

Zora Neale Hurston's Folkloric Aspects

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I Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston was active as a writer when protest novels were regarded as the works which African American writers were supposed to write. Regardless of this literary demand, she did not show much interest in protest novels: in other words, she was not much interested in sociological racism but in African American folks. She did not have specific interest in specific Black people such as the ones called "Talented Tenth," either. Because of this literary attitude, she was criticized by popular protest-oriented African American writers such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.

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. (Wright 22)

What Wright wanted to say is that Hurston wrote the daily life of Black people too authentically, which, Richard Wright thought, would cause White people to think little of Black people.

She met Franz Boas at Barnard College in 1925, who taught a new theory of anthropology, "cultural anthropology." He has a strong influence on Hurston's literary attitude. After finishing several courses at Barnard College, she went down several times to the South to collect folklore, which was to verify and realize Boas's theory about culture. In this way, her focal interest gradually turned to the daily life of African American folks.

In this article, first of all, her autobiographical descriptions in her other works will be explained. The second focus is to make a brief introductory analysis of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, which is categorized as an autobiography and then explain some negative criticisms

against *Dust Tracks*. Thirdly, somewhat about lies will be discussed: how lying is practiced, how lying plays an important role, what African Americans tell lies for, what Hurston intends to mean by making people tell lies, and so forth. Finally, more about Hurston's folkloric aspects will be analyzed from the two viewpoints.

II Autobiographical Descriptions

The focal point of this section is what is described as autobiographical facts in Hurston's works. It is still often said that Hurston was born in Eatonville, Florida, by most critics. There is a misunderstanding about her birth, but this will be discussed in the later section. However, it is true that she grew up in Eatonville, Florida, whose history and circumstances are explained in *Dust Tracks*. Since Eatonville is sort of an idealistic place for Hurston, she comes to regard it as her important literary background. From her first work, "John Redding Goes to Sea," which she wrote to the *Stylus* as a student of Howard University under Aline Locke's leadership, she uses Eatonville as its background. Eatonville is used as a background in her novels such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Seraph on the Suwanee* as well. How Hurston describes Eatonville is depicted in the following quotation. She includes one lie in this but others are explained almost correctly in terms of her genealogy.

Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town — charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America. (*Dust* 1)

Not merely Eatonville, one small town in Florida, but many other names of towns, counties, and places in Florida are used in Hurston's works. For example, Sanford; this is located 50 miles north-east from Eatonville and is the first place where Hurston's father arrived from Alabama. Orlando; this is now a sister city of Eatonville and located just in the south of Eatonville. Other places in Florida like Orange county, Jacksonville, Ocala, Oviedo, Gainesville, Maitland, Winter Park, and so on are used in her works, too. Also we can find the real names of lakes like Okeechobee and Blue Sink. Hurston often uses real names of her family as well. For example, in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, not only her mother, Lucy, but also

her father, John, are very similar to real Lucy and John. Actually and fictionally, Lucy was a small, intelligent, strong woman and John became a preacher to be respected by many people but was often false to Lucy and finally died from the car accident. After Lucy's death, John remarried Mattie, who appears with the name of Hattie in *Jonah's*, as his second wife. Hurston uses her grandmother's and grandfather's names, Amy and Alford, in *Jonah's* respectively. In addition, we can very often find neighbors' names such as Mosley, Critendon, Joe Clarke, Watson, and so on.

Not only in her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, but also in her other works including short stories, Hurston tends to use real names and places. So when we think of her biographical issue, we can expect much of biographical information from both her autobiography, *Dust Tracks*, and her other works.

The emphasis of this section is that even if Hurston's works were categorized as fiction, they contain a lot of her autobiographical facts, so it is sometimes hard to make a clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction.

III Her Autobiography: *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Dust Tracks on a Road was published in November 1942 by Lippincott as an autobiography. Before that book, she had published three novels and two folklore collections, which supported her status as a writer. Even though she was in a stable condition in terms of a writer, she had constantly been suffering from financial problems. Bertram Lippincott, who was the president of the publishing company and played a leading role of publishing African American folkloric books and magazines, found out Hurston's financial suffering and recommended her to write an autobiography. Because of her financial difficulty and Lippincott's constant encouragement, Hurston decided to write her autobiography. She started the book when she visited her friend, Katharine E. Mershon, in California and published it in 1942 from Lippincott although many of her original manuscripts were modified, rewritten, and deleted by Lippincott and Tay Honoff. Even if it was written as an autobiography, many readers tend to hesitate to regard this clearly as an autobiography. However, the writing process and the content of this book encourage us to take this book for an autobiography.

According to 1984 University of Illinois Press edition, it contains sixteen chapters along with appendixes added by Robert Hemenway, editor of this edition. This book can be divided into

three parts even though Hurston did not make this division. The first part consists of five chapters, which focuses on Eatonville and her happy family life. The second part has six chapters, in which her family's collapse and difficult life after her mother's death are described. And the third part contains five chapters, in which she tries to express her own opinion in an essay tone. The next distinctive characteristic is that Hurston writes this book in the oral way. Sometimes it might be difficult to discern this characteristic, but clearly it is written just like she is talking orally to the readers. She uses this oral way of writing in all of her books along with her short stories. Thirdly, criticisms about this book were very controversial, which means it was evaluated affirmatively and negatively as well. The most typical affirmative criticism may be represented by the fact that the Anisfield-Wolf Award was given to that book by *Saturday Review* by reason of its refined descriptions of racial characteristics. However, it was, generally speaking, criticized negatively. There are two main negative reasons: the one is that Hurston's attitude toward racial issues is ambiguous and the other, she tries to conceal herself. What is common with these two main negative criticisms is that they find Hurston sort of dishonest as an autobiographer. Is she really dishonest? This will be the next point.

IV Lying

Hurston describes about her birth in the first page in *Dust Tracks on a Road* as follows:

I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town
(*Dust* 1)

Even though she did not write her birth date in *Dust Tracks*, this became very influential on her birth. She said several different birth dates on several different occasions: for example, 1901, 1903, 1905, 1910, and so on. The controversies about her birth date tentatively ended when Alice Walker made her tomb stone in Florida, with her birth date of 1901. However, Cheryl Wall found Hurston family's census which reads that she was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama. That is to say, Hurston told lies about her birth date and birth place as well. This is one of the reasons why many critics came to think that she wrote her autobiography dishonestly.

When we think of the “autobiography,” we have sort of expectations that it tells us the autobiographer’s true life because we think that one of the most typical and important characteristics of the autobiography is “confession.” Confessions should be made honestly. Because of this preoccupied definition about the autobiography, *Dust Tracks* came to be regarded, for example, as “a marvel of self-concealment.” (Fox-Genovese 173). Not only Fox-Genovese but also many other critics including Robert Hemenway judge that *Dust Tracks* “fails as an expose of the author’s life and views.” (Robey 679)

Truly, Hurston writes many lies and conceals many convincing pictures of her own feelings in *Dust Tracks*. But why did she write such an autobiography? She must have read the autobiographies by Booker T. Washington and Frederic Douglas, for instance. In her letter to Hamilton Hold on February 1, 1943, she says that “it is too hard to reveal one’s inner self.” (Hurston papers at the University of Florida) This tells us that she must have thought of a different style of an autobiography and that it may be necessary for us to read her autobiography from a different point of view. Hassall’s opinion is very suggestive.

It is possible ... to read the autobiography differently, to read it as a set of glimpses into the character of an inventive, resourceful, spirited, effective warrior — in disguise. Pretense, misdirection, secrecy, and deliberate, slippery unpredictability — all venerable confrontational strategies, and all lessons Hurston learned in Eatonville — direct her performances in *Dust Tracks on a Road*. (Hassall 160)

When she says “all venerable confrontational strategies and all lessons Hurston learned in Eatonville,” Hassall is thinking of a “lying session” which was mainly held in the porch of Joe Clarke’s store. Hurston says about a “lying session” as follows:

... what I really loved to hear was the menfolks holding a “lying” session. That is, straining against each other in telling folk tales. God, Devil, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Sis Cat, Brer Bear, Lion, Tiger, Buzzard, and all the wood folk walked and talked like natural men. (*Dust* 47)

This quotation tells us that she grew up in the circumstances of holding a lying session, which is one aspect of African American life. As a child, she was not allowed to sit with other menfolks in the porch to join this lying session but she enjoyed listening to their lying beside the house. She mentions in *Dust Tracks* that “I picked up glints and gleams out of what I

heard and stored it away to turn it to my own uses.” (*Dust* 69) In addition, as a child she started to make little stories by herself and sometimes told them to her mother. So making stories, that is, lying, occupies a crucial part of her life.

Not only in her short stories but also in her novels and collections of folklore, lying plays a very important role in terms of the development of the story. In *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, the lie of Miriam, Moses’s elder sister, leads the development of the first half of the story. Egypt is controlled by Pharaoh and the Israelites, people in Goshen, are treated as slaves. They are prohibited from having new boy babies. Moses’s parents think that, undoubtedly, Moses, a new boy baby, will be killed by Egyptian soldiers. They decide to float Moses in a sack in the morning. Miriam has to watch the sack at night but she falls asleep. Early in the morning, she sees the band of Pharaoh’s sister picking up the sack. Miriam rushes to go home to tell her parents that Moses has been taken to the Palace. The story seems to be logical but since Miriam slept at night, she could not have told that the sack the princess took was the same one Moses had been put in. This is the beginning of Moses’s advancement as a leader.

It goes without saying that historically African American people were forced to tell lies and deceive White masters’ inhumane oppression in order to survive. When they had communication with other African Americans, they practiced it by the way of, so to speak, lying. This was their tactics to survive. This historically repeated tactics in slavery have developed into symbolical and metaphorical expressions, one of the typical African American characteristics, generation by generation.

We are familiar with African American folk tales like Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. We can find out that the literary world of this folk tale develops with the rabbit’s lying when we recall a tale like “Tar Baby.” Hurston introduces tales about Brer Rabbit and Brer Dog in Chapter 7 in *Mules and Men*. In this tale, Brer Rabbit cuts Brer Dog’s tongue by the way of cheating Brer Dog. This kind of tale was narrated by African Americans when Hurston went down to the South to collect folk tales at the end of the 1920s.

From the historical process of lying, clearly, the outside of lies has just superficial meanings as Hurston says like “The words do not count” (*Dust* 198). Lionnet makes a concise summary about what Hurston seems to emphasize as follows:

It is clear that Hurston considers cultural forms more significant than specific events. Thus, the self she fashions through language is not a fixed essence, partaking of an immutable and originary racial substance. Rather, it is a *process* of active self-discovery through self-invention by means of the folk narratives of ethnic interest. (Lionnet 411)

We can say that Hurston thinks more of cultural forms of the story than the content because she believes that the behavior of telling lies, rather than the content of lies, represents more history and life of African Americans, that is to say, African American culture.

V More about Folkloric Aspects

Zora Neale Hurston says in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* that African culture is inherited by African Americans even if White people think they tore African culture from African Americans. More can be seen in the following quotation:

It was said, "He will serve us better if we bring him from Africa naked and thingless." So the bukra [white people] reasoned. They tore away his clothes that Cuffy [Negro] might bring nothing away, but Cuffy seized his drum and hid it in his skin under the skull bones. The shin-bones he bore openly, for he thought, "Who shall rob me of shin-bones when they see no drum?" So he laughed with cunning and said, "I, who am borne away to become an orphan, carry my parents with me. For *Rhythm* [sic] is she not my mother and Drama is her man?" So he groaned aloud in the ships and hid his drum and laughed. (*Jonah's* 59-60)

What is emphasized in the former section is that lying has a symbolic meaning in terms of African American folkloric aspects and represents history and life of African Americans who inherited African culture. In this section, more about African American folkloric aspects will be explained from the two viewpoints: forms and content.

1. FORMS

a Orality

- (1) not direct discourse but free indirect discourse

One of the most characteristic features of Hurston's works is that all direct discourses, that is, not quoted sentences, seem just to be written but are written just like they are actually

narrated orally. When she writes sentences, she is always conscious of the listeners, in other words, the readers. For example, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* starts with the following sentence: "God was grumbling his thunder and playing the zig-zag lightning thru his finger." (*Jonah's* 1) In the case of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the setting is that Janie talks to her best friend, Phoeby, about what she experienced. In addition to this, Phoeby talks to the listeners, *i.e.*, the readers, about what Janie talked to her. In *Dust Tracks*, the same kind of examples as follows can be found all over the work.

The men on the store porch had given Uncle Jim a laughing sendoff. They all knew where he was going and why. The shoes had been bought right there at the store. Now here came "dat Cal'line" with her axe on her shoulder. No chance to warn Uncle Jim at all (*Dust* 23)

(2) vocabulary

Hurston shows three kinds of expression in terms of word usage as the greatest Black English contribution to English in her essay, "Characteristics of Negro Expression": metaphor and simile, the double descriptive, and verbal nouns. (51) We can pick up some examples of "metaphor and simile" from Hurston's list: One at a time, like lawyers going to heaven; You sho is propaganda; To put yo'self on de ladder; Regular as pig-tracks; and so on. As the examples of "the double descriptive," Hurston includes high-tall, little-tee-ninchy, low-down, top-superior, and so forth in the list. Also as the verbal nouns, she shows examples like "She features somebody I know," "I wouldn't friend with her," "Uglying away," and so on. African Americans have orally used these expressions, which Hurston uses in her works.

(3) oral transmission

In *Dust Tracks*, Hurston often uses the expression which suggests that the event or the story was transmitted orally. For instance, "This is all hear-say," (27) "Folks said he was" (14) "They tell me that an old snow-hog taught me" (31) and so forth. The form of oral transmission has been used and inherited so as to transmit their life, people by people, generation by generation. We can find the same kind of example in "Uncle Monday," which starts with "People talk a whole lot about Uncle Monday, but they take good pains" (106) The frame of oral transmission is overtly used in "Magnolia Flower." The River starts to tell the story to the Brook like "Long ago, as men count years, men who were pale of skin held a dark race of men in a bondage" (34) From these examples, we can easily recall the

beginning tone of the time when a folk tale was told.

b call-and-response

Hurston's fiction is developed by dialogues, not narrator's explanatory sentences. As Jones explains in the following quotation, a call-and-response form can usually be found in African American oral tradition. This form is generally used more often at the church between the preacher and the congregations.

Antiphonal back-and-forth pattern which exists in many African American oral traditional forms, from sermon to interjective folk tale to blues, jazz and spirituals, and so on. In the sermonic tradition, the preacher calls in fixed or improvised refrains, while the congregation responds, in either fixed and formulaic or spontaneous words and phrases. In oral storytelling the listeners may interject their commentary in a modified call-and-response pattern derived from African musical tradition.

In the literary text both dialogue and plot structure may demonstrate this call-and-response pattern: one scene may serve as a commentary on a previous scene while a later scene becomes a commentary or response to that one. (Jones 197)

For example, the features of the characters such as Otis Slemmons, Missie May, and Joe in "The Gilded Six-Bits," are scarcely explained by the direct discourse, but by the dialogues between Missie May and Joe. Furthermore, in the case of "Spunk," the weakness of Joe Kanty is not depicted directly, but indirectly by the conversations of the villagers.

c repetition

(1) repetition of expressions

Hurston sometimes repeats the same expression in her works. For instance, the word "creek" can be found several times in the following quotation.

John plunged on down to the Creek, singing a new song and stomping the beats. The Big Creek thundered among its rocks and whirled on down. So John sat on the foot-log and made some words to go with the drums of the Creek. Things walked in the birch woods, creep, creep, creep. The hound dog's lyric crescendo lifted over and above the tree tops. He was on the foot-log, half way across the Big Creek where maybe people laughed and maybe people had lots of daughters. The moon came up. The hunted coon panted down to the Creek, swam across and proceeded leisurely up the other side. The tenor-singing hound dog went home. Night passed. No more Ned, no hurry. No telling how many girls might be living on the new and shiny side of the Big Creek. John almost trumpeted exultantly at the new sun. He

breathed lustily (*Jonah's* 12)

The same kind of repetition, "was or were going," is made in the following quotation.

He predicted dire things for me. The white folks were not going to stand for it. I was going to be hung before I got grown. Somebody was going to blow me down for my sassy tongue. Mama was going to suck sorrow for not beating my temper out of me before it was too late. Posses with ropes and guns were going to drag me out sooner or later on account of that stiff neck I toted. I was going to tote a hungry belly by reason of my forward ways. My old sister was meek and mild (*Dust* 21)

Confronting the repetition of the same expression, we can easily associate the church sermon with it.

(2) repetition of events

Not only the repetition of the same expression, but also the one of almost the same story or event can sometimes be found in Hurston's works. One of the most impressive events is her mother's death. She describes the scene of her mother's dying in detail both in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*. In addition, she describes characters who have no mother, like Isis in "Drenched in Light" and Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston was very concerned with "mother's death." She also repeatedly portrays her father's second wife, Mattie. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Mattie appears as Hattie and in *Dust Tracks*, as Mattie. She is described as a woman who destroyed the Hurston family. Moreover, Hurston depicts "childhood" again and again; for example, John in "John Redding Goes to Sea," Isis in "Drenched in Light," Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and herself in *Dust Tracks*. When they were small, they were eager to leave Eatonville, the small town, for the big city to find their better future. While dreaming of their leaving Eatonville, they often sat "on top of the gate-post and watch[ed] the world go by." (*Dust* 45)

d improvisation

Describing the same event is related to improvisation. This is connected to the tendency that Blues and Jazz are performed on the basis of improvisation. This idea will be more understandable when we think of Japan's Rakugo. In the case of Rakugo, the same story is talked repeatedly by different Rakugoka's, person by person and generation by generation. Even if the same story is repeated and we know the original story in advance, the same story performed by different Rakugoka's is enjoyed as a kind of new story. Hurston

explains about originality of the improvisational repetition as follows:

I knew them by heart as did the rest of the congregation, but still it was exciting to see how the converts would handle them. Some of them made up new details. Some of them would forget a part and improvise clumsily or fill up the gap with shouting. The audience knew, but everybody acted as if every word of it was new. (*Dust* 272)

What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. (*Sanctified* 58)

2. CONTENT

a hoodoo

Hurston portrays hoodoo more in detail in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. She writes that she had the hoodoo initiation ceremony in New Orleans and in Haiti in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. The following quotation shows part of her initiation ceremony.

I entered the old pink stucco house in the Vieus Carre at nine o'clock in the morning with the parcel of needed things. Turner placed the new underwear on the big Altar; prepared the couch with the snake-skin cover upon which I was to lie for three days. With the help of other members of the college of hoodoo doctors called together to initiate me, the snake skins I had brought were made into garments for me to wear. One was coiled into a high headpiece — the crown. One had looped attached to slip on my arms so that it could be worn as a shawl, and the other was made into a girdle for my loins. All places have significance. These garments were placed on the small altar in the corner. The throne of the snake. The Great One was called upon to enter the garments and dwell there. (*Mules* 199)

Hurston portrays hoodoo power several times in her works. In "Black Death," Old Man Morgan, a hoodoo doctor, appears with power of controlling any person's life and death. With hoodoo power, he helps Docia's mother kill Beau Diddely, who fools and plays with her daughter, Docia Boger. In "Uncle Monday," Hurston portrays almost the same event. In addition, in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Dangie Dewoe, a hoodoo doctor, appears. It is suggested that Hattie, who is a hussy and eager to marry John, kills his wife, Lucy, with the help of Dangie's hoodoo power and that John loses himself under hoodoo power. In *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Moses is portrayed as a kind of hoodoo doctor. In this work, the expression of a hoodoo doctor is not used for him but another expression, a two-headed man, which means a hoodoo doctor, is used for him. The work does not overtly deal with African

Americans but it is said that African Americans feared and respected Moses because they regarded Moses as a hoodoo doctor with power given by God. Another hoodoo example can be found in “Drenched in Light,” too. The protagonist of this short story, Isis, is not a hoodoo doctor but it is suggested that she has the same kind of hoodoo power by the way of portraying the scene that she invigorates a mentally diseased white lady. In addition, in a short story, “Father Abraham,” a hoodoo doctor who can do anything is described as well.

It is important that Hurston intends to say that hoodoo is a credible religion and that she also portrays it repeatedly. Furthermore, hoodoo has been inherited by African Americans generation by generation as a part of African American culture.

b Ceremonies

One of the most impressive ceremonies inherited by African Americans and portrayed repeatedly in Hurston’s works is the one that villagers are trying to do for her mother when she is dying. This dying ceremony is similar to the one in Japan, which is called “kitamakura.” The ceremony is performed as follows:

And Isie, when Ahm dyin’ don’t you let ’em take de pillow from under mah head, and be covering up de clock and de lookin’ glass and all sich ez dat. Ah don’t want it done, heah? (*Jonah’s* 130)

Almost the same scene is portrayed in *Dust Tracks on a Road*. African Americans have practiced this kind of ceremony for a dying person. As already mentioned, a hoodoo doctor’s ceremonies are repeatedly portrayed. Both in “Uncle Monday” and “Black Death,” the revenge ceremony arranged by the hoodoo doctor is practiced by the mother of a daughter, fooled and played by the man, by the way of making her shoot him in the mirror with a gun. After that, he dies of a strange cause. Going to the root of the tree so as to get a peaceful mind is another example of ceremony portrayed repeatedly. In *Jonah’s*, after a child birth, its nable string is taken to the root of the tree and varied by a grandmother. It is believed by Black people that this ceremony makes the mother have a peaceful mind. In “Sweat,” Delia is watching her violent and arrogant husband dying of being bitten by a snake beside the house but she crawls to the root of the tree to have a peaceful mind. The sermon is repeatedly portrayed in Hurston’s works as a ceremony. Based on her biographical fact that her father is a preacher, Hurston portrays John in *Jonah’s* as a very active preacher in Florida. Hurston depicted almost the same sermon both in *Jonah’s* and in “The Sanctified

Church." (*Jonah's* 175–81 and *Sanctified* 94–102.) Although the content of the sermons is different, we can find the characteristics of Black sermon such as clapping hands, chanting, exclamatory shouting, Ah!, by a preacher, active interactions between the congregations and the preacher, and so on.

c The World of Brer Rabbit

Spunk in "Spunk," a giant and brown skinned man, is the strongest in the village, so nobody says anything against what he does, even if he plays around with others' wives. He meddles in the wife of Joe Kanty, who is the weakest man in the village. Joe gets mad and tries to fetch his wife back. The result is that he is killed by Spunk. However, after Joe Kanty's death, Spunk is cut by the saw and dies, saying that Joe Kanty pushed him. In "Magnolia Flower," even though he is a Black, Bentley becomes a person like a dictator because of his financial success. Finally, he dies of sort of a heart attack. He stands against the marriage of his daughter, Magnolia, and locks her and her boy friend, John, in the different rooms. But they manage to run away from Bentley's control. In "Black Death," Beau Diddley, who preys on women, is killed by the mother of Docia Boger under the help of a hoodoo doctor. In "Sweat," Sykes, Delia's violent husband, is bitten by a snake but she is just looking at the miserable scene with no intention to help him. In "Uncle Monday," John Wesley Hogan, again a man preying on women, is killed by Mrs. Bradley under the help of a hoodoo doctor, Uncle Monday, because John Hogan deceives Mrs. Bradley's daughter, Dinkie.

We can say that those who are killed are, so to speak, the strong and are not depicted like those who will be easily killed in the beginning part of the works. On the other hand, those who kill the strong, are originally the weak and are portrayed as people with no strong powers. When we confront the scene that those weak people are given a specially strong power and kill the strong people, we recall originally weak characters like Brer Rabbit and Brer Goat. The way which is not justified by the theory of the strong is authorized as the right one from the viewpoint of the world of the weak people. It is very important to know that Hurston's works are developed under the theory of the weak. In other words, Hurston's world does not accept the law of the jungle. In addition to this, we need to make a special attention to the fact that these stories adopt the framework of the folk tale like Brer Rabbit, which has been inherited orally as the folk culture of African Americans. The content of the story is important to give a flavor of African American culture but the framework of the story is more important. Gates says the same kind of thing in "Afterword" of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

as follows:

Invariably, Hurston's writing depends for its strength on the text, not the context as does John's climactic sermon, a *tour de force* of black image and metaphor. Image and metaphor define John's world (*Jonah's* 213: Perennial ed.)

Conclusion

It is not difficult for us to imagine that Hurston had a strong pride in African American culture and a sense of mission and intention to inherit and transmit African American folk culture. She says that she sought the "vision" in "Conversions and Visions" in *The Sanctified Church* to explain her beginning as a writer of inheriting and transmitting folk culture. (85–87) Furthermore, she suggests that she was "called" to transmit African American folk culture in *Dust Tracks* as well.

Hurston sounds very emotional but there are three main reasons why she considers folklore very important. First, she thinks more of oral speech with which folk culture is transmitted orally than written expressions. African American culture has historically and inevitably developed on the basis of oral speech. Secondly, she believes that culture is essentially developed by folk life. She practices Boas's theory that culture is constructed not by limited intellectuals but general folks. That is to say, portraying folk life is equal to portraying folk culture, which consequently comes to portray African Americans. The third reason is that Hurston is proud of African American culture, which is transmitted and cultivated in Eatonville, Florida, and, she strongly believes, is never inferior to culture of White people.

From what we have observed so far, we can conclude that she tries to write all of her works on the basis of the African American literary framework. It seems possible to say that African Americans tend to be moving toward white people's society and culture. In addition, many African American intellectuals such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and so on often attacked Hurston as an assimilator. However, we can say that Hurston's literary world is constructed on the basis of African American culture.

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