



## ZORA NEALE HURSTON, “THE BONE COLLECTOR” OF HARLEM RENAISSANCE: THE HORIZON BUILT ON BONES

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The Harlem Renaissance was a crucial era when black intelligentsia had an opportunity for a true representation of blacks, which led a dramatic shift in the perception of black identity along with an influx of new and divergent ideas. “The New Negro” promoted folk culture and tried to accurately reflect black folk life in their works counter to the stereotypes in whites’ works; however, their artistic endeavors in representing blacks in literature resulted in contention among the black intellectuals. Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes agreed to collaborate on a play called *Mule Bone, A Negro Folk Comedy* to reflect the accurate depiction of black folk life in black drama cloaked with elaborated and figurative black imagery; however, they were not able to publish it as co-writers due to the disagreement between. As a result, Hurston decided to write her own version of “Negro comedy” which she called *De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts*. In my paper, I will compare both plays in order to offer an analysis of how Hurston prefers to depict black folks culture in a black literary material and how salient is the black folk culture in her own version as it is in her other works. She set a horizon to depict real black folks with black folk expressions that were carried over and revived in a new form in the New World from the bones of African heritage. Although Hurston and Hughes had a similar approach to African Heritage, Hurston’s works differ from Hughes’s works in terms of the way and amount of use of black folk materials. Contrary to the leaders whose narrations were bleached with white norms, she made the best of her talent and folklore knowledge. She was convinced that the only thing would light the way to the literary horizon was folk culture, revived on the bones, or remains, of the collective African heritage. Creating works based on black folk culture was her response to the prevailing literary horizon and the realization of her own Truth that she would never give up. She was such a bone collector, who built a literary tradition on bones of her ancestors.

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In the course of Harlem Renaissance, reversing the stereotypical misconception of blacks and offering a true representation of blacks in American letters were important tasks that Harlem intelligentsia was engaged in. “The New Negro” promoted folk culture and tried to accurately reflect black folk life in their works counter to the stereotypes in whites’ works and performances. The black intellectuals were aware that there was no true representation of themselves in American letters and as Hurston remarks they were annoyed by the misinterpretation and stereotypical caricatures of blacks specifically by minstrel shows in which white performers used to wear black face makeup: “Speaking of the use of Negro material by white performers, it is astonishing that so many are trying it, and I have never seen one yet entirely realistic. They often have all the elements of the song, dance, or expression, but they are misplaced or distorted by

the accent falling on the wrong element. Every one seems to think that the Negro is easily imitated when nothing is further from the truth;" furthermore, it was even worse when blacks put that makeup on: "Without exception I wonder why the black-face comedians are black-face; it is a puzzle—good comedians, but darn poor niggers" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 72). Thanks to the racial pride promoted by the racial leaders, black literati made a dramatic shift in the perception of black identity, which, however, led to an influx of new and divergent ideas. In this paper, I will examine how Hurston differs from other black literati by her own horizon depicting real black folks with black folk expressions carried over and revived in a new form in the New World from the bones of African heritage.

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

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

The middle-class blacks rather imitate the life and cultural values of their white brother are similar to "Mimicry Man" in Homi Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." It is a fact that Bhabha discusses the "mimicry man" in postcolonial discourse, but African Americans who "ape the norms of the white brother" and colonized people who are "the blurred copy" of the colonizer can be regarded as the same in terms of the "recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 126). Langston Hughes also deals with the same issue in his essay "The Negro and The Racial Mountain," and without giving a specific name he notes that some black intellectuals have a desire of writing like a white poet or writer. The response of Hurston for black intellectuals like Countee Cullen, whose poems are reminiscent of the Shakespearean canon, and Alain Locke, who promote folk culture but only executed within traditional white literary structures is that: "The truly cultured Negro scorns him, and the Negro "farthest down" is too busy "spreading his junk" in his own way to see or care." (67) The responses of Hurston and Hughes do not differ from the response of "the Negro farthest down." They just concentrate on their own literary horizon.

Therefore, Langston Hughes and Hurston, who shared the same ideology, decided to make a contribution to the Negro Theatre with a collaborative comedy called *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life* based on "Negro folklore": When Zora Neale Hurston and Hughes began writing *Mule Bone* in April of 1930, their intention was to present black folk characters in a humorous but true-to-life manner, a counterimage to stereotyped presentations" (McLaren 19). They devoted themselves to the collective African heritage both in content and diction. They were confident that they were orienting themselves according to the new horizon, thus standing firm. In other words, they were as assertive as the "Negro 'farthest down,' [who] is too busy 'spreading his junk' in his own way to see or care. He likes his own things best" (Hurston "The Characteristics" 67). That is to say, they have already established their own horizon in their own settlement and do not yearn for another. Both conceived of a horizon where they

could see truly represented blacks, so they aimed at showing how black folks were rich in black expression and idioms and how they were skilled at metaphors and playing with words in their own vernacular form of the language, as opposed to misrepresented blacks in white works, minstrel shows and even blacks' own works that presented just well-educated middle-class blacks. They tried to rebuild black identity on the remaining bones of collective African heritage in order to demonstrate real black narrative and the considerable skills of black folks in using figurative language.

Hurston perfectly knew the function of laughter in folk culture and its applicability to her objectives in representing blacks, thus, it constituted the most significant element that lay within her artistic horizon. Contrary to those who believed laughter was a sign of inferiority, Hurston expressed it as a significant folk characteristic that is to use. Therefore, she wanted to write a comedy based on "Negro folklore", which "is still in the making," (Hurston, "Characteristics" 65). Just like in stories, black folklore and folkways needed to be staged in order to represent blacks accurately, hence to wipe out the stereotypical image of blacks. In other words, she wanted to depict "the Negro farthest down," with ingenious improvisation, wit and rhyming ability as opposed to the stereotyped figures that were too ignorant to understand the long words. In a letter to Hughes, Hurston clearly expresses her annoyance about the misinterpretation of blacks: "It makes me sick to see how these cheap white folks are grabbing our stuff and ruining it. I am almost sick—my one consolation being that they never do it right and so there is still a chance for us" (cit. in Kaplan 172). Furthermore, as Theresa Helburn, a member of the Players' Guild, expresses to Hughes that the plays submitted to the Guild were not real Negro comedy, but more variations on minstrel shows. Hurston shared her project about real Negro comedy constructed on black folklore with Hughes and he agreed to collaborate.

The collaborative work *Mule Bone* was based on a folk tale, "The Bone of Contention," which Hurston had collected in one of her expeditions in Florida: "Together we also began to work on a play called *Mule Bone*, a Negro folk comedy, based on an amusing tale Miss Hurston had collected about a quarrel between two rival church factions. I plotted out and typed the play based on her story, while she authenticated and flavored the dialogue and added highly humorous details" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 320). The folk tale tells the story of two hunters who quarrel over a turkey they simultaneously kill. One of the hunters knocks the other unconscious with the hock bone of a mule he came across at the scene of the fight. Later the townspeople bring the issue to trial, and they discuss whether the mule bone should be considered a lethal weapon and whether the hunter must thus be charged with assault. In all three products, the weapon used in the assault is a bone of an already deceased mule.

As we have seen, Zora Neale Hurston refers to biblical stories and uses them as a cover story in her works, which makes her works an iceberg with Christian beliefs on top and messages adorned with pagan ones underneath. "The Valley of Dry Bones" in *The Bible*, to which Hurston seems to refer in her folk tale, expresses the prophecy of the rebirth of Israel. She does not directly refer to it, but she makes an allusion to express her claim that black works constituting the horizon they aim at should be built on the bones or the remnants of African Heritage in order that the black culture can be revived in the New World. In *The Bible*, the revival of the dry bones signifies national restoration, and in *Mule Bone*, it represents the revival of collective African Heritage. The bones do not come into being as in the biblical story of "The Valley of Dry Bones," but the mule bone raising contention between two main characters signifies upon the black culture, which is the body to be revived with the renaissance. As the mule bone causes a fight between the two characters, the black culture was a "bone of contention" among the black intellectuals in the course of Harlem Renaissance.

Robert Hemenway explains that *Mule Bone* was originally titled "The Bone of Contention," and as he claims it "turned out to be truer to its title than to its purposes" (154), since they were not able to publish the play as co-writers, as Hughes mentioned on his copy, "the authors fell out"(cit. in Gates, "A Tragedy of Negro Life" 10). As a result, Hurston decided to write her own version of "Negro comedy" which she called *De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts*. Both *Mule Bone* and *De Turkey and De Law* are based on the same folk tale and constitute examples of real Negro comedy Hurston and Hughes dreamed about; however, *De Turkey and De Law* seems better cloaked with elaborated and figurative black imagery, which Henry Louis Gates emphasizes in the works of Hurston in general:

"Rereading Hurston, I am always struck by the density of intimate experiences she cloaked in richly elaborated imagery. It is this concern for the figurative capacity of black language, for what a character in *Mules and Men* calls 'a hidden meaning, jus' like de Bible...de inside meanin' of words,' that unites Hurston's anthropological studies with her fiction" (Gates, Afterword, *Mules and Men* 292).

Both plays were built on the same tale following the same plot with the same characters, yet there are some significant differences between *Mule Bone* and *De Turkey and De Law*.

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

Even though black culture seemed to have disappeared in the New World, blacks were able to retain their culture, and thanks to the Harlem Renaissance, black art bloomed in company with a controversial debate among the Niggerati: "dat ol' mule been dead three yeas an' still kickin'!" (220). Some black intellectuals advocated folk culture while some others believed folk culture in black art would sustain the misrepresentation due to the engrained stereotypical image of blacks. Moreover, the ones embracing the collective African heritage were also in contention about how to use it in their works. Some, like Hurston, preferred no alteration whereas some, like Alain Locke or Countee Cullen, preferred to use it in combination with a "high" literary diction; that is canon's norms.

I suggest that in all three works, two churches, Methodist and Baptist, are the figurative substitutions of the two opposed sides that are in contention about folk materials. The argument caused by the mule bone seems to concern social values, but when the opposed sides are taken into account, it can be argued that the dispute is both religious and political, and it signifies upon the disagreement of the Niggerati on the representation of blacks in art during the course of the Harlem Renaissance. Folk life, religion and culture are so intertwined that using folk material in black art is, therefore, both a religious and a political act in a way: "It was evident to the simplest person in the village long before three o'clock that this was to be a religious and political fight. The assault and the gobbler were unimportant. Dave was a Baptist, Jim a Methodist, only two churches in the town and the respective congregations had lined up solidly" (Hurston, *The Complete Stories* 214). Both sides take their places, and they seem uncompromising for what they advocate. Furthermore, as in Hurston's other works, the court represents the decision-making mechanism. Whether Jim committed a crime with the mule bone and whether it can be considered as a weapon are brought to the court to be decided. Now I suggest that the mule bone represents the *remains* of the collective African heritage, the trial likely signifies on whether to use black folk in literature or not, or in the event that the folk culture is used in a work how it should be used. Should the raw folk culture be used to represent blacks or should the raw folk culture be adorned with traditional English literary language?

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

Like Hurston's other works, *The Bone of Contention*, *De Turkey and De Law* and *Mule Bone* emphasize the significance of the porch talks and the talent of the black folks in "crayon enlargements",

but when we compare the same scene in both plays, it is clearly seen that the dialect is much more salient in *De Turkey and De Law*. One of the porch scenes goes like:

HAMBO Well, y'all done seen so much—be y'all ain't never seen uh snake big as de one Ah seen down round Kissimnee. He was so big he couldn't hardly move his self. He laid in one spot so long he growed moss on him and everybody thought he was uh log layin' there; till one day Ah set down on him and went to sleep. When Ah woke up ah wuz in Middle Georgy (General laughter...). (152)

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

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

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

Hurston's text is the first example in our tradition of “the speakerly text,” by which I mean a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed “to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the ‘illusion of oral narration.’” “19 The speakerly text is that text in which all other structural elements seem to be devalued, as important as they remain to the telling of the tale, because the narrative strategy signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 181).

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

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

Needless to say that the way she deals with black vernacular in *De Turkey and De Law* confirms her preference in representing black folks in a black work, and therefore, one of the reasons she falls out with Hughes could be the lack of vernacular used in *Mule Bone*. As Hughes states in his autobiography, he was responsible for the construction and plotting the play, and Hurston was responsible for flavoring the play with rural vernacular and authentic Florida expressions. Due to the fact that she had a chance to observe the folk life firsthand, she was a perfect choice for artistic collaboration.

In his book *Langston Hughes, Folk Dramatist in the Protest Tradition*, Joseph McLaren states that "Unlike *The Gold Piece*, with its flat language devoid of vernacular expression, *Mule Bone* fully presents black vernacular, most likely as a result of Hurston's contribution to the collaborative work" (18). It is a fact that both Hurston and Hughes did not have any fear that black folk would lead to any negative image of blacks' depiction in literature, but as McLaren states, Hughes's works are much plainer compared to Hurston's in terms of black vernacular. Briefly, Hurston could not have been content with the pale form of their collaborative work. On the other hand, in one of her letters to Hughes she claims that both plays are her versions: "Now Langston, I have not wanted to grab things for myself. I don't want to thrust you forth or anything like that. It was just self-preservation...PS: .. You say over the phone 'my version of the play.' Are not both copies my version? I don't think that you can point out any situations or dialogue that are yours. You made some suggestions, but they are not incorporated in the play" (Kaplan 203). Even if she claims that both versions are her version, I propose that *De Turkey and De Law* sounds much richer when compared to *Mule Bone*.

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

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

Another difference between the two plays is that even though we have the same main characters: Jim and Dave, they are represented with different characteristics.

In *Mule Bone*, Jim Weston, "Guitarist, Methodist, slightly arrogant, aggressive, somewhat self-important, ready with his tongue," represents blacks skilled at black expressions. That he plays guitar, or "boxes," refers to folk music blues; thus, I suggest that Jim is quite possibly a reference to the black writers using folk rhythms like blues in their works; hence he represents black intellectuals advocating folk culture in literary works. Hurston states "In past generations the music was furnished by 'boxes,' another word for guitars" (Hurston, "Characteristics" 69). What Jim does is called "joking," which is singing and playing in black folk style. "Jook is the word for a Negro pleasure house...Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as blues, and on blues has been founded jazz" (69).

Dave, on the other hand, is "Dancer, Baptist, soft, happy-go-lucky character, slightly dumb and unable to talk rapidly and wittily," and represents blacks lacking black expressions, or black intellectuals avoiding black expressions in their works. Thus, these two characters represent the black literati using black folk culture, but differently. While Jim refers to artists using folk materials quite skillfully, Dave refers to those either avoiding folk materials in their works or not skilled at black narration. As Walter

states Dave is not talented in applying black folk in his life: “Dave ain’t got as much rabbit blood as folks thought” (Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* 96). In other words, he represents the black artist that has no talent and for relation to black folk culture: “The rabbit, the bear, the lion, the buzzard, the fox are culture heroes from the animal world. The rabbit is far in the lead of all the others and is blood brother to Jack. In short, the trickster-hero of West Africa has been transplanted to America” (Hurston, “Characteristics” 66).

Despite the differences, Dave and Jim are very good friends, and they make a living from their shows, in which Jim plays and Dave dances. They have performed for white people, but now they want to perform it for their people:

DAISY: (Giggling) I see you two boys always playin’ and singin’ together. That music sounded right good floating down the road.

JIM: Yeah, child, we’s been playin’ for the white folks all week. We’s been playin’ for the colored now (85).

Jim does not say that they completely stopped playing for white people, but what he states may refer to the decision of younger black generation that is to publish their own magazine instead of writing for white publishers and periodicals supported by white philanthropic organizations, which will enable them “to assert their artistic independence against both W.E.B. Du Bois’s didacticism and Alain Locke’s prescriptive cultural pluralism,” (Singh and Scott 98). Furthermore, while Dave and Daisy dance, Daisy wants to show new steps she has learned in the north and then suddenly Jim stops playing and puts his guitar aside, but this is interpreted as jealousy:

DAISY: Look here, baby, at this new step I learned up North.

DAVE: You can show me anything, sugar lump.

DAISY: Hold me tight now. (But just as they begin the new movement JIM notices DAISY and DAVE. He stops playing again and lays his guitar down.)

VOICES IN THE CROWD: (Disgustedly) Aw, come on, Jim... You must be jealous....

JIM: No, I ain’t jealous. I jus’ get tired of seein’ that ol’ nigger clownin’ all the time. (Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* 93)

Indeed, Jim is not jealous. He just does not want their show tainted by this new figure. In “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” Hurston remarks that the folk material obtained in the South was changed into a new form with a new construction that wipes its authenticity through the shows performed in the North: “Gershwin and the other “Negro” rhapsodists come under this same axe. Just about as Negro as caviar or Ann Pennington’s athletic Black Bottom. When the Negroes who knew the Black Bottom in its cradle saw the Broadway version they asked each other, “ ‘Is you learnt dat new Black Bottom yet?’ Proof that it was not their dance” (Hurston, “Characteristics” 72). As she states, black folks in the South were aware that the new version had nothing to do with their culture, but was just something *new*. Therefore, the reason Jim stops playing is that he does not want their practice of folklore, or the bone of his culture, infected and spoiled by outer detrimental influences as in bone taint, which ruins the flesh. In one of the letters Hurston wrote on August 14, 1931, to her Godmother, she complains about the changes made to her show *Fast and Furious*: “Perhaps he (the producer) and I shall disagree about changes in my material. Godmother, they take all the life and soul out of everything and make it fit what their idea of Broadway should be like. It’s sickening at times” (Kaplan 224). Thus, the scene constitutes a reference to Hurston’s disagreement with alteration in raw folk materials.

As for the two main characters in *De Turkey and De Law*, while Jim is still arrogant and aggressive: “Jim Weston: A young man and the town bully (A Methodist),” Dave has good qualifications as opposed to the one in *Mule Bone*. Unlike the dumb and happy-go-lucky character who is unable to use black rhetoric, Dave is “The town’s best hunter and fisherman (Baptist).” Moreover, in *Mule Bone*, when Dave and Jim quarrel and needle each other about walking Daisy home, Dave claims that Jim is full of *rabbit blood* as if it is something bad:

DAVE: Don't no girl as good-lookin' as you is have to go home by herself tonight.

JIM: No, cause I'm here.

DAVE: (To DAISY) Don't you trust yourself round that like wid all them 'gators and moccasins with that nigger there, Daisy (Pointing at JIM) He's jus' full of rabbit blood. What you need is a real man ... with good feet (Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* 86).

When we acknowledge Dave and Jim as representation of Harlem literati, in *Mule Bone* why Dave accuses Jim of being full of rabbit blood is a reference to the black intellectuals who disapprove using raw folk material without alteration in black works, because according to those literati, using great amount of folk material will prevent them from reaching to the level of whites in letters.

Whereas in *De Turkey and De Law*, in the same scene Dave claims that he is the one who has the *rabbit blood*:

JIM: Daisy don't you trust yo'self round dat lake after dark, wid dat (points at Dave) breath and—britches. You needs uh real man to perreck you from dem 'gators and moccasins.

DAVE: Let somethin happen and she'll find out who got rabbit blood and who aint. Well, Ahm gone (Hurston, *De Turkey an De Law* 148).

It is obvious that Dave has a different mission in *De Turkey and De Law* as a black intellectual representation. While in *Mule Bone* Jim and Dave represent the Niggerati differing in using folk materials in black letters, in *De Turkey and De Law*, we have two characters fighting over a turkey, which, I propose, constitutes another significant event. The gobbler, or the turkey, causing the contention in the story was previously dropped in *Mule Bone*, and now reappears in *De Turkey and De Law*. Cole and Mitchell claim that "*De Turkey and De Law* appears to be largely Hurston's work, and constitutes her attempt to excise Hughes's contributions and return the play to the spirit of 'The Bone of Contention,' which was centered on a fight over a turkey rather than a fight over a girl" (133). I suggest that rather than just excising Hughes's contributions, the turkey might refer to the play itself, *Mule Bone*, which brought Hurston and Hughes into conflict. It is quite likely that Hurston attributes another meaning to her characters, and rewrites the play with a different purpose. When one reads *De Turkey and De Law* as Hurston's feather bed concealing their conflict, it can be argued that the *turkey* signifies upon their collaborative play *Mule Bone*, the result of which was that "the writers fell out."

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

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



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

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

I suggest that Hurston metaphorically uses the verb *fire* to refer to setting *fire* or *burning away* the old and dead ideas of older generation by the younger black intellectuals. Furthermore, the reason why Hurston, Hughes, Thurman and the other residents of the Niggerati Manor called their quarterly *Fire!!* was based on this same idea as Hughes states in his biography:

During the summer of 1926. Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, John P. Davis, Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, and I decided to publish "a Negro quarterly of the arts" to be called *Fire*—the idea being that it would burn up a lot of the old, dead conventional Negro white ideas of the past, *épater le bourgeois* into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with the outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing, the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*—the first two being house organs of inter-racial organizations, and the latter being God knows what" (Hughes *The Big Sea* 235-236).

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

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

Thus, in the play, the verb *fire* is not incidental; on the contrary, it reaches a significance suggesting that they would meet the expectations of themselves rather than those of the older generation. As Thurman states, their works should not spill out hatred and grief, but must be like like Toomer's prose that "is warm, mellow, pulsing with fire and passion" (250). Therefore, I suggest, that both Jim and Dave claim they kill the turkey and *fire* at the same time quite likely refers to two writers claiming authorship for the same work: *Mule Bone*. Both Hurston and Hughes aimed at creating a black folk comedy that would fire or burn out engrained stereotypical images of blacks, but unfortunately they failed to reach their aim. Still, when we look at both works, they are excellent works written by accomplished authors that admirably aspire to their horizon.

One may ask, if *Mule Bone* would lead an end to a friendship, why Hurston dared to use the same material which she would claim as her own play. I argue that along with laying claim for her material, she also aimed at constituting an example of intertextuality, which is one of the important characteristics that can be attributed to Hurston's literary horizon. Intertextuality is concerned with repetition and difference, and as Gates asserts it is essential in the practice of Signifyin(g): "It is this principle of repetition and difference, this practice of intertextuality, which has been so crucial to the black vernacular forms of Signifyin(g), jazz—and even its antecedents, the blues, the spirituals, and ragtime" (Gates *The Signifying Monkey* 64). For Hurston, however, intertextuality is not confined just to other people's texts, but her own previous works. She tells the same events, or uses the same characters, modifying them to render a new or updated argument. In her works, readers come across reinterpretations and modifications of her own previous writing, as we see in *Mule Bone* and *De Turkey and De Law*. For instance, in *De Turkey and De Law*, she offers a perfect "Negro play" depicting black folk life by signifying upon her other play that constitutes a metaphor and an example of the signifying ritual of text within text in a different dimension. The message is conveyed through an animal, "de turkey", which is also a perfect fit for black folk tale tradition. She signifies upon her own preceding text just as Gates suggests "repeated but still different."

In terms of repetition, "The Bone of Contention" not only forms the basis for *De Turkey and De Law* and *Mule Bone*, but also constitutes the groundwork for the Mock funeral in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the novel, the criticism about bleaching folk materials is conveyed through a mule. The mule reappears in the novel, but with a slightly different significance. Still, it refers to the slavery experience; however, in the novel rather than a piece of bone, signifying the remains of folk culture, the whole body of the mule is used to represent the *body* of folk culture. That the tale starts with the mule talking, then proceeds to the mock funeral and lastly to the pulpit that is left to the buzzards for their performance is, as Gates states, a "tale-within-a-tale-within-a-tale" (200). This is a very good example of how black narration interacts and is interwoven with nature. As the turkey in *De Turkey and De Law*, a meaning is attributed to the mule, and the narration is finalized with the buzzards. As discussed earlier, the swamp and the mule serve a very significant purpose in *De Turkey and De Law*, and they have the same inference in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, too. The mayor, Jody Starks and the folk of Eatonville organize a funeral for the deceased mule. After the mule was dragged to the swamp, Jody stands on the body of the mule and gives a speech:

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

While in "The Bone of Contention" and the other two plays the bone represents folk culture, in the novel it refers to the body, or the structure of folk culture. Thus the mule tale within Janie's story not only represents an example of the folk tale, but also it is Hurston's own crayon enlargement of her criticism about leaders using folk materials in accordance with their own horizon. As the dead body of the mule constitutes a platform, on which Jody the leader of the community, makes a speech and shows off, according to Hurston, folk material just serves for the leaders a chance to create a big voice of their own.

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

Furthermore, Hurston deals with the whitening, or bleaching of “Spirituals” in *De Turkey and De Law*, too. Lindsay says that the mule bones are picked by the buzzards and whitened by *the elements*: “He wuz—bet he fought ole death lak a natural man. Ah seen his bones yistiddy, out dere on de edge of de cypress swamp. De buzzards done picked em clean and de elements done bleached em” (9). It is not clear what these *elements* are, but I propose that it refers to *rules or structure of English language*, which bleach raw folk material and change the soul of “Spirituals,” which Hurston disapproves. Certainly, black folklore is not a complete action but always in progress, but Hurston prefers the alteration within the folklore and black tradition. For instance, the alteration of spirituals in every congregation or, as she does, using the same theme and characters within another work- same but still different.

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

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