writing a new history of discarded, forgotten, and repressed lives, her autoethnographies bear witness to the “unreal,” throwaway bodies hidden in plain view within the Global South.

Chapter Two

“De inside meanin’ of words”: Orality and the Archive

“Miss Hurston is writing poetry and giving us anthropology; her sermon is a synthetic preservation of the spirit of a hundred ‘Bible-shouting’ meetings. It is too good, too brilliantly splashed with poetic imagery, to be the product of any one Negro preacher.”

John Chamberlain’s review of *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, *The New York Times* (L17)

“Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.”

Richard Wright’s review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *New Masses* (Wright’s italics, 25)

Responding to John Chamberlain’s critique of *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, Hurston acquiesced that “he is unwilling to believe that a Negro preacher could have so much poetry in him” (L, 302). Championing black preachers as “the first artists, the ones intelligible to the masses,” she staunchly defends her fictional preacher (autobiographically modeled on her father, himself one of Eatonville’s most well-known clergy) in likening him to “Adam Bede, a voice has told them to sing the beginning of things” (L, 302-303). In gesturing to George Eliot, Hurston not only circumvents Chamberlain’s critique of her writing in dialect³⁷ – that her own prose is “too good” to be mimetically authentic – but also rejects the contemporary critical need for a genuine mode of “Negro expression.” Having enmeshed herself within a largely white community in 1920s New York, Hurston was reluctant to pander to an audience like Chamberlain, one yearning for

³⁷ In an unpublished essay for *The Florida Negro* (1938), Hurston writes that she penned *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* “in the idiom – not the dialect – of the Negro” (“Art and Such,” 910). In keeping with the political stakes of this project – entrenched within a larger critical discourse that refers to the black vernacular as “dialect” – I will refer to this idiom as “dialect.”

outdated caricatures depicting the “hundred ‘Bible-shouting meetings,’” not the serious art associated with Bede’s visions. In overstepping her bounds by writing “too good,” she failed to present the portrait of the folk expected from her anthropologically influenced fiction.

That most of the criticism leveled against Hurston was aimed at her use of dialect speaks to the weight she placed on voice. Because communication operates as a boundary between insider and outsider, orality “constructs and articulates her community” (Nwankwo 52) at various times configured along the lines of race (black/white), gender (female/male), region (South/North), class (lower/upper), religion (Hoodoo and Vodou/Christian), or even history (pre-Reconstruction/post-Jim Crow). By situating black culture as primarily rural and oral, Hurston thrusts the Harlem Renaissance’s spotlight back onto her native region home to loquacious storytellers and spirited oral historians, thus insisting upon a fluid, dynamic understanding of cultural memory. Unlike her peers’ ethnographies of “primitive” populations seemingly forgotten by modernity, her writings inhabit a space of historical plasticity – history still unfolds in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* because even if the same account is told on separate occasions (such as her own differing perspectives of Cudjo Lewis); the story is never quite the same. Understandably, audiences expecting a traditional account of slavery and its aftermaths in the South were flummoxed by these postmodern ethnographies.³⁸ Upon encountering these radically disruptive historical accounts, frustrated critics like John Chamberlain expressed confusion as outright denial “that a Negro preacher could have so much poetry in him,” thus trapping the folk she represents within what Richard Wright refers to as “that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.” (His review is an ironic self-fulfilling prophecy: having assimilated these expectations himself, Wright was

³⁸ On Hurston’s postmodernism, see Boxwell 608, Duck 276, and Gambrell 99-124.

incapable of considering what lay beyond this orbit, thereby dismissing Hurston without due consideration.) The intricacies of Hurston's folk, especially in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, testify to her accomplished career as an anthropologist trained in portraying the nuances of the ethnographic subject.

As these hasty dismissals of her fiction suggest, one must read Hurston's oeuvre intertextually – fiction and nonfiction alongside each other – because her anthropological training drove her fiction writing and vice versa: while *Jonah's Gourd Vine* appeared in 1934, she had been already publishing short stories and academic essays for over a decade. During this formative decade (1924-1934), her involvement with both the Harlem Renaissance and the anthropology department at Columbia University introduced her to the “Pet Negro system,” her satiric name for the interracial patronage system fueled by an economics of expectation wherein white patrons only financed black cultural production that perpetuated the “minstrel technique” bemoaned in Wright's review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This performance of racial caricature, conflated in these reviews with the black vernacular, was fueled by what critics refer to as aesthetic primitivism, a fundamentally modernist fixation on what were rapidly becoming postcolonial sites: most often with Hurston's New York, the enigmatic Africa. I would suggest that the “Pet Negro system” – a specific symptom of the embrace of primitivism in 1920s Harlem – is a response to the impulse inherent in what Jacques Derrida refers to as the neo-Freudian (and therefore Oedipal) archive where one is consumed by a “painful desire for a return to the authentic and singular origin, and for a return concerned to account for the desire to return: for itself” (85). In Hurston's ethnographies these two impulses, the “Pet Negro system” and archive fever (“*mal d'archive*”), fuel one another because “the spy-glass of Anthropology” (*MM*, 1) seeks to fix a stable, historically sealed archive of the Global South just like the “Pet Negro”

trapped within a bygone past. The archive is ultimately a site of anxious origins that siphons off (the Freudian verb is “represses”) the past in order to give shape to the inheritors of the archive: “*No archive without outside*” (Derrida’s italics, 11) because the archive only comes into being in its making and unmaking.

Hurston rewrites the archive through dialect that bears witness to an ever-shifting, alternative history transmitted on the porch, in the field, or at the jook, marginal spaces in which the folk “passed nations through their mouths” (*TE*, 1). Professionally invested in the genre of the ethnographic archive yet skeptical of its intentions, Hurston’s own archives (*Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, and her published articles and essays) refuse to depict a static portrait of the Global South. Instead, she documents oral testimonies that reveal the limitations of the archive: chiefly, that the archive is a self-constructed, exclusive repository that omits transgressive, “unreal” lives that disrupt a stable narrative of historical wins and losses. Hurston’s anti-archive is particularly invested in one man – Cudjo Lewis, an African king transported to America on the final slave ship in 1859 – who exposes the tenuousness of the archive because he is a threshold figure who erupts throughout Hurston’s oeuvre: after her first essay on him in 1927, she remained fixated on his vexing space in historical discourse, returning to his story in unpublished manuscripts, academic essays, and anecdotes from 1927 onward until the 1940s. His voice reverberates throughout these decades in these documents that struggle to reconcile oral testimony with accepted history; ultimately he is not entombed within the archive so much as a rupture of its very boundaries. As a restless specter of the past that will not fade away, Lewis helps Hurston dismantle the archive fever lurking behind the genre of ethnography.

Primitivism and “Pet Negroes”

Upstairs, on the third floor
 Of the 135th Street Library
 In Harlem, I saw a little
 Bottle of sand, brown sand,
 Just like the kids make pieces
 Out of down at the beach.
 But the label said: “This
 Sand was taken from the Sahara desert.”
 Imagine that! The Sahara desert!
 Some bozo’s been all the way to Africa to get some sand.

Helene Johnson, “Bottled” (1927)³⁹

Writing about the aggression inherent in the archive, Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (1996) offers an analogous dynamic shared between the “Pet Negro system” and anthropology: for Derrida, the archive is an Oedipal institution that both works through and represses the anxiety of the past.⁴⁰ As a repository of cultural memory, the archive is the means by which subjective experience can become objective history, or what he refers to as the “institutional passage from the private to the public” (2): it remembers so that we can forget. Venturing back to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida argues that this tension between recognition and annihilation is a

³⁹ A friend of Hurston’s, poet Johnson and novelist Dorothy West sublet Hurston’s apartment while she was away conducting research the same year this poem was published.

⁴⁰ Here’s Derrida on what he means by the archive: “the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the *arkhē* in the *physical, historical, or ontological* sense, which is to say the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement” (Derrida’s italics, 2). The archive is not so much a defined physical location as it is what Derrida calls a “*domiciliation*,” a site of collective memory that exists in several different media. Within the scope of this project, the archive refers to a white history of slavery and its aftermaths that omits oral history – in short, the black perspective. By the 1920s, this cultural archive assumed the form of “objective” documents like ethnography, filmed footage, and historical textbooks, though it was by no means limited to these genres as literature, film, and theater doubled as historical truth.

collective death drive because “the archive is made possible by the death, aggression, and destruction drive” (94). This dance of oedipal violence – creating history only in order to forget – is the fundamental essence of the archive that searches for “a return to the authentic and singular origin, and for a return concerned to account for the desire to return” (85). By delineating history from modernity, heirs of the archive can dissociate themselves from what has been already indexed as anterior because the process of indexation is itself an act of negation-as-remembrance whereby history is affirmed as it fades from view. Writes Freud about this type of erasure: “the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed” (Freud’s italics, 236). This process of ambivalence is at work in the archive. To its inheritors, the archive is the “lifting of the repression” by acknowledging the relationship between history and modernity but only from the security of the present day already separated from the archive: archival history presupposes its own structure and thus its structural finitude. Static and self-contained, Derrida’s archive is a monologue with the past that emerges only in retrospect because it is “radical finitude” embodied, “the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression” (19). In its “radical finitude,” the archive remembers on behalf of its culture even while traces still remain. There is always a leaky glimpse of the present in the archive because it is genealogy and casket. Derrida diagnoses this “radical finitude” as *mal d’archive*, archive fever, “a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (91). A historical utopia (Greek – “no place”), the archive is a past that exists only in the realm of phantasy of transcendental “homesickness.” Hurston’s

ethnographies participate in this archival nostalgia but only insofar as she writes about these mythologized pastorals – especially that of the antebellum South – only to dismantle them. In order to secure funding for these research expeditions, she often articulated her projects within the vocabulary of the “Pet Negro system.” But while she was expected to document the lives of ex-slaves and their descendants, Hurston rejected decorum in providing oral testimony that exposed the falsity of this vocabulary. Because Derrida’s archive is predicated upon this “radical finitude,” Hurston’s oral histories help her operate within the “Pet Negro system” (by appearing to pander to these white audiences) when in fact she bears witness to deeply radical histories of political agency and resistance.

The anxious nostalgia Derrida describes in *Archive Fever* suffused American anthropology of the 1920s as it searched desperately for an idyllic pastoral “most archaic place” capable of redeeming the excesses of modernity. This distinctly American arcadia⁴¹ was largely defined as rural, pre-capitalist, and regional because marginal communities of the folk were regarded as wayward and perverse, both aberrations of America’s past as well as a testament as to how far the nation had come. Ethnographers, anthropologists, and documentarians rushed to archive this prelapsarian pastoral of “folk country” with what James S. Miller refers to as “indexical-excavatory enthusiasm” (374) run amok. A euphemism for archive fever, this “indexical-excavatory enthusiasm” was often predicated upon the same impulse that engendered the minstrelsy of the “Pet Negro system.” As Hurston laments to her own patron, “Godmother”⁴²

⁴¹ Alain Locke invokes the pastoral tradition in his review of *Mules and Men* in lamenting that “there is yet something too Arcadian” about a collection of folklore in a region “so extinct that our only possible approach to it is the idyllic and retrospective” (240).

⁴² It was at Mason’s request that her “children” call her “Godmother.” Hurston’s “siblings” included Miguel Covarrubias (Mexican illustrator who designed *Mules and Men*) and Langston Hughes; Mason played a large role in editing his debut novel *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Hurston and Mason’s was a demanding relationship, largely because Mason felt entitled to her

Charlotte Osgood Mason in 1931, Forbes Randolph's revue *Fast and Furious* "squeezed all Negro-ness out of every thing and substituted what he thought ought to be Negro humor" (*L*, 226). To Langston Hughes in September 1928: "It makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it. I am almost sick – my one consolation being that they never do it right and so there is still a chance for us" (*L*, 126).⁴³

Hurston maligns this phenomenon in her scathing indictment "The 'Pet Negro' System" (1943). Written with the safety and hindsight of retrospect, her satirical exposé lampoons the performative nature of her relationship with Mason and other "Negrotarians"⁴⁴ because white audiences, benefactors, and critics will only sponsor arts that reinforce black dependency upon white culture:

beneficiaries' work and personal lives. Mason treated Hurston as a means to an end and paid for her protégée's travel only if she itemized all expenses; a particularly embarrassed Hurston once had to request more funds to pay for sanitary napkins and medicine for intestinal problems while in Florida. Their contract stipulated that Hurston's role was to collect data on behalf of "the mother of the primitives" (*L*, 234), so all transcriptions belonged to Mason and were not to be published in any form by Hurston. When Hurston recycled folklore in theater productions from 1931-1932, their relationship never recovered. In plagiarizing what belonged to "the Park Avenue dragon" (*L*, 284), Hurston had betrayed her patroness' trust in overstepping her bounds. See Kaplan (2013) 193-256 for more.

⁴³ Cultural theft was a shared concern for Hughes and Hurston whose co-authored play *Mule Bone* (1931) recycled Hurston's ethnographic data into theater. While the play never materialized, the concern of cultural theft remained as evidenced by Hughes' "Note on Commercial Theatre" (1940):

You've taken my blues and gone –
 You sing 'em on Broadway
 And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
 And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
 And you fixed 'em
 So they don't sound like me.

Yep, you done taken my blues and gone. (215-216)

⁴⁴ Hurston's acerbic nickname for these financiers attests to the mongrel economics of Harlem as prosperous socialites (Nancy Cunard, editor of the *Negro* anthology), popular authors (Fannie Hurst, a longtime friend of Hurston's), serious academics (Carl Van Vechten), and other well-connected aristocrats funded black artists.

Now it says here, “And every white man shall be allowed to pet himself a Negro. Yea, he shall take a black man unto himself to pet and to cherish, and this same Negro shall be perfect in his sight. Nor shall hatred among the races of men, nor conditions of strife in the walled cities, cause his pride and pleasure in his own Negro to wane.” (“PN,” 593)

Calling upon an established tradition of associating dehumanization with animal characteristics, Hurston’s provocative metaphor of “petting” and “cherishing” a pet also conjures unambiguously Christian rhetoric (“in the sight” of God) to solidify the patronizing nature of patronage across the color line. As a housetrained creature, the “pet Negro” straddles awkwardly the boundaries between whiteness and blackness because it can “do all the things forbidden to other Negroes” (“PN,” 594), the most important activity being able to venture over into white cultural terrain. This model of charity is predicated upon performance: to Hurston, white patronage stems from benign guilt over wanting to help the destitute but only on the condition that the charity project reinforces the perception of kindness and moral superiority of the patron. Patronage here is not an equalizing force but a means of perpetuating the asymmetrical power structure in making black beneficiaries (the “Pet Negroes”) dependent upon white patrons for class mobility and financial support in order to make a living as artists and other cultural figures. But once a “Pet Negro” disrupts the system, the system falls apart: “It has generally been accepted that all Negroes in the South are living under horrible conditions that many friends of the Negro up North actually take offense if you don’t tell them a tale of horror and suffering” (“PN,” 596). This pretense of Southern subjugation and Northern liberation preserves the dynamic of “a solid black South” sustained by “a solid white North,” but this flimsy narrative always undoes itself. If it crumbles apart in moments of seepage, the system will suture itself back together: “[n]early everybody spills the beans to his favorite on the other side of the color

line – in strictest confidence, of course. That’s how the ‘petting system’ works in the South” (“PN,” 597).⁴⁵

In Hurston’s summation, the majority of white anthropologists only document what they want to see in the South, like the owner of the “Pet Negro,” thus draining their material of true “Negro-ness.” This simplification runs throughout her ethnographies because she articulates her role as a black anthropologist as someone who will correct these mistakes with scientific methods and objective reporting. For instance, she critiques “the malicious lies of foreigners” that pass as truth for the tourist:

He has read the fantastic things that have been written about Haitian Voodoo by people who know nothing at all about it. Consequently, there are the stereotyped tales of virgin worship, human sacrifice and other elements borrowed from European origins. All this paints the Haitian as a savage and he does not like to be spoken of like that. So he takes refuge in flight. (*TH*, 83-84)

What’s at stake in Hurston’s summation is the risk of erasure: her precious ethnographic subject would rather take “refuge in flight” than confront reductive, racist slander. Because these falsities of “stereotyped tales” threaten to sap the “Negro-ness” of the Global South, Hurston self-identified as an advocate for the folk who would protect what she refers to as the “lush glades of primitive imagination” in “Go Gator and Muddy the Water” (1939). Fearing that this “primitive imagination” might soon be “drained by formal education and mechanical inventions” (*GG*, 69), she structured her own anti-archives (*Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road*) as oral history transcribed onto paper to reinforce the lack of mediation or

⁴⁵ Indicative of Hurston’s increasingly conservative politics, she resigns that “This is the inside picture of things, as I see it. Whether you like it or not, is no concern of mine” (“PN,” 600). Still implicated in a world of white publishers, her fatalistic ending takes one step forward and two steps back.

interference on her behalf. That is to say, she repeatedly insists upon her role as a detached transcriber whose duty is to report rather than interpret. Read in this light, her essay “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals” (1934)⁴⁶ reads like a preface-cum-manifesto for *Mules and Men*, published one year later. In the essay, she differentiates between native and mock spirituals:

Like the folk-tales, the spirituals are being made and forgotten everyday. There is this difference: the makers of the songs of the present go about from town to town and church to church singing their songs. Some are printed and called ballads, and offered for sale after the services at ten and fifteen cents each. Others just go about singing them in competition with other religious minstrels. (“S,” 223)

The chief difference between spirituals and neo-spirituals is that the mass-produced neo-spirituals restrict the movement of spirituals across an Afro-diasporic imaginary, thus hindering any potential for fluid transformation. “Printed” and “offered for sale” for an audience, neo-spirituals divorce the artifact from its historical moment and embalm it within a culturally amnesiac archive. Like folklore, the medium of spirituals is transitory: improvisation means that no two renditions will be the same. “There has never been,” she concludes, “a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience anywhere. What is being sung by the concert artists and glee clubs are the works of Negro composers or adaptors *based* on the spirituals” (Hurstons’ italics, 224). Like the “Pet Negro,” these neo-spirituals are a form of mimicry designed for an audience expecting “big old lies” (*MM*, 8) that perpetuate established narratives of race.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Essay printed in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro* (1934), an *avant garde* European reaction to Locke’s *The New Negro*. Only 1,000 copies were printed for its initial run, the majority of which were destroyed in the London Blitz of 1940-41.

⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard defines this phenomenon as “hyperreal,” a model “of a real without origin or reality” (1) that compulsively repeats itself in an age of mechanical reproduction. Simulation “is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of

Hurston resists this archival impulse in *Mules and Men* because her texts stage ethnography (as textual archive much like the neo-spirituals) as an artistic battlefield on which she refused to yield to what Peter Brooks refers to as the “*anticipation of retrospection*” (Brooks’ italics, 23) inherent in plotting.⁴⁸ For Brooks, plot is driven by the same “radical finitude” of the archive because “telling is always *in terms of* the impending end” (Brooks’ italics, 52):

The very possibility of meaning plotted through sequence and through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending: the interminable would be the meaningless, and the lack of ending would jeopardize the beginning. We read the incidents of narration as “promises and annunciations” of final coherence, that metaphor that may be reached through the chain of metonymies: across the bulk of the as yet unread middle pages, the end calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it. (93-94)

Like the archive, the plot is a closed circuit whose existence delineates the reader’s present day from the text’s internal temporality. As Brooks concludes, “desire of the text is ultimately desire for the end” (108). The archive and ethnography are always written from a backward glance, from the awareness of an impending finality that relegates the ethnographic subject within the realm of a closed textual past much like the archive itself. This “anticipation of retrospection” fuels archive fever in that the archive is designed to be a static repository of collective memory fixed and delineated as having already occurred in the past tense.

substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2). As the simulation eclipses the original, it represses the point of origin.

⁴⁸ I turn to Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot* (1985) not because Hurston’s ethnographies are structured along the lines of fictional plot (though they are), but because the genre of ethnography is insistent upon a structure of organization in which the ethnographer presents a report predicated upon its very finality: there can be no ethnography where the fieldwork has not yet ended. Scientific observation arises from the results, not the process of observing itself.

Within the context of Hurston's "petting system," the archive's fetishized past was profoundly shaped by aesthetic primitivism. Like Brooks' vision of a hermetically sealed plot, the primitivist archive constructs an outdated, archaic Africa whose seemingly empty (geographic, cultural, historical, psychological) terrain offered white modernist culture a blank slate onto which it could project and satiate oftentimes sexual desires. A unique instance of otherwise mundane Orientalism, modernist primitivism drew upon a post-colonial anxiety about modernity and history in that post-colonial sites were increasingly regarded as atemporal with regards to Western eyes; this investment in primitive sexualities that lay outside of Freudian paradigms of repression was only compounded by what Sieglinde Lemke refers to as the "chiaroscuro effect" (4) of primitivism wherein white audiences could cross over and tap into repressed desires that impinged upon a need for (post)colonial historical difference. That is to say, colonial and postcolonial sites needed to be demarcated as outdated and counterintuitive to Western values, but nevertheless the historical tradition of exploitation remained as white audiences commandeered these cultural sites in order to stage encounters with the taboo within the acceptable realm of fantasy. The "chiaroscuro effect" Lemke describes is thus a muddying of the racial waters of the early twentieth century because the primitivist archive insists upon a boundary between history and modernity in such a way that it is easily dismantled. Like the "Pet Negro system," this cognitive dissonance between past and present only worked because its fragile borders encouraged this crossing over into the fetishized past.⁴⁹ Modernist primitivism was a potent expression of repressed desire for black bodies in which "either 'the primitive' is

⁴⁹ Describing a similar cultural process, Eric Lott argues that this "nearly insupportable fascination and a self-protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices" (6) incited antebellum minstrel shows. See Sánchez-Pardo for the Caribbean primitivism at work in *Tell My Horse* as a response to the threatening modernity of Hitler's Europe.

valorized for *being* different, or it is denigrated and humiliated *because* it is different” (Lemke 27). This interplay between desire and displacement and desire likewise fueled the mongrel economics associated with the “Pet Negro system” because white patrons could live vicariously through a “Pet Negro” who parroted what its patrons wanted to hear. Reluctantly Hurston had to work within this system by regurgitating an already exhausted narrative of a “solid black South” needing to be saved by the “solid white North” for benefactors and publishers alike. Yet while she reaped the benefits of white patronage because she ostensibly wrote about what they wanted to read, she understood that her task was considerably more complex than parroting. As a serious researcher, she was to document what she saw, warts and all, during her travels. No wonder, then, she was overwhelmed by what she witnessed on the road: the oral testimony she collected interrogated the “Pet Negro system” by complicating the narrative of black political inefficacy. Whereas the “Pet Negro” (like the primitivist subject) is denied any sense of agency whatsoever by being dependent upon a patron or audience, the political subjects of *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* possess a resourcefulness that transcends these vocabularies. This transcendence initially overwhelmed Hurston: at work in Haiti on *Tell My Horse*, she fears that the research “is swelling up in me like a jeenie in a bottle” and “engulfing me” (L, 404). Because of the stakes involved in constructing an ethnographic archive of the Global South, she pushed back against the genre conventions of ethnography (again, predicated upon the “anticipation of retrospection”) in order to accommodate the ongoing, unstable, and deeply subversive histories she discovered. Writing the definitive account of Caribbean folklore or Hoodoo culture in one book “is like explaining the planetary theory on a postage stamp” (L, 391).

Tasked with the equivalent of having to explain planetary theory on a postage stamp, Hurston began to experiment with generic conventions of ethnography in order to more fully and

accurately portray the folk of the Global South. Responding to collections organized by white researchers like Guy Johnson and Howard Odum's *The Negro and His Songs* (1925) and *Negro Workaday Songs* (1926), she attempted to break away from the dynamics similar to the "Pet Negro system" inherent in white anthropology at the time. As she explains to Melville Herskovits, her unique vantage point as an Ivy League-educated woman of color became her contribution to this gap in scholarship:

You fully appreciate how much there is to be done when you realize that there is no real curricula for these Anthropologists who wish to study the Am. Negro. I was struck with it whn [sic] I went back to Columbia last year. Papa Franz knows the Indian, etc. but there was nothing to help me in my study of the Negro. I could bring more to the Dept. tha [sic] it could give me in the matter. (*L*, 372)⁵⁰

What she brought to the anthropology department was her use of dialect-as-methodology: her refusal to translate her fieldwork out of dialect vouches for the authenticity of her research as it suggests that she has refrained from editing her material. By letting the folklore speak for itself, the medium is the message, and Hurston's message in *Mules and Men* is inextricable from dialect because the vernacular testifies to the material conditions under which the folklore developed. That is to say, dialect transforms the folklore into historical discourse because these tales function politically for the disenfranchised communities of color that tell these tales. As a

⁵⁰ American anthropology had been historically invested in Native populations. In the 1910s the field slowly gravitated towards black communities in order to flesh out the scant scholarship like *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867) and *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880) that tended to valorize antebellum ideology under the guise of objective history. Hurston's ethnographies, on the other hand, provide an overabundance of information: glossaries, sheet music, song lyrics, home remedies, prescription formulae, incantations, prayers, photographs, proverbs, recipes, and transcribed folklore. This uncompromising syncretism routinely frustrated her readers: even one of Hurston's most trusted friends, Alain Locke, dismissed *Tell My Horse* as "anthropological gossip" (279); his review unfortunately epitomizes the larger critical response to her work after *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

startling enactment of what Boas referred to as cultural relativism, *Mules and Men* forces its audience to compromise in order to best approach the ethnographic subject rather than the other way around.⁵¹

The double-voiced nature of these tales allowed Hurston to receive funding for her research while at the same time dismantling the notion of the ethnographic archive. As she makes clear in the introduction to *Mules and Men*, storytelling is a mode of “feather-bed resistance”: the black communities of Florida “let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries” (*MM*, 2-3).⁵² To its unsuspecting audience, *Mules and Men* is a collection of “laughter and pleasantries,” but to Hurston and her ethnographic subjects the text protects the metamorphic nature of oral history. In “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934), she clarifies this aesthetic principle of transformation endemic to black culture: “Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use” (27). Since “originality is the modification of ideas” (28), oral history fluctuates like an adept jazz musician to suit the needs of the present moment and thus exists

⁵¹ The uneasy publication history of *Mules and Men* is worth noting: Boni and Liveright first approached Hurston for a collection of folktales in 1926; she soon prepared *Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States* from ethnographic material collected between 1927-1930. This material was reworked into “Hoodoo in America” (1931) for *The Journal of American Folklore*. A significant contribution to the emergent field of African-American anthropology, “Hoodoo in America” was the first piece of serious scholarship written by a black anthropologist and is arguably her first monograph as it suggests her literary potential (Gambrell 109). After a brief detour through the autobiographical *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, she returned to what would become *Mules and Men*. Because Lippincott wanted the collection to be “a \$3.50 book,” she excerpted “Hoodoo in America” for inclusion in the manuscript as “Part II: Hoodoo,” but not before revising the material yet again in order to incorporate her first-person narrative that antedates postmodern anthropology.

⁵² For Sonnet Retman, *Mules and Men* is thus a “signifying ethnography” that “dismantles the pastoral, preindustrial portrait of the folk so popular in the 1930s” (156-157). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines signifyin(g) as cultural, rhetorical, and “formal revision that is at all points double-voiced” (22).

outside the realm of the “radical finitude” of the archive. If there is no point of fixed origin, the archive begins to collapse upon itself because it hinges upon a past that is not there. In the nomenclature of *Mules and Men*, the fact that the archive is made as easily as it is unmade is one of the many “big old lies,” material truth that is dismissed as trivial distraction because it appears to be too mundane to be significant. “Big old lies” lie at the heart of the “Pet Negro system” because

the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, “Get out of here!” We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. (*MM*, 2)

The discrepancy between “open-faced laughter” and “feather-bed resistance,” what Du Bois diagnoses as double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), defines the sociocultural boundaries between white audience and black actor. But whereas Du Bois laments the melancholic nature of double consciousness, Hurston understands that the “open-faced laughter” generates a space ripe with political opportunity because the satirical, subversive elements of folklore go undetected. As she explains in dialect: “The white man is always trying to know somebody else’s business. All right, I’ll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho’ can’t read my mind. I’ll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I’ll say my say and sing my song” (*MM*, 3). Distracted by the “play toy,” white audiences are duped for the time being and thus mistake the forest for the trees. As one of Hurston’s storytellers remarks about the difference between what white audiences see and what they comprehend:

Now, some white people say she hold hoodoo dance on Congo Square every week. But Marie Laveau never hold no hoodoo dance. That was a pleasure dance. They beat the drum with the shin bone of a donkey and everybody dance like they do in Hayti [sic]. Hoodoo is private. She give the dance the first Friday night in each month and they have crab gumbo and rice to eat and the people dance. The white people come look on, and think they see all, when they only see a dance. (*MM*, 193)

Here the mistake is not one of dismissal but of mistranslation: in only seeing what they expect to find, the audience in this anecdote is intent upon watching authentic Hoodoo ritual when in fact the religion is notoriously guarded. Laveau's dance thus operates as both a guise, a performance for expectant audiences, and a means to evade prying eyes by offering a charade that will satiate their endless appetite for "big old lies."

As this allegory of audience consumption suggests, interracial ethnography pivots on an axis of ignorance: what white audiences miss in these moments are the "old-time tales" in danger of extinction because they exist only in the memories of the storytellers themselves. An unavoidable melancholia lingers throughout *Mules and Men* because Hurston's informants want her to "set them down before it's too late": before "everybody forgets all of 'em" (*MM*, 8). The danger in forgetting is that forgetting entails the erasure of the radical politics of the folktales, the majority of which usurp power structures of antebellum plantocracy when allegorical figures like John ("the wish-fulfillment hero of the race") "nevertheless, of in spite of laughter, usually defeats Ole Massa, God and the Devil" (*MM*, 247). In these moments of revolt, the John/Ole Massa folktales rewrite the master-slave dialectic because the trickster figure outsmarts the entire institution of slavery. As one of Hurston's storytellers reveals, this dynamic can be appropriated for a variety of rhetorical contexts: "Dat's de reason de dog is mad wid de rabbit now – 'cause he

fooled de dog” (*MM*, 109). These tales often end in Ole Massa (or in this case, de dog) being outsmarted by his own property: these seemingly innocuous tales carry with them a weighty sense of politics-as-comedy, for it is through humor that black storytellers have the last laugh. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes about the carnivalesque, tales like the ones in *Mules and Men* create a “suspension of all hierarchical precedence” because they transgress and reverse social order; black vernacular is a type of linguistic liberation because it fosters a “special type of communication impossible in everyday life” (10) revising hierarchical precedence. Through this release of inhibition, speakers can vocalize dissent and outsmart the oppressor in a game of wits.⁵³

One tale in particular epitomizes the “feather-bed resistance” inherent in black folktales. After Hurston observes the day laborers of the Polk County pine mill, she recounts their discussion of the origins of slavery and “de reason niggers is working so hard.” Jim Presley, one of the storytellers, offers the following explanation:

God let down two bundles 'bout five miles down de road. So de white man and de nigger raced to see who would git there first. Well, de nigger out-run de white man and grabbed de biggest bundle. He was so skeered de white man would git it away from him he fell on top of de bundle and hollered back: “Oh, Ah got here first and dis biggest bundle is mine.” De white man says: “All right, Ah'll take yo' leavings,” and picked up de li'l teeninchy bundle layin' in de road. When de nigger opened up his bundle he found a pick

⁵³ While the literary and historical scope of Bakhtin's work falls outside of Hurston's (his is the carnivalesque of Rabelais), it nevertheless responds to a similar dynamics of oppression and release that informs so much of her career. The jook and the porch are to Hurston what the marketplace is to Rabelais because the Dozens (a vulgar, dueling-banjoes battle of the wits) is “the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter” (Bakhtin 8) rather than economics. For Nicholls, the migrant laborers' tales of *Mules and Men* are a mode of resistance against this racialized hierarchy of labor and class.

and shovel and a hoe and a plow and chop-axe and then de white man opened up his bundle and found a writin'-pen and ink. So ever since then de nigger been out in de hot sun, usin' his tools and de white man been sittin' up figgerin', ought's a ought, figger's a figger; all for de white man, none for de nigger. (*MM*, 74-75)

The nuanced irony of Jim Presley's fable works on both the level of the tale (that the slave outran the master) and the teller who has the final say even if he lacks the "writin'-pen and ink" of his opponent. This mythological origin of slavery repositions "de nigger" as a victim duped by his physical superiority but only for so long. Hurston's transcription of the tale captures its political implication – chiefly, that slavery was a matter of happenstance and deceit that resulted in the exploitation of those who were more physically adept than their counterparts. Tales like Preston's appear throughout *Mules and Men* and articulate a similar revision of the historic archive through dialect. Mediated only by Hurston's framing of the tale and occasional footnotes defining particularly esoteric slang, these tales are preserved as oral testimony bearing witness to an alternate cosmology wherein "God made de world and de white folks made work" (*MM*, 74).

Hurston's strategic use of dialect – using the vernacular in her transcriptions of black folklore and then contextualizing it in relation to her position as an ethnographer writing in standard academic English – helps her negotiate the "Pet Negro system." The "feather-bed resistance" inherent in these tales was often unnoticed by white audiences because they often dismissed these tales as quaint or superficial in keeping with the primitivist impulse: by bracketing these folktale collections as old-timey and racially coded, audiences could thus accentuate the divide between the history the tales recover and the present-day from which they are read. Yet for the fellow storytellers (for in Hurston's ethnographies the audience is that of the book, never of the stories – her listeners are only fellow storytellers who have paused long

enough to lend an ear), the concealed message of the stories is apparent. One of Hurston's storytellers bemoans this discrepancy between audience and fellow storyteller: "Most people is thin-brained. They's born wid they feet under de moon. Some folks is born wid they feet on de sun and they kin seek out de inside meanin' of words" (*MM*, 125). To hear and understand "de inside meanin' of words" is to remain attentive to the political ideology hiding in plain sight of these tales. Returning to the epigraphs of this chapter, critics often conflated this double-voiced presentation of ethnographic material with racial stereotyping, oftentimes resorting to accusations of minstrelsy that threatened to compromise the progress of black representation often problematically associated with standard academic English.⁵⁴

Yet at the same time, Hurston's numerous interjections as ethnographer (in standard academic English) speak to an intense ambivalence about how to reconcile her dual identities of anthropologist and author. "Editors are violent men" (*L*, 55), she would write in 1925. Yet by 1942, a more confident author would proclaim in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, "I am of the word-changing kind" (*DT*, 19). "Word-changing" runs throughout *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* in Hurston's narrative persona who positions herself as an interlocutor who abstains from tampering with the ethnographic data. In presenting these tales in their entirety and often in indented type without quotation marks, Hurston's texts are quick to reinforce the accuracy, and thus the authenticity, of the material. The "inside meanin' of words" emerges in this context whereby the vernacular is treated on its own terms as a cultural artifact. But while she is quick to

⁵⁴ The Harlem Renaissance had an especially turbulent relationship with dialect: unlike Paul Laurence Dunbar or Charles Chestnutt, poets of the 1910s and 1920s hesitated to embrace a folk rhetoric, especially after James Weldon Johnson's critique of dialect in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1923). Jean Toomer's *Cane*, published the same year as Johnson's anthology, was often read as a swan song for black dialect. A notable exception to this was Langston Hughes whose early poetry was often penned in the vernacular, likely at the encouragement of Osgood Mason.

protect the integrity of the ethnographic data, she is equally quick to distance herself from the folk in referring to herself as an outsider who knows the value of her research:

“Hello, heart-string,” Mayor Hiram Lester yelled as he hurried up the street. “We heard all about you up North. You back home for good, I hope.”

“Nope, Ah come to collect some old stories and tales and Ah know y’all know a plenty of ’em and that’s why Ah headed straight for home.”

“What you mean, Zora, them big old lies we tell when we’re jus’ sittin’ around here on the store porch doin’ nothin’?” asked B. Moseley.

“Yeah, those same ones about Ole Massa, and colored folks in heaven, and – oh, y’all know the kind I mean.”

“Aw shucks,” exclaimed George Thomas doubtfully. “Zora, don’t you come here and tell de biggest lie first thing. Who you reckon want to read all them old-time tales about Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear?”

“Plenty of people, George. They are a lot more valuable than you might think. We⁵⁵ want to set them down before it’s too late.”

“Too late for what?”

“Before everybody forgets all of ’em.”

“No danger of that. That’s all some people is good for – set ’round and lie and murder groceries.” (*MM*, 7-8)

Poised on a tightrope walking between the poles of being a daughter of the folk (“Ah headed straight for home”) and a detached outsider (“We want to set the down before it’s too late”), Hurston here tailors her self-presentation in order to reacquaint herself with her “skin-folks, but

⁵⁵ Just who this “we” refers to remains unclear. Hurston oscillates between identifying with and distancing herself from Eatonville throughout *Mules and Men* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*.

not my kinfolks” (*DT*, 188) but in doing so constructs a persona predicated upon her goal as an anthropologist to collect data. In this endeavor she employs the vocabulary of the archive that situates her surroundings as static and self-contained: “As I crossed the Maitland-Eatonville township line I could see a group on the store porch. I was delighted. The town had not changed. Same love of talk and song” (*MM*, 7). Seeing her adopted hometown through what she refers to as the “spy-glass of Anthropology”⁵⁶ (*MM*, 1), her vision of the Global South is necessarily mediated because of her research agenda. While she remains privy to the “inside meanin’ of words,” she nevertheless embeds her unmediated material within a variety of interpretive strategies: footnotes, a glossary, and numerous asides all reach out toward the reader in order to insist upon her credibility as a skilled analyst.⁵⁷

This Janus-faced narration – preserving dialect while bracketing it off as something at risk of being forgotten – is a symptom of Derrida’s archive fever as it suggests both her awareness of her material’s transience and its potency if properly conveyed in vernacular. These tales offer a site of resistance through the collective imaginary as Kimberly Benston describes:

The vernacular emerges in her vision not as a realm of systematized or isolated “authenticity,” but as an agile, collective medium of conflict, revision, and surprise, an improvisational artifice forged among institutional formations whose constraints can be guilefully transgressed to enable constructive movement and release fresh energies. (258)

⁵⁶ Hurston’s counterpart to Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness.

⁵⁷ My reading in turn resists bell hooks’ understanding of Hurston as a proponent of the folk: “Rather than write about black folk culture in a detached academic style, she chose the style of the folk” (141). Kadlec (184-222) and Duck likewise sense discursive hybridity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* not unlike Hurston’s own syncretism of academic and vernacular English. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that this synthesis was the first use of free indirect discourse in the black literary tradition (191). I contend that it was only through her anthropological training that she developed this technique as evidenced in her interlocutory asides of *Mules and Men*.

The dynamic movement Benston alludes to reiterates what Hurston herself made clear in “Characteristics of Negro Expression”: that “Negro folklore [...] is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use” (27). In this manner, then, does Hurston practice what she preaches (or rather, praises) with regard to her material; the endless adaptation of dialect is the vehicle through which she can sculpt a three-dimensional portrait of Global Southern “feather-bed resistance.”⁵⁸

To Hurston this intergenerational storytelling doubles as both historical record and collective genealogy. As her Afro-diasporic theology makes clear, Moses was the original man of oratory: “And ever since the days of Moses, kings have been toting rods for a sign of power. But it’s mostly sham-polish because no king has ever had the power of even one of Moses’ ten words. Because Moses made a nation and a book, a thousand leaves of ordinary men’s writing couldn’t tell what Moses said” (*MM*, 184-185). The discrepancy here is not between Moses’ ten words and what they meant, but rather between how they existed orally (“what Moses said”) and how they were inscribed textually (“a thousand leaves of ordinary men’s writing”). This threat of forgetting – of losing something in the transition from the oral to the written – plagued Hurston throughout the composition of *Mules and Men* as she struggled to document oral folklore without sacrificing its malleability across the generations: as Hurston’s fictional persona remarks, “That’s what the old ones said in ancient times and we talk it again” (*MM*, 185). As with the mystery of Moses’ ten words, the Ole Massa folklore is handed down across the generations rather than disseminated through the page: “Let *me* talk some chat. Dis is de real truth ’bout Ole Massa

⁵⁸ Joshua L. Miller (182-226) argues that for Nella Larsen and Jean Toomer, multilingual dialect is one of the many “flexible, inventional, and antiessentialist forms of code switching” (31) that refuse to settle the debate on multicultural representation in the Renaissance. Outside the realm of Miller’s scope, Hurston likewise destabilizes the notion of an archaic vernacular.

'cause my grandma told it to my mama and she told it to me" (Hurstons italics; *MM*, 72). These oral histories define the cultural borders of the Global South because they allow its communities to subvert historical discourse in a clandestine, secret manner.⁵⁹ In this manner Hurston resists the monologic mausoleum that is the closed archive. Rather than entomb ethnographic material, her anthropologies are dialogic and open-ended in such a way that acknowledges her relationship to the disappearing folk.⁶⁰ Whereas a wide swath of contemporary anthropology was predicated upon a strict subject/observer divide, Hurston deliberately crosses over this line as she consciously aligns herself with the folk through a variety of initiation rituals: baptism in the New Orleans haven of Marie Laveaux, playing the dozens at the jook in Florida, dancing and drinking at miners' bars, and so forth. This interaction between Hurston and her material splits the archive wide open in revealing how she herself was constructed by the archive. Her autoethnographies are mutually constitutive: she needs the folk as much as they need her to preserve oral testimony. This symbiotic relationship is nowhere more apparent than in her anxious relationship with Cudjo Lewis, believed to be one of the last Africans brought to the Americas on the slave trade, who erupts throughout her writings time and again.

⁵⁹ Literally: Holloway (1987) contends that there are some aspects of black vernacular (for instance, conjugations of verbs like "done" and "be") that lack an equivalent in standard academic English (85-97).

⁶⁰ Dialogic storytelling abounds in Hurston's career, most noticeably in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* when Janie's narration wills her consciousness into being. For Kaplan (1996), Janie's relationship with Phoeby's "hungry listening" (*TE*, 10), rather than her marriages to men, initiates her path toward self-discovery. See Kaplan (1996) 99-122 for more.

Trouble in the Archive: Cudjo Lewis

“You have don [sic] more for me then any one elce [sic] in this world. Since I ben [sic] in this country no one has thought enough of me to look out for my well fair [sic] as you has [...] Dear Godmother, I want to see you with the eye before I die. If it not for you I die of starve but you send me the money. I want to see you with the eye before I die so I want come to New York for one day. Miss Zora she good to me but I want to see you and thank you and tell you much love.”

Cudjo Lewis to Charlotte Osgood Mason, March 29, 1929⁶¹

Like the specters of Lucy Potts Hurston or Cousin Jimmie, Cudjo Lewis haunts Hurston’s ethnographies, resurfacing long after his first appearance in “Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaver” (1927) for over twenty years. His successive reincarnations – depicted at various times as a king, slave, victim, and wizened elderly man – suggest that the unfinished work of cultural melancholia over what refuses to fade away. Captured in Africa at nineteen years old and then transported aboard the *Clotilde*⁶² into slavery in 1860, Lewis is “the Last Witness of the Middle Passage” (Sexton 191). As a missing link between Africa and the Americas, he represents both an African idyll and a slave-based plantation hell: he is a threshold figure who has slipped outside of the archive. His memories of freedom in Africa and slavery in the Global South, problematically mediated by Hurston in her only documented instance of plagiarism, create a liminal space between past and present that shatters the framework of the archive. Although she lays his history to rest in several essays that emphasize the “radical finitude” of his oral testimony, she returns time and again to excavate what she had just buried. A rhetoric of

⁶¹ Quoted in Kaplan (2013): 249.

⁶² The ship is referred to as the *Clotilda*, *Chlotilde*, and *Clotilde*. Similarly, he was known as *Kossula* in Africa and *Cudjo Lewis* in America. Because Hurston wrote about the *Clotilde* and *Cudjo Lewis*, I will keep these referents intact. The most astute critics of Hurston’s writing on Lewis are Diouf (a historian) and Sexton. The dearth of scholarship on Lewis is understandable considering that most of Hurston’s writing on him remains unpublished.

melancholia insists upon Lewis' finality – his is the “last slave ship,” he one of the “last-minute” additions to the “last load of slaves” – but she herself reopens this archive in acts of compulsive remembrance. The multi-decade eruption of Cudjo Lewis epitomizes archive fever because he is a threshold figure that operates as both historical construct - the idealized African victim - and its undoing, thus revealing the constructedness of the archive's boundaries.

From the beginning of their relationship, Lewis holds sway over Hurston because he epitomized the histories that were in danger of being forgotten. Their first interactions in 1925-1926 emboldened the inexperienced graduate student to chart his complicated history as African royalty, American slave, and Jim Crow subject. From the perspective of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she describes the transience of African civilization: “they were assaulted, completely wiped off the map, their names never to appear again” (*DT*, 145). Were it not for ethnographic preservation, this erasure would have remained within what Genevieve Sexton refers to as a “palimpsest” (196) of Afro-diasporic history in which traces of the past fade from view as public discourse overcrowds individual experience. Hence in “Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaver” (1927), Hurston’s first essay on Lewis, an anxious record of his journey from Africa to the Americas, and finally back to Africa – or, more specifically, Africa Town, a small all-black enclave in Alabama partially funded by Hurston’s patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason.⁶³ This essay adheres to ethnographic conventions as it provides a brief history of Lewis’ life and enslavement from 1860-1865 before a transcription of their interview that covers the founding of Africa Town. Understandably, the black hamlet ensnared her attention as it conjured memories of Eatonville, a black haven in Florida. As depicted in “Cudjo’s Own Story,” Africa Town

⁶³ Residents continued to speak a variety of West African languages in Africa Town. The town was something of a small-scale mecca – Booker T. Washington visited in 1909 as did many other prominent black intellectuals, artists, and travellers of the 1910s.

resembles an ahistoric idyll seemingly disconnected from the modern United States: “It is not incorporated. It has no Mayor, although one Murray, the store keeper, is referred to as such [...] There is no pavement of any kind. The settlement is not lighted” (“C,” 661). Like Africa itself, Africa Town hovers at the margins of modernity as it is caught in the liminal space between past and present.

In one of the strangest moments of her career, Hurston knowingly plagiarized the majority of “Cudjo’s Own Story” from Emma Langon Roche’s *Historic Sketches of the South* (1914).⁶⁴ Roche’s text, a mawkish history of antebellum slave culture and its aftermath in Jim Crow South, was lifted line-by-line into “Cudjo’s Own Story.” With few emendations (he is referred to as Kazoola in *Historic Sketches* and Cudjo Lewis in “Cudjo’s Own Story”), Hurston recycled Roche’s history and passed it off as original ethnographic research gathered from her interviews with Lewis. Read within the context of the archive, however, this baffling moment can be read as a symptom of Hurston’s anxious relationship to the archive of the Global South, for she literally rewrites history by emending Roche’s source text. Although the majority of her changes are artistic flourishes – more descriptive characterization and dramatic flair – one alteration in particular warrants attention. Hurston deliberately revises Lewis’ relationship to Africa, transforming an affirmation of American patriotism into a more complicated meditation on transnational identity and melancholia:

⁶⁴ Linguist William Stewart discovered the plagiarism in 1972; he calculated that out of the sixty seven paragraphs in her 1927 essay, only eighteen were written by Hurston. See Hemenway 96-99 for a summary of this controversy. Boas also knew of his apprentice’s offense but kept it under wraps.

Roche's account (1914):

Kazoola says he often thinks that if he had wings he would fly back; then he remembers that all he has lies in American soil – the wife who came from his native land, who was his helpmate and companion through the many years, and all his children. (*HS*, 121)

Hurston's account (1927):

Cudjo says he wishes at times to return to his native land, but he realizes that he would be a stranger there. He doubts even if he could locate the graves of his relatives. All that he is sure of is here, the graves of his wife Albine and all of his children. He has numerous descendants. He is glad that he was brought to America, since here he found the true God. He is very vigorous though he is nearing the century mark. ("C," 663)

For Hurston, it is not enough that "all he has lies in American soil." She rewrites⁶⁵ Lewis by insisting upon his displacement within the Global South. Willed out of Roche's account, Lewis' African identity is annihilated in "Cudjo's Own Story" because he has become "a stranger" in his homeland and a relic in Africa Town with "the graves of his wife Albine and all of his children" his only link to the past. He is caught between history and modernity in that he is existentially homeless having outlived or been denied community on either shore. His vitality, then, can be read as a double-edged sword in that he survives in America but he survives alone (despite

⁶⁵ Just why Hurston plagiarized remains unclear. For Hemenway, her risky decision was motivated by a Freudian ambivalence over her budding anthropological career: "It seems plausible that some part of Hurston's self wanted to be caught, wanted to see her scientific integrity destroyed" (99). But given her investment in the discipline, especially in the late 1920s, this self-destruction rings false. Her decision to amend (rather than regurgitate) excerpts from *Historic Sketches* can thus be read as a manifestation of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. describes as signifyin(g), "an act of rhetorical self-definition" (122) contingent upon postmodern practices of intertextuality and pastiche. Always one step ahead of the times, Hurston was signifyin(g) upon a semantics of outdated racist ideology.

having “found the true God”). Hurston’s signifying upon *Historic Sketches of the South* recasts Lewis as a melancholic rupture of the ethnographic archive who does not belong in either world.

At Osgood Mason’s and Boas’ request, Hurston continued to work on the Lewis material long after “Cudjo’s Own Story.” In an especially cryptic passage, she discloses her guilt once Boas discovered her plagiarism: “I stood before Papa Franz and cried salty tears. He gave me a good going over, but later I found that he was not as disappointed as he let me think. He knew I was green and feeling my oats” (*DT*, 144). Funded on Mason’s bankroll, Hurston returned back to Africa Town in 1928 to spend three months with Lewis collecting more material for *Barracoon* (also referred to as *Life of Kossula*), an unpublished manuscript written in 1930-1931. (Understandably, a biography of an ex-slave would struggle to find an audience in the first years of the Depression.) This project prefigures the ambivalent structure of *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*: the three parts are divided chronologically in that the first section is Hurston writing from 1931, framing the book as her experience with Lewis in the present-day. The second portion is their experiences together in 1928 spliced together with Hurston’s reminiscences which sculpt Lewis as a threshold figure between Africa and America. The give and take between Hurston’s first-person account and Lewis’ oral testimony anticipates the structure of her later ethnographies for this syncopated dialogue reinforces each other’s credibility: Hurston bears witness to Lewis’ testimony as he confirms her anthropological ethos. As Genevieve Sexton argues, she “positions herself as secondary, but also as necessary to the transmission of this testimony” (198). This ambivalence about her role in *Barracoon* is not unrelated to her

ambivalence about archiving the folk because she is a necessary interlocutor that vouches for the authenticity of oral history that is in danger of being forgotten.⁶⁶

As Lewis' testimony "speaks at a precipice of loss" (Sexton 191), his African liminality establishes Hurston's American identity. Being "the only Negro alive that came over on a slave ship" (*DT*, 144), Lewis' presence is nearly always prefixed by a reminder of his death in 1935. Her identity as an American anthropologist is routinely contingent upon her relative distance from her ethnographic material that nevertheless allows her a glimpse into her own psyche. In a particularly unguarded moment in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she confronts her own ignorance on the slave trade:

The white people had held my people in slavery here in America. They had bought us, it is true and exploited us. But the inescapable fact that stuck in my craw, was: my people had *sold* me and the white people had bought me. That did away with the folklore I had been brought up on – that the white people had gone to Africa, waved a red handkerchief at the Africans and lured them aboard ship and sailed away [...] if the African princes had been as pure and as innocent as I would like to think, it could not have happened. No, my own people had butchered and killed, exterminated whole nations and torn families apart, for a profit before the strangers got their change at a cut. It was a sobering thought.

(Hurston's italics; *DT*, 145)

Pronouns matter in *Dust Tracks*: implicating herself by the first-person narrative of "me" and "us" sold to slave traders, she lays claim to an intergenerational lineage that extends back to

⁶⁶ Tantalizingly, she mentions another displaced African ex-slave in a letter to Langston Hughes from July 1928 but concludes that "no one will ever know about her but us." This nameless woman is "a better talker than Cudjoe" (*L*, 123); their first interview, according to Hemenway, was disastrous (98).

Africa.⁶⁷ But while she acknowledges Africa as her homeland, she also acknowledges the very constructedness of that mythologized pastoral. Like her appropriation of *Historic Sketches of the South*, Hurston rewrites the narrative of the slave trade as a source of intraracial, not just interracial, violence. In doing this, she breaks apart the Afro-diasporic archive through Lewis' testimony that counters her previously held assumptions. Like his transcendental homelessness in "Cudjo's Own Story," this "sense of mutilation" from Africa is a projection of sorts on Hurston's behalf that articulates her vexed position between cultural poles like Lewis. Both were caught between Africa and America with a shared "yearning for blood and cultural ties." As she reflects on her affective empathizing with his homelessness: "It gave me something to feel about" (*DT*, 148).

This "something to feel about" reverberated throughout the 1940s when the ship that transported Lewis across the Atlantic – the *Chlotilde* – became the focus for one of Hurston's final anthropological essays, "The Last Slave Ship" (1944). Written after Lewis' death, "The Last Slave Ship" is an elegy of sorts for the *Chlotilde* as it lays "scuttled and sunk" (*LS*, 351) at the bottom of the Bayou Corne in Alabama. As a metonym for slavery, the wreckage of the *Chlotilde* transfixed Hurston. Upon first discovering the wreckage in 1926, Hurston sent part of the debris to Mason for safekeeping as a condition of their contract (Hemenway 132).

Preservation was still on Hurston's mind when she wrote "The Last Slave Ship," and it continued to influence her thought when she wrote to W.E.B. Du Bois a year after finishing the essay. She wrote in hopes of convincing him to look into "a cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead" (*L*,

⁶⁷ She begins *Mules and Men* by differentiating between herself and her "skinfolks": "They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people [...] The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out" (*MM*, 2). Oscillating between first- and third-person pronouns, Hurston was reluctant to self-identify as "the Negro" described in her ethnographies.

518) modeled after the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris, home to the graves of Proust, Wilde, Balzac, and, interestingly enough, her occasional adversary Richard Wright (both died in 1960).⁶⁸ After Charlotte Osgood Mason died in April 1946, Hurston appealed to Carita Doggett Corse (on the grounds of her being a fellow historian) that she should “set things in motion to have the ship that brought over the last load of slaves (1859) raised from the bottom of the Alabama River and towed to Jacksonville” (*L*, 541-542). The rushed chronology of these events – publishing “The Last Slave Ship” in 1944, reaching out to DuBois to build a cemetery in 1945, and attempting to salvage the remains of the *Chlotilde* in 1946 immediately after Mason’s death – reveals a complicated, anxious constellation of melancholia. This continued investment in an archive of the Global South revolves around her rewriting and appropriating historical discourse (*Historical Sketches of the South*, graveyards, and museums) in order to make room for the intergenerational and orally transmitted histories like Lewis’. Like the *Chlotilde* itself, his testimony lies “scuttled and sunk” underneath this simplistic discourse that suppresses a particularly ineffable history.

Ultimately Cudjo Lewis is not so much a lost object entombed within the archive but an elusive subject that was sculpted and resculpted from 1914 onward. This endless adaptation of her fieldwork enacts the improvisation described in “Characteristics of Negro Expression” in that he occupies a variety of historical and social spaces: a primitivist Africa, an antebellum America, and a Jim Crow South. Yet he transcends this schema because of this very fluidity that underscores the archive: he is always something more, something else, something in addition to

⁶⁸ That Hurston wrote to Du Bois at all reveals how serious she was about this cemetery. Her strained relationship to a man she nicknamed “Dubious” was indicative of other tenuous relationships with men of the Renaissance including Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. Her interest in cultural memory was likely borne of her ongoing anthropological interest in Honduras; she describes a similar graveyard to Ruth Benedict the same month she wrote to Du Bois.

whatever he is channeled into. While the archive exists solely to demarcate between history and modernity, Lewis is an enigma that blurs these very lines. His spectral haunting is thus a fissure in the cultural imaginary that underscores the porous nature of an archive anxious to forget. Vestiges of history like Lewis and the Chlotilde slip away from the archive in oral testimony that is porous and ongoing; like Moses' "ten words," Lewis still exists long after his physical death. Desire for a past that never was outruns the boundaries of the archive as "the inside meanin' of words" articulates the gaps and silences hidden in plain sight.

"Everything is too much [...] Too much blue, too much purple, too much green.
The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near."

Rochester's Jamaica in Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (63)

When Hurston studied in the Caribbean from April 1936 to March 1937 and again from May to September 1937, she witnessed the aftermath of the U.S. occupation of "the mightiest nation on earth" (*TH*, 22) – Haiti – from 1915-1934.⁶⁹ Having traveled across the South from Alabama to Florida and Louisiana, the seasoned veteran experienced a sensation similar to what Jean Rhys' postmodern Rochester felt as he gazed at a colonial Jamaica: a crucible of desire and violence fueled by repressed longing. Like Rochester, Hurston entered the Caribbean as a consumer, only she ingested its "music and barbaric rituals" (*TH*, 4) from the vantage points of anthropology and politics. Indeed, the politically pregnant timespan of Hurston's sojourn in the Caribbean (1936-1937) coincided with a resurgence of neoimperialism and looming threat of another global war. As a woman who occupied a vexing geocultural position, she worked

⁶⁹ My understanding of Haitian history is indebted to Dayan and Dunbar. See Batiste for the imperialist slant of Afro-diasporic Depression-era culture.

through her ambivalence in acts of rhetorical self-presentation caught between dialect and standard academic English. This semantic tension reached its crescendo in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), her most explicitly imperialist ethnography that goes against the anti-archival impulse described earlier in this chapter. *Tell My Horse* complicates any understanding of Hurston because it reveals how her increasingly conservative politics hinged upon an imperialist critique of the Caribbean which in turn bolstered her reputation as a credible American anthropologist. Ifeoma Nwankwo refers to this internal contradiction of liberatory feminism and nationalist chauvinism as “binaristic blackness” (68), or a rendering of “blackness that resembles a scale – to elevate one group, the other is necessarily lowered” (69). The dichotomy between American (industrialized, urban, modern) and Caribbean (agrarian, destitute, exploited) blackness (re)enacts the very binary at work in the “Pet Negro system” she reacted against in *Mules and Men*. But by *Tell My Horse*, she chose to align herself with the Global North as a means to distance herself from what she dismissed as “the wreck of a colony” (*TH*, 81) after the once-great Haitian Revolution. Having outlived its potential, the troublesome nation of Haiti – and to a lesser extent, Jamaica – offered Hurston a *tabula rasa* onto which she could continue rewriting history so as to self-identify as distinctly American.

The root of Hurston’s disappointment in Haiti lies in her frustrations with what she considered to be its failed potential after the Haitian Revolution, the first successful slave rebellion in the Global South. Given her investment in black resistance (the Ole Massa folklore from *Mules and Men* alludes to the potential of slave agency), no wonder she gravitated toward Jamaica and Haiti. Yet upon arriving on the islands, she found only traces of the region’s historical legacy. Writing from Jamaica’s shores, she writes that

I could feel the dead generations crowding me. Here was the oldest settlement of freedmen in the Western world, no doubt. Men who had thrown off the bonds of slavery by their own courage and ingenuity. The courage and daring of the Maroons strike like a purple beam across the history of Jamaica. And yet as I stood there looking into the sea beyond Black river from the mountains of St. Catherine, and looking at the thatched huts close at hand, I could not help remembering that a whole civilization and the mightiest nation on earth had grown up on the mainland since the first runaway slave had taken refuge in these mountains. They were here before the Pilgrims landed on the bleak shores of Massachusetts. Now, Massachusetts had stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Accompong had remained itself. (*TH*, 22)

Hurston's dichotomy between the prosperous United States and stagnant Caribbean is couched in terms of space and movement, for it is expansion ("from the Atlantic to the Pacific") and geographical land ("the thatched huts close at hand") that reveal the destiny of each respective land of revolt. While both nations were borne of rebellion, it was only the United States that fulfilled its prophecy in becoming "the mightiest nation on earth" despite Haiti's earlier claim to the title. What Hurston sensed as the squandered potential of Jamaica and Haiti, here expressed as the "dead generations" that came before in that both the hope of Caribbean autonomy – and those who were to secure it – have passed, reiterates the archival boundary between past and present. In constructing a history of "a whole civilization," she laments for the wasted opportunity. That is to say, the Caribbean has only moved backwards in time whereas America has embraced an industrialized modernity. This sentiment surfaces when she writes about the mixed-race populations of Jamaica by likening the present-day Caribbean to the outdated America: "The situation presents a curious spectacle to the eyes of an American Negro. It is as if

one stepped back to the days of slavery or the generation immediately after surrender when negroes had little else to boast of except a left-hand kinship with the master, and the privileges that usually went with it of being house servants instead of field hands” (*TH*, 7). Trapped in a historical void which the United States has moved beyond, Jamaica has become outdated and fallen out of sync with the rest of the Global South. Haiti has also succumbed to this fate:

They were trying to make a government of the wreck of a colony. And not out of the people who had at least been in the habit of thinking of government as something real and tangible. They were trying to make a nation out of very different material. These few intelligent blacks and mulattoes set out to make a nation of slaves to whom the very word government sounded like something vague and distant. Government was something, they felt, for masters and employers to worry about while one rested from the ardors of slavery. It has not yet come to be the concern of the great mass of Haitians. (*TH*, 81)

The “very different material” – in effect, Haitians themselves – cost the island its potential because the freed slaves were incapable of considering themselves autonomous political citizens. In this summation, the “ardors of slavery” entrapped Haitians within a system in which “it takes many generations for the slave derivatives to get over their awe for the master-kind” (*TH*, 6).⁷⁰ And because the notion of democracy still “has not yet come” to Haiti, the island is still trapped by the chains of the past with little hope of advancement.

This line of logic – that the Caribbean is on a hundred-year delay despite overthrowing slavery well before the United States – constitutes the boundaries of the historical archive in *Tell My Horse*. Her fixation on delineating Haitian from American democracy buttresses her own modernity: “Haiti is not now and never has been a democracy according to the American

⁷⁰ This comment made in reference to Jamaica, but the pattern of intergenerational dehumanization holds true in Haiti as well.

concept,” largely because they lack the “concept of the rule of the majority in Haiti. The majority, being unable to read and to write, have not the least idea of what is being done in their name. Haitian class consciousness and the universal acceptance of the divine right of the crust of the upper crust is a direct denial of the concept of democracy” (*TH*, 75). Equating democracy with class consciousness and literacy situates Hurston within the realm of the American education system. Paradoxically, the American folk of *Mules and Men*, some of whom are illiterate, function as democratic subjects regardless because their oral folklore generates a space of equality rooted in trickster figures that deceive Ole Massa. Haiti is denied this agency, instead seduced by “talking patriots” who “have tried to move the wheels of Haiti on the wind of their lungs” but remain ineffective despite their charisma. Duping their audiences into buying into political leadership that is long on oratory and short on efficacy, these political confidence men fail to change the living conditions of the Caribbean folk. But it is not enough for Hurston to identify this phenomenon: she uses it to bolster her sense of American pride: “The Negroes of the United States have passed through a tongue-and-lung era that is three generations long” (*TH*, 75) already, but they have already solved this problem by having “produced a generation of Negroes who are impatient of the orators. They want to hear about more jobs and houses and meat on the table. They are resentful of opportunities lost while their parents sat satisfied and happy listening to crummy orators. Our heroes are no longer talkers but doers” (*TH*, 77). A nation of “doers” rather than “crummy orators,” the United States has surpassed Haiti because they can look past the ostentatious oratory in ways that the illiterate Caribbean cannot. As she suggests, the only remedy for this malaise is enrolling in North American universities and bringing the knowledge back to the Caribbean in a move that resembles her own journey from

Eatonville to Columbia University.⁷¹ This childlike dependency upon the Global North as both a model of democracy and a source of educational empowerment ironically reiterates the dynamics of the “Pet Negro system,” only this time positing Hurston on the opposite end of the spectrum of charity.

Like the relationship between the archive and its inheritors and primitivists and their fetishized origins, Hurston likewise needs the Caribbean to buttress her American identity. Whereas the primary tension of *Mules and Men* and her writings on Cudjo Lewis falls between her identity as an Ivy League anthropologist and Eatonville daughter, it became increasingly globalized in *Tell My Horse* as she subsumed these two identities together when writing about what she regarded as the squandered opportunity of the Caribbean. This constitutive relationship thus bolstered her distinctly American feminism⁷², but it came at the cost of affiliation with her diasporic “blood brothers.” The problematic patriotism laced throughout *Tell My Horse*, conspicuously absent from the rest of her writings on the Global South, complicates her relationship to a black transnationality. Subtly complicit with America’s imperialist culture, Hurston’s blackness was dependent upon the Caribbean in order to self-identify as modern. She acknowledges her dependency on the folk in the conclusion to *Mules and Men* in her allegory of

⁷¹ She explicitly mentions Dr. Camille Lherisson, a graduate of McGill and Harvard universities (*TH*, 77). See Dunbar 47-57 for black modernism’s indebtedness to non-American (Caribbean) primitivism.

⁷² During her first stay in Haiti, Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; see Stein and Menke for the relationship between her Haiti fieldwork and the novel. Ironically, the ethnocentrism of *Tell My Horse* ignited Janie’s journey toward self-empowerment: in one of the most shocking passages of Hurston’s oeuvre, she limns the Jamaican woman: “They look so wretched with their bare black feet all gnarled and distorted from walking barefooted over rocks. The nails on their big toes thickened like a hoof from a life time of knocking against stones. All covered over with the gray dust of the road, these feet look almost saurian and repellent. Of course their clothing is meager, cheap, and ugly. But they sit by the roadside on their enormous pile of rocks and crack down all day long” (*TH*, 59). Janie is Hurston’s revision of this “saurian” creature in that she has all of the Jamaican woman’s physical agency – Janie works in the fields and at the store – but without her abject embodiment.

the relationship between anthropologist/ethnographic subject as akin to the dynamics of predator/prey.⁷³ In the story, the trickster figure of Sis Cat gets ready to pounce upon De Rat caught in between her paws only to be interrupted by her victim who chastises his captor and demands that she shouldn't "eat 'thout washing yo' face and hands" (*MM*, 245). De Rat escapes, but Sis Cat eventually catches another rat and feasts upon him because "Ah eats mah dinner and washes mah face and uses mah manners afterwards" (*MM*, 245-246). Sis Cat and Hurston both let their meals speak, but cats must eat in order to survive: though Hurston treats the folk with dignity and respect, she was not unwilling to use them to strengthen her standing as a woman of color in a field dominated by white men. Using various ethnographic subjects like Cudjo Lewis and the Caribbean to prop herself up, Hurston, like Sis Cat, hovers in a state of ambivalence with De Rat caught between her paws. Sis Cat needs De Rat in order to survive, but that is not to say that there is not some level of baseline respect: like Hurston, she is always willing to listen. But when push comes to shove, the conversation between Sis Cat and De Rat can only end in a meal for Sis Cat, a fact that Hurston accepts in identifying with her fellow hunter: "I'm sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin' my manners" (*MM*, 246).

⁷³ Harrison (91) offers an alternative interpretation by suggesting that de Rat stands for Hurston's audience.

Coda

Going Down: Moses, Hurston, Freud

“Moses had crossed over. He was not in Egypt. He had crossed over and now he was not an Egyptian. He had crossed over. The short sword at his thigh had a jeweled hilt but he had crossed over and so it was no longer the sign of high birth and power. He had crossed over, so he sat down on a rock near the seashore to rest himself. He had crossed over so he was not of the house of Pharaoh. He did not own a palace because he had crossed over. He did not have an Ethiopian Princess for a wife. He had crossed over. He did not have friends to sustain him. He had crossed over. He did not have enemies to strain against his strength and power. He had crossed over. He was subject to no law except the laws of tooth and talon. He had crossed over. The sun who was his friend and ancestor in Egypt was arrogant and bitter in Asia. He had crossed over. He felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he had been. He was a man sitting on a rock. He had crossed over.”

Moses, Man of the Mountain (78)

“Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;
But with *him* that standeth here with us this day before our LORD our God, and also with *him* that is not here with us this day.”

God’s covenant to the Hebrews, Deuteronomy 29:14-15

And what of *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Hurston’s final anthropological work that weaves together history, religion, ethnography, and folklore? The figure of Moses was pivotal to Hurston’s career: after arriving in New York from her first research trip in Haiti in 1937 before returning once more, she compares herself to the prophet: like him, she has “a ideal of achievement fleeing before me. Always there is the hope that I shall confine it in the written word. So far my fingers have not touched its garments. But when one has a burning bush inside one keeps on trying” (*L*, 394). The “burning bush” is of utmost importance to her as it encapsulates her ongoing commitment to collecting folklore. She reiterates this anxiety about

having to “confine” her seemingly inexhaustible anthropological data in print throughout other letters of 1935-1939 as her fieldwork threatened to overwhelm any attempts to solidify it in print.

Hurston wrote about Moses with resounding frequency: from short stories – “Fire and the Cloud” (1934) – to folklore collections and even a novel, she called upon a historical tradition of signifyin(g) upon Exodus to work through the horrors of slavery and its aftermaths in the Global South. To the storytellers of *Mules and Men*, Moses is the storyteller *par excellence*: “And ever since the days of Moses, kings have been toting rods for a sign of power. But it’s mostly sham-polish because no king has ever had the power of even one of Moses’ ten words. Because Moses made a nation and a book, a thousand leaves of ordinary men’s writing couldn’t tell what Moses said” (*MM*, 184-5). For Moses and Hurston alike, the juncture between textual history and collective memory lay at the heart of their relationship to the folk, Hebrew and Afro-diasporic migrants respectively. As a means to suppress particularly troublesome histories of the oppressed, institutionalized historiography privileged the written text over the oral word, thus divorcing collective memory from public history. If the call of Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923) is that “th white folks made th Bible lie” (116), then Hurston’s response in her ethnographies is the recovery of this repressed truth: “That’s what the old ones said in ancient times and we talk it again” (*MM*, 185). Her investment in recovering historical erasures like the story of Moses – a project which consumed her like a “burning bush inside” – reaches its apex in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, a novel that could only be written after *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* as it theorizes about the nature of collective memory that falls outside of public discourse because it is transmitted across the generations through storytelling rather than historical texts. Uncannily echoing Freud’s own exegesis of Exodus published two years before Hurston’s, *Moses and*

Monotheism (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* attests to the resilient fluidity of cultural memory that outlasts the problematic archive of institutional history.

Through the figure of Moses, Hurston reveals that because public history and collective memory can become severed from each other, they can run parallel in devastating ways. She discusses this at length in *Tell My Horse* from the vantage point of the Caribbean: “All over Haiti it is well established that Damballah is identified as Moses, whose symbol was the serpent. This worship of Moses recalls the hard-to-explain fact that wherever the Negro is found, there are traditional tales of Moses and his supernatural powers that are not in the Bible, nor can they be found in any written life of Moses” (*TH*, 116). This “hard-to-explain fact” – that Moses is more myth than man – leads Hurston to consider the broader relationship between what is written down and what is forgotten:

Perhaps some of his feats recorded in the Pentateuch are the folk beliefs of such a character grouped about a man for it is well established that if a memory is great enough, other memories will cluster about it, and those in turn will bring their suites of memories to gather about this focal point, because perhaps, they are all scattered parts of the one thing like Plato’s concept of the perfect thing. (*TH*, 118)

Her model of clustered intergenerational memories in turn builds off of earlier essays such as “Characteristics of Negro Expression” which identify this sense of improvisation as the defining features of black artistic production. Within this context of adaptation and recycling, storytellers riff upon their source material in order to best suit the needs of the present. Hurston’s mentioning of the supernatural Moses is the penultimate example of this as the “focal point” – Moses as historical figure – metamorphoses into something much greater – Moses as supernatural god – by evoking these clustered memories by association. Like Hurston’s depiction of Miriam searching

for the baby Moses who fades from view as he floats down the Nile in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, his (his)story is subject to the ebb and flow of cultures who appropriate his story:

She woke up with a guilty start and looked for the little ark on the river which contained her baby brother. It was not there. She looked all around her to see if anyone was watching her and feeling sure on that score, she crept down to the spot where the basket had been and parted the bulrushes. The child and his basket were gone, that was all. And she had not the least idea of where he had gone, nor how. (*M*, 26)

In light of Hurston's earlier writing on the nebulosity of improvisatory oral storytelling, this passage resonates all the more: as metonym for the man himself, the disappearing basket is both a means of containment as it is also a vehicle for escape. Floating down the banks of the Nile, the basket, like his tale, is mobile and dangerously so as it suggests the malleability of his tale, its ability to become coopted by ulterior motives. Insisting upon the hazy constructedness of Moses, Hurston underscores a point that runs throughout *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*: that public history is a subjective mode of interpretation capable of appropriating the historical subject itself. In a pointed critique of the racial appropriation of the prophet (which seeks to make him a descendent of a monolithic, uniform Africa), Hurston's Moses is an ethnic *mélange*: the coexistence of Assyrian blood and Egyptian ancestry muddies the waters of a folk hero routinely inscribed as uniformly black.⁷⁴ In reclaiming the historical Moses from the folk-hero Moses, Hurston peels back the layers of palimpsestic history obscuring the original tale in the early twentieth century.

By destabilizing the notion of a "black Moses," Hurston both engages and critiques a tradition of transnational solidarity that comes at the cost of cultural difference. In separating

⁷⁴ Thus for Pederson, Moses is "neither Jewish nor Christian, neither Egyptian nor African, neither black nor Assyrian, but at the same time he is in some way all of these" (446).

history from memory and race from culture, she reiterates her anthropological stance on ethnographic research: that specific cultures must be considered within a global framework yet granted their own autonomy of a distinct tradition. Though she remarks in a brief footnote in *Mules and Men* that all “Negroes are in similie [sic] children of Hagar” (*MM*, 124), she had finessed this point by *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. The African-Jewish historical experience runs deep, and the narrative of Exodus – in which Hebrew slaves were ultimately led to freedom in the Promised Land by a skilled orator – accrued even greater weight following Reconstruction as the Hebrews’ wanderings in a foreign land enacted similar psychic dynamics as ex-slaves on the brink of the Great Migration. From Frances E.W. Harper’s blank verse poem “Moses: A Story of the Nile” (1869) to Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Ante-Bellum Sermon” (1896) and James Weldon Johnson’s “Let My People Go” (1927), the figure of Moses doubled as both a narrative trope and a model of effective leadership: as prophet and politician, he became an archetype of agency for the early twentieth century.⁷⁵ That Marcus Garvey was referred to as “The Negro Moses” suggests the interconnectedness of African Zionism and radical politics; his brand of militant black nationalism hinged upon a conception of blackness as dark-skinned, working-class, and populist. In all these different configurations, Moses had become something of an enigma as his “Africanness” was presumed to be as monolithic as it was politically disruptive. Hurston resists this reductive tendency in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* by cloaking the man in a myriad of garbs: at various times as prophet, rhetorician, skeptic, poet, activist, wanderer, and as conduit between God and man (the godlike Damballah described in *Tell My Horse*). As Joshua

⁷⁵ Global politics also contributed to his resurgence: when Ethiopia defeated Italy in the Battle of Adwa (Adowa) in 1896, the hope of black resistance became even stronger. Just as the Haitian Revolution opened the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian victory brought it to a close, and black Israelite religion rose in the United States as various congregations emerged throughout the Great Migration. The three waves of Black Israelite religion – the 1890s, 1910s, and 1960s – coincided with decades of equal strife and opportunity. See Dorman 81-151 for more.

Pederson explains, she signifies “on Exodus in order to distance African-American history from an Israelite history that can no longer serve as a positive model for blacks” (443).⁷⁶ In moving beyond the trope of an “African Moses” toward a multicultural hybrid, Hurston underscores the separation between collective memory and textual history that run parallel to each other in order to serve the needs of respective communities: because Afro-diasporic slaves needed a political savior, they constructed Moses as a model of resistance and religious prophecy.⁷⁷

To Hurston, the cracks in this intercultural façade had begun to show as early as the 1920s in which she experienced firsthand the Black-Jewish relationship in New York. A disciple of Franz Boas, Hurston was well acquainted with the primarily Jewish community of scholars in Columbia University’s anthropology department: as a German-Jewish émigré, Boas, like Freud, divorced Jewish culture from Jewish religion in such a way that anticipated his arguments about cultural relativism and intersectional identities culled from a number of different demographics: race, gender, class, nationality, and religion.⁷⁸ As in Columbia University, the Harlem Renaissance decentered monolithic racial identity as Harlem was a haven for displaced African descendants from all throughout the Global South: as citizens of the West Indies, Africa, and African America, not to mention Europe, these Renaissance artists “realized the promise of a diasporic consciousness that had always been implicit in Black identity” (Philipson 159).

⁷⁶ For an alternate stance, consider Harrison-Kahan (143-176) who argues that Hurston expropriates the tale of Exodus in order to construct a founding myth for African Americans.

⁷⁷ For Mark Christian Thompson, this intense cultural nationalism precedes the rhetoric of fascist ideology which insists upon racial purity and sacrifice – in other words, the ideology of Nazism. See his provocative article for Hurston’s critique of the trajectory from fervent nationalism to religious deification (of political heroes) to an investment in fascism. For Thompson, Hurston limns her Moses as an uncanny antecedent of Hitler as both men are gifted with skilled tongues that can lead a people into battle.

⁷⁸ Not quite white (or at least not white enough), Jews in early twentieth-century America occupied a similar position in society as educated, upper class African Americans; both displaced communities understood the vitality of hybridity and transnationalism. See Frank and Torgovnick 194-209 for more on the relationship between Judaism and anthropology.

Initially skeptical of this “diasporic consciousness” which she feared would conflate or reduce individual experience for the sake of solidarity, Hurston’s return to Moses in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* reclaimed the idiosyncrasies of the man rather than his cultural imago. In becoming a fictional creation, Moses became a distinct creature who was as multifaceted, dynamic, and contradictory as the folk recovered in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. Like the migrant workers, Hoodoo practitioners, and oral historians subsumed under the umbrella term “folk,” he emerges in Hurston’s oeuvre as a humanized subject deserving of attention and sympathy. To recover Moses in this manner was a calculated political move as the novel was penned and published on the brink of a second world war in which the descendants of Moses – the Jewish populations displaced throughout the Mediterranean – faced the undeniable threat of genocide. Rewriting history to underscore the resiliency of the Hebrews and their kin, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* uncannily engages Freud’s own reclamation of the Hebrews in his final published work, *Moses and Monotheism*, written in the crucible of Hitler’s Europe as a means to correct the past before it is forgotten.

Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* clarifies Hurston’s model of intergenerational transmission – what he refers to as “phylogenetic inheritance” (171) – of memory rather than history. Both ethnic outsiders in urban centers (Freud a Galician Jew in Vienna and Hurston an African American from rural Florida in New York), the two researchers often wrote on how their respective communities defined themselves in relation to outsiders. As their numerous writings on community suggest, racial identity lies entrenched within a sense of racialized history that is defined not so much by public discourse (especially because histories of the disenfranchised are often negated by the gaze of the oppressor) but rather by idiosyncratic, personal, domestic memories preserved by alternate modes of transference. That is to say, black and Jewish histories

exist peripherally in relation to institutional archives of history and are thus subject to a hermeneutics of rewriting and revision as they are handed down across the generations. *Moses and Monotheism* arises out of this speculative history; for Freud, Jewish identity is predicated upon the repression of the primal oedipal murder of Moses by the Hebrews in an act of mutiny. After two generations of never mentioning the assassination, the Hebrews use a second Moses, this one a priest from Yahweh, to replace the first Moses in their histories. As a means to work through their manifest guilt over the murder, the Hebrews erected a totem of the “second Moses” as a conflation of the two men into a deified prophet deserving of reverence. Thus for Freud the story of Moses is a narrative of repression: to negate the trauma of patricide (Moses as the slain oedipal father), the sons displace their guilt through totemism.⁷⁹ As Jewish generations are guilty of “repeating instead of remembering” (Kolbrener 245) this repressed history, Freud hypothesizes that Jewish collective memory is the return of the repressed as religious practices bear the trace of the unconscious “mental residue” (170)⁸⁰ left over from the knowledge of the act. This intergenerational “residue”– transmitted “independently of direct communication” (127) – reiterates the processes of cultural memory that Hurston depicts in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* in which Hoodoo and Vodou practice articulate an alternate history through ritual, folklore, and mythology. Like Freud’s “mental residue” of Jewish memory, these testimonial activities preserve an alternate version of history that exists only in the private space of racial communities rather than in the textual discourse of history. Freud denounces the textual representation of Moses as it was laden with “striking omissions, disturbing repetitions, [and]

⁷⁹ In this regard *Moses and Monotheism* is the final entry in Freud’s “trilogy” of religion preceded by *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).

⁸⁰ This provocative term arises from Freud’s professional interest in telepathy and transference as he suggests that this “mental residue” is the recognition of psychic transference of guilt. See Slavet 127-165 for the relationship between telepathy and Freud’s writing on Jewish identity.

palpable contradictions” in order to keep “suppressed and abnegated material hidden away” from readers. Never one to shy away from controversy, he concludes that such a “distortion of a text is not unlike a murder” (52). This textual (re)enactment of the primal murder thus perpetuates the repression because it keeps certain “truths withdrawn from the knowledge of later generations” (77). In differentiating written history from intergenerational memory (here associated with religious practice rather than oral storytelling), Freud locates religious identity in the inheritance of this repressed truth. Just as Hurston insists that black communities are privy to “de inside meanin’ of words” that fall upon the deaf ears of white audiences, Freud claims Judaism as the recognition of this oedipal murder, of understanding the knowledge that manifests as latent “residue” soon to be brought to light. This rather ineffable definition of cultural identity helps him get outside of any biologically determined notions of Judaism as the intrinsic knowledge “needs only to be awakened, not to be reacquired” (170) in every Jewish generation regardless of race, ethnicity, or geographic location. Hurston depicts this model of genetic memory in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* as the Book of Thoth, the first textual account (and thus the primal repression) of the death of Moses: “The cry of it is that it is in the middle of the river at Koptos, in an iron box; in the iron box is a bronze box; in the bronze box is a sycamore box; in the sycamore box is an ivory and ebony box and in the ebony box is a silver box; in the silver box is a golden box and in that is the book. And there is a deathless snake by the box to guard it” (*M*, 54). Hidden in plain sight, the knowledge of the murder of Moses is open only to Jews who know where to look.

This privileging of collective history as a closed circuit accessible only to a select few ramifies throughout Hurston and Freud’s writings on migration as these transmitted histories fluctuate in relation to wandering. The very beginning of Hurston’s *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

suggests yet another truth repressed from the Moses mythos: the female voice, here metonymically expressed in the stifled cries of Hebrew mothers who had to hide away in order to escape edicts claiming their first-born sons: “So women in the pains of labor hid in caves and rocks. They must cry, but they could not cry out loud. They pressed their teeth together. A night might force upon them a thousand years of feelings. Men learned to beat upon their breasts with clenched fists and breathe out their agony without sound” (*M*, 1). These smothered cries reverberate throughout her novel as Moses insists to the Hebrews, “You must be united among yourselves” (*M*, 69). Ironically, his order entails further silencing as individual dissent would compromise the momentum of collective revolt; in sacrificing individual voice for the greater good, Moses asks the Hebrews to put the needs of their community first.⁸¹ In light of Hurston’s earlier writings on matriarchy and female religious leaders of Hoodoo and Vodou, the Hebrew patriarchy demands a sacrifice of individuality for the sake of solidarity. At the end of his life, he instructs his disciple Joshua that “You can’t have a state of individuals. Everybody just can’t be allowed to do as they please. I love liberty and I love freedom so I started off giving everybody a loose rein. But I soon found out that it wouldn’t do. A great state is a well-blended mash of something of all of the people and all of none of the people” (*M*, 278). Because the ends justify the means in Moses’ summation, individuality compromises solidarity and must be kept in check; the Hebrews would withstand the trials of exile only if they kept a collective identity intact.

Hurston and Freud alike insist upon Jewish history as a narrative of this trauma of exile: in leaving Egypt for Canaan, the Hebrews had to redefine identity independent of a home. Hence

⁸¹ Regrettably *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is beset with Hurston’s burgeoning conservative politics – a staunch opponent of communism, she caricatures Moses as an amalgamation of pseudo-socialism and makeshift fascism. In part, her adversarial relationship to Richard Wright stems from this split in political organization.

Hurston's account of Moses' order to the Hebrews: "And don't let the people take up too many habits from the nations they come in contact with and throw away what they got from God." To Hurston's Moses, the Hebrews' defining characteristic is their being the interlocutor of God because "it ain't everybody who can go right up and talk with God. And then, too, it's less than that who can talk with God and then bring back the right word from the talk. It is so easy to mix up what you are wishing with what God is saying. You might not get another good interpreter. You better hold on to what you got" (*M*, 279). *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is a lament for the Hebrews' ability to "bring back the right word from the talk" with God because in other hands, the message would become coopted. Moses is an intertextual conduit for God's word in the material world, and that his tablets were smashed suggests the inhospitability of the written text as encasing for divine scripture. This tension between the divine and human – configured by Hurston and Freud as thus a matter between written and oral (or "phylogenetic") knowledge – anticipates the existential homelessness of the Hebrews and African Americans doomed to wander in exile from the word of God.

This rupture between textual record and collective memory prefigures Freud and Hurston's parallel conceptualizations of racial identity as not only corporeal (ethnicity and skin color) but mystical as well (this intergenerational transmission of memory). Amidst a culture of *Blot und Boden* ("blood and soil") wherein race entailed heredity alone, Hurston and Freud venture beyond this definition by decentering the prominence of genetics in favor of the ineffable "mental residue" of collective memory. When Moses "crosses over" in this chapter's epigraph, he is similarly drained of material identity through migration:

He did not own a palace because he had crossed over. He did not have an Ethiopian Princess for a wife. He had crossed over. He did not have friends to sustain him. He had

crossed over. He did not have enemies to strain against his strength and power. He had crossed over. He was subject to no law except the laws of tooth and talon. He had crossed over. The sun who was his friend and ancestor in Egypt was arrogant and bitter in Asia. He had crossed over. He felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he had been. He was a man sitting on a rock. He had crossed over. (*M*, 78)

Estranged from his native soil of Egypt, Moses locates his racial identity in having “crossed over” into the soon-to-be Promised Land. Hurston’s poignant, melancholic portrait of the cost of migration testifies to the losses inherent in exile as he leaves behind traces of the past so he can travel lightly. In this light, then, their history of Hebrews is a narrative of historical desire: the exiled ex-slaves have either repressed the murder of the psychoanalytic oedipal father (for Freud) or lost contact with the racial mother of Africa (for Hurston). Either way, this loss is inscribed in and repeated through textual histories and collective memory that further estrange an outsider audience from the material truth because they cannot read the repressions, gaps, and silences, nor can they decipher “de inside meanin’ of words” that are not even on the page. *Moses and Monotheism* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* are written on foreign shores, fueled by what Cathy Caruth refers to as “the necessity of various kinds of return – on the return to origins in memory, and on the ‘return of the repressed’” (183).⁸² To uncover and recover these repressed truths, Hurston and Freud encode the “mental residue” of intergenerational collective memory within the discourse of historical fact to reconcile the poles of history and memory.

⁸² Freud finished *Moses and Monotheism* while in London after fleeing invaded Vienna. In one of his strangest and most daring moments, he satirized Nazis right before their eyes: before departing, he had to sign a waiver saying that he was not harmed during the occupation. His official statement: “Ich kann die Gestapo jedermann auf das beste empfehlen” (“I can most highly recommend the Gestapo to everyone”) (Gay 628).

The bewildering convergence of *Moses and Monotheism* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is an overdetermined juncture⁸³ between the black-Jewish transnational imaginary as well as the apexes of Freud and Hurston's careers at which they lay claim to psychoanalysis and oral folklore as fundamentally Jewish and Afro-diasporic responses to this legacy of repression and exile.⁸⁴ While their exegeses of Exodus each begin in the realm of anthropological history, they veer away in separate though not unrelated directions: literature (penned in dialect) for Hurston and psychoanalysis for Freud.⁸⁵ Diagnosed with what David Marshall has deemed the "representation compulsion," Hurston sees Moses' life as a plot and encodes it accordingly so as to reclaim Moses as a three-dimensional sculpture that complicates the political trope of the "Negro Moses" in vogue at the time. Freud likewise treats the Hebrews as a collective analysand struggling with guilt manifested as reverence for a totemic imago – the monotheistic Moses. Moses encapsulates the enigmatic nature of memory as he is both man and diffuse myth: Hurston insists that "Nobody can tell how many tales and legends of Moses are alive in the world nor how far they have travelled, so many have collected around his name" (*M*, xxiv). Freud likewise commences by reminding his reader that Moses "belonged to an age so remote that the preliminary question arises whether he was a historical person or a legendary figure" (3). In delineating between cultural memory and textual history, both authors situate racial identity as

⁸³ Hemenway (275) suggests that Hurston might have read Freud's essays on Moses published in *Imago* in 1936. Barbara Johnson's helpful phrase – "unconscious intertextuality" (19) – suggests a climate of mutual exchange, recognized or not, that was nevertheless undeniable in the dialogue between Hurston and Freud.

⁸⁴ Freud was ambivalent about the Jewishness of psychoanalysis. While the majority of first-wave analysts were Jewish (aside from Carl Jung and Ernest Jones), Freud fears in his letters that the practice will become a distinctly "Jewish national affair."

⁸⁵ That being said, Freud's original title for *Moses and Monotheism* was *The Man Moses, A Historical Novel*.

existing somewhere between the two poles as it is tasked with protecting memories omitted from the institutional archive.

Psychoanalysis and oral folklore emerge in *Moses and Monotheism* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* as means of decoding and recovering the ineffable “mental residue” of repressed, subversive stories lurking underneath textual history. These interpretive activities expose and work through the latent material truths stricken from the record yet still hovering in the background of history; Freud himself remarks that the material of *Moses and Monotheism* “haunted me like an unloosed ghost” (132) as he composed and revised the manuscript over several years in both Austria and England. Hurston likewise compulsively returned to her ethnographic data from 1927 to 1942, easily the most prolific period of her career as she published plays, novels, scholarly articles, folklore collections, ethnographies, an autobiography, and several short stories – the majority of which was inspired by her research expeditions throughout the Global South. Repressed histories like those of *Moses, Man of the Mountain* plagued her career as she worked to expose the latent content hidden behind the manifest surfaces of her research: oral testimony, storytelling, and folklore. Prefigured by Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), this tension between latent and manifest appearances strikes a visual chord in one of Hurston’s most unlikely texts, a self-illustrated Christmas card she sent to Fannie Hurst in 1926. On the hand-drawn card, the abstracted body of a woman lies both on top of and buried underneath the earth. This double-play of visual perspective, appealing to the two different vantage points of the audience (standing on top of the terrain or looking straight at the tableau) depicts the bodies, living and dead, waiting to be unearthed as they are as much a part of the geocultural terrain as the land itself. Hurston exposed the latent, transgressive realities of these “unreal” lives by transferring the intergenerational “mental residue” from traces of ineffable

knowledge to facts weaving history and memory together. Her descent into the fertile Global South sketched on the Christmas card (illustrated during her first research expeditions into Florida and Louisiana), set her along the same path as her fellow traveler, also guided by the “burning bush inside” that leads the way to freedom in the promised land:

Go down, Moses,

'Way down in Egypt land.

Tell old Pharaoh:

Let my people go.

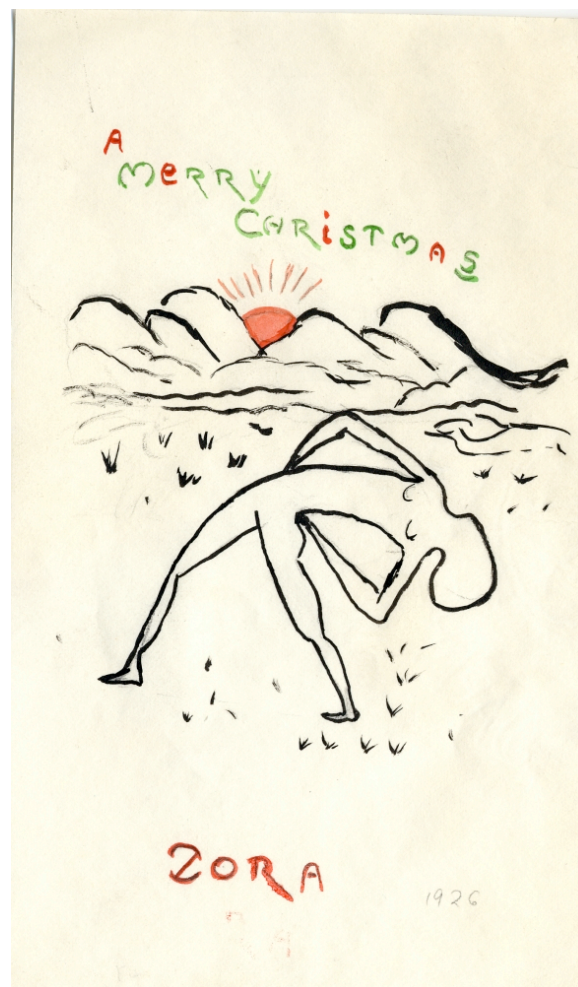


Figure 1: Christmas Card, 1926

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