


2013

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### Recommended Citation

Lin, Jung-Hsien (2013) "Between Literature and Science: Inscribing Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men in the Post-human Condition," *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 10. Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/lux/vol3/iss1/10>

# Between Literature and Science: Inscribing Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* in the Post-human Condition

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## Abstract

*Intrigued by the influence of technology on or in literature as well as the ways of which the posthuman body subverts the existing social constructs of race, gender, and culture, this paper appropriates the Foucauldian concept of "technologies of the self" to investigate the narrating "I/eye" in Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men. I flesh out how Hurston's new "cyborg" identity, along with the idea of performativity—particularly in relation to her manipulation of the genre of autoethnography—resists the dominant constructs of race, gender and culture. Through a re-examination of these major moments of transformations of knowledge/power in Hurston's Mules and Men through the lens of cyborg feminism, my ultimate goal is to offer a new connection between science and literature.*

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When Zora Neale Hurston introduces her 1935 autoethnographical work *Mules and Men* to her readers, she immediately calls our attention to the gap between the old Zora and the new Zora:

When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of negroism. From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that (Hurston 3).

Here Hurston emphasizes the difference between her naïve internalization of the African American folklore cultures in her childhood and her scientific approach to them after her college education. "The spy-glass of Anthropology [looking] through" implies that, far from being a passive transcriber of the Black folklores, Hurston has to recollect the "garment" that she has thrown away in order to see what she used to cover herself. *Mules and Men* unobtrusively functions as a vehicle of Hurston's own anthropological theory. When gazing upon those fabrics of "big old lies," what Hurston sees is no laughing matter—they are of power struggles, wrestling forces, and survival strategies used by her own people in her own times in order to live. A "life" is abbreviated into a "lie."

The narrating Zora, however, is not simply an outsider looking in. What complicates her role in her auto/ethnography is her being an outsider from the inside, attempting to be an insider again. What separates her from other true insiders is the "spy-glass" of many new technologies registered on her body. My primary concern is the influence of technology on or in literature and

how the very concept of “technologies of the body” challenges or even further subverts the existing social constructs of race, gender, and culture. I argue that the Foucauldian concept of “technologies of the self”—the spy-glass—transforms the narrating “I/eye” of Zora in the *Mules and Men* into a “cyborg” and demonstrates how her new “cyborg” identity, along with the idea of performativity, resists the dominant constructs of race, gender and culture. By juxtaposing “I” and “eye” against each other, I mean to highlight Hurston’s calculated appropriation of a narrating persona (Zora) in the auto/ethnographic work *Mules and Men* and describes the ways in which the “I/eye” occupies simultaneously subject and object position as narratives unfold. Namely, the “I” who participates actively in the target-culture, the overt object of the gaze in a Lacanian sense, is also the uncanny “eye” that observes the culture voyeuristically, be(com)ing the covert gazing subject.

### **Explanation of Methodology: Cyborg Feminism**

Before we inspect the cyborg identity of Zora in *Mules and Men*, two major questions call for immediate explications: what constitutes a cyborg and what are its political stakes? Donna Haraway offers a comprehensive definition of cyborg in “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. [...] Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience [...]. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion (149).

If we take “social reality” for science and “fiction” for literature, then the fundamental concept of cyborg being a mixture of social reality and fiction parallels the rise of sociology, a disciplinary hybrid sprung from the liminal space between science and fiction. Liberation lies precisely in the hybridity of cyborg, as Haraway argues “for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” (150). If the “Cyborg Manifesto” celebrates the disruption accompanying modern technology of stereotypically considered as fixed boundaries between “life” (social reality/organism) and “lies” (fiction/machine), my goal is to demonstrate how Hurston’s narrator in *Mules and Men* embodies this celebration of deconstruction of the social boundaries. To expedite new postmodern cyborg subjectivity, Haraway encourages revolutions in human conception of the existing binaries (i.e. race, gender, and class), upon which modernist notions of subjectivity rely. Intrigued by Haraway and her cyborg theory, I trace the trajectory of how Hurston’s new cyborg subjectivity undermines these social dichotomies in *Mules and Men*. In traversing freely the boundaries between various systems, a new cyborg identity/subjectivity embraces liberation from the dominant structures of race, gender and power.

Deviating from Haraway, recent scholars have otherwise devoted their attention to the intersection of social reality and fictional events from another direction—sociology. Wolf Lepenies warns us in *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* of the danger behind the vicious competition between literature and science. He shows how this partition is not only arbitrary but detrimental and argues that the social sciences should be granted their own

epistemic space (Lepenies 1-15). It is through the use of language that the two intersects for language is the quintessential fabric in constructing any cultural and societal discourse. Hurston acknowledges the vital role of language in recollecting African American folklores, songs and Black southern cultures. As Lucy Anne Hurston points out in "Zora Neale Hurston: Pioneering Social Scientist," (Zora Neale) Hurston as well as other "[s]ocial scientists believe that language is the most important element of culture in that it facilitates the sharing of the interpretation of abstract concepts among its members. This communication, in turn, functions to create the reality of the group" (18-19) and "distinguishes humans from all other species and is the foundation of every cultural group" (19). In this light, the folklore collections in *Mules and Men* exemplify Hurston's beliefs and methods of ethnography—the writings of cultures.

In line with Lepenies' concerns, Susan Mizruchi illustrates how a sociological reading of the employment of type-casting in representative American literary works from different historical moments assists our understating of society as a whole. These "types" in literature mirror not only the ideological and political condition of their own time, but furthermore, they reciprocally reinforce or mold the hierarchical power networks concerning the types being portrayed. W. E. B. Du Bois terms sociology as "the science that seeks to measure the limits of chance in human action, or if you will excuse the paradox, it is the science of free will" (Wortham 32, 391). However, the idea of society, knowledge, or subjectivity as integrated entities has become fiercely contested with the rise of modern technology in the age of computerization. If the limits of chance in human action become more extensive, what may become of the dimension of free will? New types in both literature and society must arise in response to this change in the postindustrial and post-cybernetic era. In Haraway's framework, the emergence of the cyborg is one perfect model among these new types in both reality and fiction.

### **Reinventing "Technologies of the Self"**

If we push the concept of technologies to a metaphysical level, meaning, if we interpret the idea of technologies in terms of gadgets of human mind or soul, then we reach an argument that Foucault had proposed in his short essay "Technologies of the Self." In "Technologies of the Self" (as well as "The Political Technology of Individuals"), the new theoretical direction towards which Foucault leaned shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault transitions from his earlier discussion of power and its relation to knowledge to the ethical aspects of the networks of knowledge, among which the "self" or the subject(ivity) is formed. He suggests that "technologies of the self [...] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (18). Tracing the historiography of technologies of the self, Foucault defines two crucial ancient historical practices from Greek tradition: first, the Delphic principle, "Know Yourself"; second, "Take Care of Yourself" (19). To do so, one has to find or locate the self. Ironically, the self is found behind the principle "not of the body but of the soul" (25), which, in turn, transitions the care for the body into the care of the soul, from a physical level to an ethical level. Accordingly, when Hurston deliberately puts on the spy-glass to see through her own garment—her own culture, her own color—she was following the practice of "knowing oneself." In volunteering for a firsthand experience of the Southern voodoo/hoodoo practices for her ethnographic research, Zora also experiments with means of "taking care of

herself.” Both techniques are Hurston’s new technologies of the self. These tools validate her subjectivity of cyborg, the source for her subversive power.

Another element that is also under the influence of “technologies of the self” is knowledge. Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* investigates how the status and production of knowledge as well as its materiality have mutated in a postindustrial or “postmodern” society. Knowledge itself has undergone significant transformations as “it ceases to be an end in itself” (5). The age of computerization has opened up the gate of knowledge and/or information, and this accessibility to knowledge fosters the issues of legitimation of information. Katherine N. Hayles in *How We Become Posthuman* proposes a more “updated” version of Lyotard’s argument, confirming that not only knowledge, but the human body per se initiates its own process of disembodiment (25-49). Influenced by how knowledge is produced in the techno-age, our body gradually loses its own unifying materiality. The digital information, contrarily, finds its own materiality through its influences on the human subjects. This posthuman subject is “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles 3). Hayles argues that we have arrived at a posthuman condition, in which no individual could remain intact, as a consolidated, unifying subject, but rather, a collective, mosaic database. In other words, the subject of human is deconstructed and reconstructed into “after-human,” or cyborg.

### **The Doubling of the “I” and the “Eye” in Hurston’s *Mules and Men***

The most cited paragraph from Du Bois’ famous piece *The Souls of Black Folk* resonates with both Hayles’ argument of “human as database” and Hurston’s “spy-glass” from another dimension:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American World,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Wortham 72, emphasis mine).

However, different from Hurston’s garment, Du Bois’ veil represents a more “compulsory ignorance” for the American society in its entirety, covering folks from two sides of the color lines (Wortham 74). The veil combines both the garment and the “feather-bed resistance” (4) in Hurston’s construction. Though Du Bois’ “second-sight” parallels Hurston’s “spy-glass” (3), Hurston does not identify with the same dilemma that Du Bois poses. The sense of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” is in alignment with Hurston’s statement of “that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment” (3). Nevertheless, both the double-consciousness of Du Bois and the spy-glass of Hurston involve a “two-ness” or “two unreconciled strivings” (Wortham 72), or a gap, a split in consciousness. In a Lacanian or psychoanalytical sense, this is the moment in which subjectivity forms. The two-ness that remains unreconciled for Du Bois is never meant to be reconciled for Hurston. From a Haylesian or posthuman angle, this “two-ness” within a single body marks the moment in which

one ceases being human, rather, transforming into a post-human. Hurston, or the Zora in *Mules and Men*, functioning with her own version of the double-consciousness, as a collective self-hood, a cumulative database, reaffirms her cyborg identity in both social reality and fiction.

However, half a century before Haraway's manifesto of how cyborg helps to break down the boundary between human bodies and objects, and how cyborg feminism should bridge the gap between socialism and feminism, Hurston in 1935 had already been leading her life as a psychological cyborg, tackling the issues of race and gender in her time. Throughout her lifetime, Hurston constantly "re-wrote" her past and present in order to invent her future. This very practice of manipulating "lies" to reconstruct her subjectivity and identity makes Hurston a self-made (wo)man, and this "manipulation of technology" makes her post-human. As shown in *Mules and Men*, the idea of "returning to the past from the future" is constant and intentional. First, this return makes it possible for the narrating "I/eye," through her new cyborg identity, to reconstruct her social status related to her past. Second, it justifies Hurston's choice of site for her ethnographic studies to be her hometown. If she had wished to distance herself from the subjects of her studies, she would have chosen unfamiliar places for her ethnography. By returning to her "birthplace," Hurston is returning to her past to modify her present identity, which again echoes her technologies of the self—a major part of her cyborg identity.

Before moving on to *Mules and Men* and the textual cyborg, we should understand the cyborg elements in Hurston's biographical events, for they illuminate our understanding of her cyborg identity in the novel. To begin with, Eatonville, Florida is not where Hurston was born. Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama. However, as Valerie Boyd points out in her biography of Hurston, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, Hurston believed her life began the moment she received her education in Eatonville: "For Zora Hurston, Eatonville was always home. Throughout her life, she would claim Eatonville as her birthplace and refer to it as her 'native village.' [...] In any case, she never mentioned Notasulga as part of her personal geography" (25). In claiming Eatonville as her "birthplace," Hurston utilizes narratives, or language, to reconstruct her concept of self. Moreover, she constructs her authority and credibility in *Mules and Men*. Another example of Hurston's "lie as life" or "narratives as performances" is how often she modified her age. When Hurston was twenty-six, she modified her birth year from 1891 to 1901 in order to be eligible for a free high-school education in Baltimore, which she had been denied in the South (Boyd 73-75). This shows how freely Hurston revised her personal history and how she constructed her identity through "lies" or pure narratives—"In a quiet act of revolution, in a city where few people knew her history, [Hurston] decided to subvert the rules" (75). In Hurston's "herstory," the self is always "post-human," for it is always the "after-me" instead of "not-me." This idea of "not me" signifies the core of cyborg identity, which consists of a constantly changing, ever-fluid subjectivity that is always under the influence of new technologies.

Away from her biographical events, in *Mules and Men*, we see how Hurston, through the approach of the participant-observer, materializes the cultural investigations of the field anthropologist as she took part in performative events studied in context of the customs and social lives of the groups in their natural environments. The "lies" Hurston endeavors to compile are culturally significant, especially as they create, reciprocally, the social reality of the Southern Black folks. As L. Hurston's observes,

The folklore Hurston collected was a natural database of demographic information yielding insights relevant to gender, class, family, age, status, employment, and other indices. [...] Embedded in these recordings is Hurston's process of capturing and

presenting oral expressions, significantly highlighting Hurston's ability to meld the worlds of science and art (18).

Hurston's works contribute to our understanding of the social life of the Southern Black population from an insider's perspective. Her own childhood experience in Eatonville, Florida, and her later journey to the South made her an expert of Black culture. As an insider, Hurston is better positioned to transcribe and to interpret Black culture. On the other hand, Hurston plays the role of commanding the scientific and popular definitions of Black folk culture rather than uncritically allowing "outsiders" to define her own culture. Furthermore, she "transculturates" those definitions of her native marginal insider-groups on the outsider-groups while simultaneously transmitting them to the larger, dominant society. Hurston's ethnographic works become the contact zone between the Black and White cultural groups. However, as I mentioned earlier, Hurston is also an outsider looking in. Therefore, in order to secure an insider's perspective, in order to guard her authenticity and authority in her representations of the Black folk-cultures, Hurston has to strive for the access to a community that was once of her own. This defines her intentionality behind the adoption of a narrating "I/eye" to assist her in the exploration of "lies." As Hurston herself points out:

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences, and these people, being usually underprivileged, are the shyest. 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, 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, that is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries (4).

Hurston is aware of the possibility of being treated with "a feather bed resistance" (which she was) by her childhood community, and this awareness is also an awareness of a different sense of self and subjectivity. However, by pointing out the resistance among the Black folks against outsiders, Hurston also mocks the authority and credibility of previous White scholars who have attempted to delve into the mind of the Southern Black folks. Moreover, this paragraph indicates Hurston's awareness of her own "spy-glass of Anthropology"; namely, she is conscious of her acquired technologies of the self, her new cyborg identity.

To better illustrate what constitutes the narrating "I/eye" in *Mules and Men* as cyborg, we need to pin point the major elements of "technologies" inscribed on Zora's body in the novel: first, Zora with her Chevy; second, her advanced education from Bernard College; third, the newly acquired voodoo/hoodoo practices. The narrating Zora hints at the new technologies she carries several times in the book; for instance, "I realized that I was new myself" and "I didn't go back there so that the home folks could make admiration over me because I had been up North to college and come back with a diploma and a Chevrolet" (3). In the 1930s, it was uncommon for a woman, let alone an African American woman, to drive or even possess a car. Hurston herself repeats many times the description of her with her Chevy in *Mules and Men*: "I began to feel eager to be there and I kicked the little Chevrolet right along" (5), "everybody crowded around my car to help greet me" (9), "the little Chevrolet" (20, 64) or "shiny gray Chevrolet" (65). She

even has to contrive a clever plot to keep her car with her at all times while collecting folktales without looking suspicious, such as the scenario from the Polk County ball, in which Zora lies about being a bootlegger (64-66). Thus “driving back” to Eatonville and Zora being unable to function without her Chevy alters her physically into a cyborg. By appropriating Foucault's notion of “technologies of the self,” we see that Hurston's college education, particularly her training in anthropology—the spy-glass she wears for observing her native folks—programs the way in which Hurston perceives the world. An African American female from the south who received higher education in New York (having experienced the Harlem Renaissance) is another extraordinary phenomenon, and the power/knowledge as well as the rich cultural capital reinvents Hurston mentally into a cyborg. In Part Two, Hurston's pursuit of the voodoo/hoodoo practices—what the Black folks worship and what the white people fear—upgrades herself, symbolically, into a cyborg.

### **Performing Lies as the Performative Life in Hurston's Auto/Ethnography**

In deliberately choosing the genre of auto/ethnography, Hurston strategically deconstructs and reconstructs the subjectivity of the narrating “I/eye.” It is possible to Hurston shift the conventional ground of ethnographic studies through the way in which she presents the self by participating in, and subsequently recording, the “lies.” This preoccupation with self, with the observing “eye” and the performing “I,” in the discourse outside the narrative acts, is a problematic element in Hurston's ethnographic work. Hurston makes her narrative device performative by adopting a narrative “I/eye” in her ethnographic accounts. This performativity of narration distinguishes the “I-at-the-moment (of speaking)” from the “I-in-the-past (of being spoken).” In the process of narration, Hurston performs her subjectivity while concurrently subverting it. Returning to Lyotard and his comments on the legitimation of knowledge in the postmodern condition, that “the subject is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself” (35), when applied to *Mules and Men*, the epic of Zora's narrative is her own liberation from everything that prevents her from her technologies of self, from her identity of cyborg. Lyotard suggests that the emancipation comes from the narrative game (27-31), and that “knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject” (35). Should this be accurate, then by casting a performative “I/eye” in recounting an auto/ethnography, Hurston secures a counter-public space for her own subjectivity.

Hurston's incorporation of a narrating “I/eye” in *Mules and Men* is a self-empowering act, for it articulates the desire for the expression of selfhood, which is similar to Hurston's deliberate inclusion of the hoodoo/voodoo practices. Let us not forget that the genre of *Mules and Men* is “auto/ethnography”—literarily, the writings of (self-)culture, intensifying the cultural significance of hoodoo practices. From a Foucauldian perspective, Hurston's actual acquisition of hoodoo practices is a means of “taking care of her own self,” a technology of the body. From Hurston's perspective, hoodoo is a religion to the Southern Black folk as Christianity to the White folk of the rest of the United States. In the opening of Part Two of *Mules and Men*, Hurston comments:

Hoodoo, or Voodoo, as pronounced by the whites, is burning with a flame in America, with all the intensity of a suppressed religion. It has its thousands of secret adherents. It adapts itself like Christianity to its locale, reclaiming some of its borrowed characteristics



to itself. Such a fire-worship as signified in the Christian church by the alter and the candles. And the belief in the power of water to sanctify as in baptism. Belief in magic is older than writing. So nobody knows how it started (193).

Here Hurston tries to connect hoodoo to Christianity. Through building up this connection, Hurston is able to further elaborate her belief that hoodoo shares the same cultural significance to the Southern Black as what Christianity is to the White. Then Hurston gives a folktale-like account of the origin story, connects God, Moss, Queen of Sheba, and Soloman with the threshold of the black magic (193-95). Similar to Christianity, hoodoo is both an answer and a question. Religion is one way to “Know Yourself” according to Foucault’s theory; thus, for Hurston, acquiring the hoodoo practices is an introspective act. It is an act for Hurston to see what’s inside the garment. On the other hand, from the perspective of Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, religion is one path for knowing other cultures. Geertz states that, in order to tackle the meanings, we should start from scratch, finding the “sacred symbols [functioning] to synthesize a people’s ethos” because they are “the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order”(89). Therefore, for Hurston, transcribing the voodoo practices becomes simultaneously an extrospective move. It is a step forward for the outsiders to, at least, see the veil itself.

The power of religion comes from performativity. We see the concept of performances and performativity in Geertz’s definition of religion: “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (90). From the words like “symbols,” “moods,” “conceptions,” to “aura of factuality,” the emphasis is not on the Real, or the concrete facts or tangible object; rather, the emphasis is on the invisible and the intangible. Performativity and knowledge are what endow religious symbols and rituals legitimate power. It is performativity that legitimates knowledge, as Lyotard suggests in *The Postmodern Condition* under discussion of what constitutes a scientific observation if all senses are deceptive and proofs need to be proven (41-44). He asserts that this is where technology comes into play because:

Technology [follows] a principle, and it is the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process). Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful etc., but to efficiency: a technical “move” is “good” when it does better and/or expends less energy than another (44).

Both Lyotard and Geertz highlight the notion of contingency of religion—if we read it as one form of technology of the self—and how it associates more with efficiency but not with the Real. For Hurston, the hoodoo practices are performances and rituals that convert her into a cyborg and empower her. The hoodoo doctors in *Mules and Men* are portrayed as God’s tools, executing the belated justice (234-36, 240-41). Different doctors perform different hoodoo rituals, even though some of them aim at the same effect, such as casting out an estranged spouse or an enemy (213, 218, 227, 233, & 246). Those performances may vary, but the performativity they carry out shares the same weight. It is exactly the same Black folk who are in dire need of the mysterious power of hoodoo practices that create the mysterious power of hoodoo. The performativity of voodoo is what makes Hurston a cyborg. Zora, in becoming a hoodoo doctor,

embodies a cyborg for being God's tool and for the "technologies" of the hoodoo practices she inscribes on the body. She is before-god, after-human. Hurston is in a posthuman condition; her body, posthuman.

Taking the concept of performativity in the construction of subjectivity one step further, we arrive at the discourse of gender performativity. In *Mules and Men*, gender functions as Zora's avatar. The employment of gender as avatar dehumanizes Hurston's subject(ivity) as human/ woman, resonating with Judith Butler's argument of gender as performative. The notion of gender as role-playing or avatar is central to Hurston's cyborg identity as well as to Butler's theory of gender performativity. Jerry Aline Flieger in *Is Oedipus Online* proposes the idea of "gender as avatar" when constructing a virtual interlocution between Freud and Deleuze, asserting that this interlocution between these two great minds challenges both the conventional concept of gender and the notion of human. As the postmodern world has shifted its preoccupation with the "transformative processes of becoming" to the "set properties of being," Flieger argues that Deleuze's theory of "gender as emergence" not only demonstrates the sense of "becoming an identity" (in contrast with the previous perception of identity as fixated) but is congruous to the theory of gender performativity (158). She further connects this view of "emergent gender" to Haraway's concept of posthumanism, especially to the theory of cyborg feminism, in which gender is always a style of role-playing (168-69). The concept of "gender as performances" confronts the long-existing belief of gender as a biological attribute and it also denotes that gender as a cultural construct.

In *Mules and Men* we see how Zora tactfully appropriates her gender and sexuality for gaining access to knowledge, such as the scenes of collecting folklores or hoodoo practices. Take for instance, in the Polk County ball, when Zora is aware of her own difference and implicit exclusion from the locals, she starts to participate in the "woofing" with a local Black male in order to retrieve her agency (68-70). Instead of "being a female" throughout her narratives, Hurston only "becomes a woman" when necessary, given her concern to maintain a scientific objectivity. Butler indicates in *Gender Trouble* that "the sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of 'the body' that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance" (164). This explains the difficulty that Zora encounters when she first appears at the ball—her body is that of a cyborg, which makes her "gender" fluid. She has to put on the performance of a female to alter others' perception of her sex. This scene not only illustrates that gender is performative, but it calls our attention to the problematic materiality of gender. As Butler states:

[A]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality (172).

The gendered body acquired "a gender" through its performances, that is, "what does a woman do" is socially and culturally constructed to answer the question of "what is a woman?" Zora, by acting out her gender, such as using female charm over the male hoodoo doctors, illustrates the problematic idea of gender. In showing how gender is mere performance, she subverts the

gender construction in those acts per se. This subversive power of gender performativity proves how cyborg identity helps deconstruct certain social norms and confronts us with the two major questions: What is normal and what is natural?

On the other hand, in underscoring the traditional subversive role of the “lies,” Hurston recognizes the contingency between African American folktales and Black people’s eternal battle of the sexes. The seemingly anecdotal “lies” about the conflicts between Black males and females not only suggest how men use these lies to maintain and perpetrate domination of women, but also how the Black women recycle them for striking back at their opponents and for usurping that power from their oppressors. In addition to Butler’s theory of performativity and gender subversion, Haraway’s theory of the cyborg is deployed through the gender resistance that Hurston records through “the big old lies.” One example of how “technologies of the self” becomes the *deus ex machine* of the folktale is the tale from Mathilda about “why women always take advantage of men” (33-38). In the story, a man asks God for “mo’ strength than woman” (34), and the wish is granted; the woman cannot bear the beatings from the man and seeks advice from Devil. Taking the Devil’s suggestion, the woman requests three major keys from God—keys to the kitchen, to the bedroom, and to the cradle, and therefore secure “mo’ power in [the keys] than all de strength de man kin ever git if [the woman] handle ‘em right” (36). Through this anecdotal folktale, Hurston both interweaves the issues of gender battle with the utilization of technology—the keys—and she further demonstrates the performativity of power, and the ambiguity between good (God, Adam) and evil (Devil, Eve). Consistently aware of her own role as a social scientist (an ethnographer), Hurston leaves the process of moralization to her reader while presenting us truth under the “garment”/cover of lies.

### **Conclusion: “How It Feels to be Colored Me?”**

While *Mules and Men* is presented as a humorous documentation of African American folklores, Hurston meticulously rearranges these “lies” to reveal the intricate exchanges between race and gender in the life of the southern Blacks. Consequently, Hurston subverts the racial confinement of her time through her ethnographic documentation of “lies” (or folklores) from her people. *Mules and Men* is dotted with several disturbing “lies” that raise the issues of social (in)justice and the “color line” problems. One brief yet powerful tale is the following one:

And dat put me in de mind of a nigger dat useter do a lot of prayin’ up under ‘simmon tree, durin’ slavery time. He’d go up dere and pray to God and beg Him to kill all de white folks. Ole Messa heard about it and so de next day he got hisself a armlod of sizeable rocks and went up de ‘simmon tree, before de nigger got dere, and when he begin to pray and beg de Lawd to kill all de white folks, Ole Messa let one of dese rocks fall on Ole Nigger’s head. It was a heavy rock and knocked de nigger over. So when he got up he looked up and said: “Lawd, I ast you to kill all de white folks, can’t you tell a white man from a nigger? (97)

The rock in the white man’s hand symbolizes power, a tool or political technology for executing the law. Through the exposure of these conflicts between the slave and the slave-holder, Hurston’s texts confront the White men’s power. By exhibiting the ostensible inequality of the Black people to her white readers, Hurston, equipped with her technologies of education and spy-glass of scientific inquires, is confronting her readers at the same time. In re-accounting these “lies” that consist in the majority of historical power struggles between the Black slaves

and the white Massa, and by “improvising” these lies through narration, Hurston (as well as the people who participate) indirectly reconstructs their racial identity in these accounts. The recurring patterns in narratives beget certain ideological freedom. Hurston's ability to re-present these “lies” in black and white, with the aid of printing technology and her education, ties closely with her cyborg identity and confirms its subversive power.

Continuing from his framework in “Technologies of the Self,” Foucault extends his concept of “technologies” to the political dimension in “The Political Technology of Individuals,” in which he ends with a reflection on the rise of social sciences. Foucault reminds us that “the emergence of social science cannot [...] be isolated from the rise of this new political rationality and from this new political technology” because “in the same way that, if man—if we, as living, speaking, working beings—become an object for several different sciences, the reason has to be sought not in an ideology but in the existence of this political technology which we have formed in our societies” (162). The political technology refers to the technologies of the self, and the reason lies not in any integral ideological apparatus, but rather, in the dispersed networks of power. Zora's role of cyborg in *Mules and Men* exemplifies this new political rationality, and through a study of the formation of this new subjectivity we conduct a painstaking investigation into the social fabrication of “what makes a human” in our postmodern as well as posthuman condition.

As if responding to Foucault's concern of the political technologies of individual, Lyotard concludes his report on postmodern knowledge with contemplation on the knowledge and modern subjectivity:

The line is to follow for computerization to take the second of these two paths is, in principle, quite simple: give the public free access to the memory and data banks. Language games would then be games of perfect information at any given moment. But they would also be non-risk fixating in a position of minimax (*sic*) equilibrium because it had exhausted its stakes. For the stakes would be knowledge (or information, if you will), and the reserve of knowledge—language's reserve of possible utterances—is inexhaustible (67).

Consequently, what Hurston achieves—through her cyborg identity which assists her in collecting Black folklores and through bringing to light (as well as to archive) the knowledge or information of representations of African American cultures—matches perfectly with Lyotard's solution of “giving the public free access to the memory and data banks” by “giving them with the information they usually lack for making knowledge” (67). Hurston's identity of cyborg bridges literature and science in transmuting the covert to the overt. By re-examining these major moments of transformations of knowledge/power in Hurston's *Mules and Men* through the lens of cyborg feminism, we see how the auto/ethnographical text provides another connection between science and literature, the liminal place in which social sciences arise, and also, the virtual space where reality and fiction converge to generate new posthuman possibilities.

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