Re-Visioning Nature: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under* as New Southern Pastoral

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Introduction

Despite their well-known personal correspondence, few critical studies read the works of two Southern women writers, Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings together. Both of them began to thrive in their literary career after they moved to Florida and published their first novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *South Moon Under* (1933). When they came down to central Florida (Hurston, grown up in Eatonville, and coming back as an anthropological researcher, Rawlings as an owner of citrus grove property) in the late 1920s, the region had undergone significant social and economic changes. During the 1920s, Florida saw massive influx of people from varying social strata against the backdrop of the unprecedented land boom, the expansion of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, the statewide growth of tourism, and the development of agriculture including the citrus industry in central Florida.[1] Hurston's and Rawlings's relocation was a part of this mobility. Rawlings's first visit to Florida occurred in March 1928, when she and her husband Charles had a vacation trip. Immediately attracted by the region's charm, the couple migrated from Rochester, New York, to be a part of booming citrus industry.[2] Hurston was aware of the population shift taking place in her home state and took it up in her work. At the opening of *Mules and Men* (1935), she writes: "Dr. Boas asked me where I wanted to work and I said, 'Florida,' and gave, as my big reason, that 'Florida is a place that draws people—white people from all over the world, and Negroes from every Southern state surely and some from the North and West.' So I knew that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro South in the one state" (9). Here and elsewhere Hurston, based on her own mobility within and beyond the South, successfully depicts the region on constant move and reconfiguration. As Martyn Bone correctly points out, she "depicts the South . . . as an unstable, liminal locus."[3] It is this physical mobility that gives Hurston and Rawlings a significant literary perspective.

Both Hurston and Rawlings knew the South and considered the region to be their home, yet they also kept in contact with the world beyond. They literally moved back and forth between bigger cities and rural places, between their Southern communities and Northern academic/literary societies, and this state of constant traveling deeply influenced their literary imagination. Their experience of "traveling at home" led them to resituate the Southern folk cultures in a broader cultural context and to refigure the South in a perspective missing in the then dominant southern cultural discourse such as the Agrarian manifesto. They capture the South not as a space defined solely by oppression and rigid social stratification but as a contact zone where people with disparate cultural backgrounds encounter and interact.

The period when Hurston and Rawlings moved to Florida marks a significant turning point in their lives. Both writers had just started their professional career and desperately needed isolation and a less stressful environment for writing. Hurston had been struggling to finish her anthropological project (*Mules and Men*) which began in 1927 with her first Florida field work, while facing financial stress and health problems. She ended her formal contract with her patron Charlotte Osgood Mason in 1931, and moved back to Eatonville the next year, which immediately turned out beneficial. In a letter to Mason on May 8, 1932, Hurston excitedly reports, "I am happy here, happier than I have been for years. The air is sweet, yes literally sweet. Summer is in full swing. . . . Godmother I am so grateful to you for letting me be here in Eatonville. I am renewed like the eagle. The clang and clamor of New York drops away like a last year's dream" (Kaplan 254). A change of environment had a similar impact on Rawlings. The life in the citrus grove property quickly provided Rawlings materials for her fiction and the solitude she needed for writing. Soon she found "Cracker Chidlings" (1931), her first short story on Florida "cracker" culture, published in *Scribner's* magazine.

Significantly, both writers experienced divorce around the time they came to Florida. Hurston married her first husband Herbert Sheen on May 1927 in St. Augustine, FL, but their marriage practically ended four months after when Sheen "discovered that his bride resented interruptions in her work and had no intention of following her husband in his occupation" (Hemenway 93-94). Rawlings too terminated her first marriage which became strained around the success of *South Moon Under* (Bigelow 16). Her letter to her editor Maxwell Perkins postmarked the day after the divorce shows the extent to which

Rawlings was stressed out through the marital relationship:

> I was granted a divorce from my husband. The end, simply—I hope—of fourteen years of Hell—of a fourteen-year struggle to adjust myself to, and accept, a most interesting but difficult—impossible—personality. It was a question, finally, of breaking free from the feeling of a vicious hand always at my throat, or of going down in complete physical and mental collapse. . . . I am not riotously happy, not being interested in freedom for its own sake—I could have been a *slave* to a man who could be at least a benevolent despot—but I feel a terrific relief—I can wake up in the morning conscious of the sunshine, and thinking, "How wonderful! Nobody is going to give me Hell today!" (Bigelow and Monti 80)

Both Hurston and Rawlings found it hard to work out the balance between their professional and personal lives and eventually chose the former, which would have been a difficult decision for women in the early 1930s but still was a relief in terms of their career.

Hurston's and Rawlings's move to Florida was a kind of pastoral retreat, in that it offered them a sense of liberation from their personal roles and relations they had in the northern cities. It also provided them a chance to reexamine gender norms and conventions, among other things, through their writings on Florida. Discussing travel writings on Florida by the women writers of the Reconstruction era (especially Harriet Beecher Stowe), Susan A. Eacker claims that a less stressful, more sensual and optimistic atmosphere of the state that is created by its rich natural environment enabled these writers to reinvent traditional gender roles in northern life (503). The South presented the conflation of gender and nature more that any other American region did, and Stowe and other women writers of the late 19th century used such conflation in their writings. Eacker considers Rawlings as a 20th century successor of these women writers, but the similar argument could be built on Hurston. Both writers chose to end their marital relationships in order to further pursue their literary career, and Florida turned out to be the best place to retain independence and isolation in their personal and professional lives. Moving to the South thus enabled them to rethink about gender in terms of their surrounding environment. The South was arguably known for the most rigid gender norms in addition to its racial ideologies, but the liberating aspect of the pastoral settings encouraged them to investigate the way to think and act

outside such norms and critique them through their personal lives and their writings.

Scholars with ecofeminist perspective examine how the Southern women writers review male pastoral tradition prevalent in Southern fiction since antebellum romance.[4] Elizabeth Jane Harrison discusses that women writers across racial lines question the male pastoral mode which represents the South itself as a Garden of Eden archetype and identifies the Southern women with the land. According to Harrison, Southern landscape in these women writers' fiction functions not necessarily as the metaphor for submission and passivity of women/nature but rather as "an enabling force" for their female characters (11). It ultimately envisions a cooperative community in which the relationship between men and women can be renewed into a more egalitarian one. Christopher Rieger similarly focuses on the potential empowerment by the bond between women and nature. He points out that Hurston and Rawlings "represent wilderness as more than merely a passive field for the exercise of masculine power, and they identify their female characters with a vital, active nature rather than with virginal or despoiled Southern gardens" (*Clear-Cutting Eden* 15-16). Southern women writers including Hurston and Rawlings are well aware of the various dichotomies such as nature/culture, women/men, rural/urban, and wilderness/modernization that are abundant in Southern narratives. Rather than simply accepting these conventional paradigms, the two writers seek to revise or disrupt them through their version of pastoral. Hurston and Rawlings critique what Leo Marx called the desire for creating a "middle ground" between nature and culture which is often found in the American pastoral.[5] They utilize the pastoral mode to represent the Southern landscapes affected (or unaffected) by modernization. In so doing, they link the process of modernization to that of male domination over the female, and inquire if human and nature (and men and women) can create a harmonious, non-hierarchical relationship with each other without lapsing into binary thinking. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*, with their marked emphasis on gender and nature, epitomize the two writers' exploration of these issues.

Critiquing Modernity

Rawlings's *South Moon Under* chronicles the lives of a "cracker" family living in a vast scrub area in central Florida. The family's struggle for maintaining

the nature-oriented way of life reflects the author's contemplation on the encroachment of modernization to Southern rural communities. The scrub is, in Rawlings's view, the closest point to wilderness which "has defeated civilization. It is one of the few areas where settlements have disappeared and the scanty population is constantly thinning" (Tarr 44). As a way of critiquing modern civilization, Rawlings introduces the conflicting concepts of natural and man-made laws as the center of the novel's plot. The scrub inhabitants depicted in the novel are obedient to the natural laws which equally influence plants, wild animals, and themselves. In wilderness where nature still overwhelms human civilization, those are the only laws they understand and pay respect to. The novel's title *South Moon Under* itself denotes one of such natural laws; it is the position of the moon by which the scrub people know the creatures' pattern of behavior. The protagonist Lant Jacklin explains how the moon influences the whole ecosystem of the scrub:

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

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

(62-63). The natural laws described in *South Moon Under* arguably reflect such model of human/nature relationship, and Rawlings characterizes Lant as its embodiment. As a part of natural environment, Lant follows the laws and uses his knowledge about the scrub's biological rhythm for hunting and farming.

By contrast, the novel depicts the man-made laws as a threat to the cosmic view on nature. In order to earn their living, Lant and many others engage in illegal activities, mainly moonshining and hunting during closed season or in the preserve. Both federal and local officials impose and reinforce new laws and restrictions on hunting, farming, fencing, and moonshining, which, to the scrub inhabitants, are potentially harmful interventions against the community. Therefore, Lant and other scrub men firmly resist these laws. Moonshining is especially significant in the novel, for it is depicted not simply as an economic activity but as the symbol of the scrub inhabitants' independence and their attempt to preserve their life style.

In addition to the law enforcement, intervention by outsiders is also depicted as a great threat that would lead to the destruction of the scrub's whole ecosystem. The dispute over cattle-fencing best describes this.[6] The family called Streeters who recently moved to the scrub build up fences to protect their cattle, ignoring the scrub's free-range tradition which had kept the harmony within the community as well as with the surrounding environment. Lant, his uncle Abner, and other scrub men threaten them to remove the fence and eventually get arrested. Even though it costs the violation of man-made laws, they try to follow the natural laws on which the system of the scrub community is based and maintained. Abner's statement clarifies this: "The law's the law, and the law's always changin' but they's things beyond the law is right and wrong, accordin' to how many folks they he'ps or harms" (257). To raise fence in the free-range scrub is to circumscribe the natural environment which originally had no border, and thus unnatural. Through the scrub inhabitants' struggle against outsiders' intervention, Rawlings questions the artificial boundaries set within nature that are essentially at odds with her cosmic model of the human/nature relationship.

Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* likewise dramatizes the social and cultural changes influencing the Southern rural communities. The novel's protagonist John Pearson epitomizes the upward social mobility of post-slavery Southern blacks in tune with modernization.[7] The opening of the novel is clearly pastoral in setting, depicting John's family of sharecroppers living in rural Alabama. From there, he travels through more urban and developed Southern spaces, to

Notasulga and to Eatonville, the all-black town in then developing central Florida where he becomes a minister. John's whole journey attests to his adaptability to modernized life style: highly mobile and invested with entrepreneurial mindset, he successfully adjusts himself to each new environment. As John appropriately says to his stepfather Ned, "Dis ain't no slavery time and Ah got two good footses hung onto me" (8).

Unlike Rawlings, Hurston does not necessarily focus on the negative impact of modernization on the Southern rural communities. And yet, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* provides a subtle critique on modernity through her use of symbolism. Hurston repeatedly uses train as a significant symbol of John's gesture away from nature and toward modernity. When John sees a train for the first time in Notasulga, he feels both fear and admiration:

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

This sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is a classic example of the pastoral "middle landscape." It vividly depicts the significant shift toward modernity occurring in the South at the turn of the century. Through John's contradictory response, Hurston compellingly illustrates the modern man's ambivalence toward technological modernization and industrialization. Also important is her use of anthropomorphism. Trying to understand or at least make familiar the uncanny presence before him, John attributes human (though monstrous) characteristics to the train. Such process of familiarization taking place within John's mind precisely shows how the modern is rapidly acknowledged by the rural Southerners and assimilated into their daily landscape.

The train also symbolizes John's inner sexual desire which is considered natural and uncontrollable. As Anthony Wilson points out, the train "plays a

double role in the novel's symbology: it signifies both sexuality and phallic power and the encroachment of technological and its attendant threats to community and self" (74). The association is evident in a scene in which John converts in his mind the train's mechanical sound into the rhythmical repetition of words: "Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika-black-and-dirty, Opelika-black-and-dirty!" (41). The train's enormous power is here related to the predatory animal ("Wolf coming!"), and the repetitive calling of the place name Opelika anticipates John's future sexual prowess: Opelika is the place where a woman with whom he would have a extramarital affair lives. Sexual imagery associated with the train appears again when John works at a Florida railroad camp. Workers at the camp sing about their women while spiking on rails, and John absorbs himself in the rhythm of the song:

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

The mechanical movement of hitting spikes with a hammer has an obvious sexual implication, and once again it hints at the close connection between the cultivation of nature and the penetration of the female body. Hurston uses these imageries to emphasize the association between modernity and masculinity. More specifically, through depicting John's deeply problematic masculinity, she explores the question of modernity in the South and how it affects the lives of Southern blacks.[8]

John provides a classic example for a modern man split between nature and civilization, struggling to find a balanced middle state. While he embodies the modernization of the South and the socially upward mobility of Southern blacks during the early 20th century, he exposes his "nature," e.g., his uncontrollable desire and moral weakness which he calls "de beast within me"

(88). He repeats illicit affairs with multiple women, which ruins his relationship with his wife Lucy and jeopardizes his position within each community he joins. All through the novel John attempts to resist this "beast within," but his guilt for being a "natchel man" (122) in fact induces him to act more oppressively towards women, which further worsens his situation. His tragic death by a train-automobile accident at the end of the novel, which occurs immediately after he got into yet another extramarital affair, is highly symbolic of his futile attempts to control nature. As Nathan Grant notes, "Black men in Hurston's novels and stories, when guilty of abuses against black women—which is to say as well that they are also guilty of abuses against nature—are met with powerful and consuming responses to their transgressions" (117).

Nature and Gender

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Voodoo represents the force of nature that is women's "powerful and consuming responses" against oppression.[9] Hurston associates Voodoo practices with the female characters and emphasizes its empowering aspect for them. Voodoo itself has been one of the key concepts in Hurston scholarship. A number of studies have exhaustively discussed Hurston's illustration of Haitian Vodou in *Tell My Horse* (1938) and its influence on her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).[10] Rachel Stein, one of the influential scholars in this line, discusses how Vodou provides "an alternative spiritual model that reframes the binary hierarchies operating within the denigration of black women as nature incarnate" (54). While such aspects can also be found in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, few studies focus on the gender issue of the novel in relation to Hurston's exploration of Voodoo in the American South that is well documented both in *Mules and Men* and its earlier and more academic-oriented version "Hoodoo in America" (1931).[11]

The Voodoo section in *Mules and Men* and "Hoodoo in America" provides a significant background to Hurston's representation of nature and her characterization of women in the novel. In these anthropological works, Hurston reveals how Voodoo as a religion and conjure practices is closely tied with nature, and how it disrupts the hierarchical gender relationship. Voodoo initiation rituals and magic acts are often characterized by the use of animal symbols such as snake skin, sacrifices and herbs. For example, *Mules and Men* tells how Marie Laveau (spelled "Leveau" in the book), the legendary Voodoo queen of New Orleans, became a practitioner when she was called upon by a

rattle snake and how the snake always stayed with her until her last moment (183-85). Luke Turner, the self-professed nephew of Laveau, takes over the snake hide as a sacred symbol and wears it whenever he performs the rituals (185). In Voodoo, association of nature (especially snakes) and women does not have a negative connotation as it does in the Christian context. It rather symbolizes the power which the Voodoo practitioners obtain through their contact with nature. The "two-headed doctors" of Voodoo also use a variety of animal sacrifices such as chickens, sheep, and black cats at the rituals and conjure practices. And they make folk medicines and conjure potions from herbs, roots, and natural cooking ingredients. Behind such heavy dependence on nature lies the idea of Voodoo as a mode of transformation; it utilizes nature and transforms it into spiritual (and sometimes destructive) power. Whether a Voodoo practice is performed to retrieve a lover or cause a death, it works on nature to change the status quo.

Voodoo practitioners and worshippers do not have rigid gender roles and hierarchies. "Hoodoo in America" introduces four female Voodoo practitioners including Laveau, and shows that both men and women can become the "two-headed doctors" with no visible hierarchy between them.[12] Those who get consultation by the practitioners are often women too. An episode in *Mules and Men* in which Zora works as a Voodoo practitioner under the guidance of Father Joe Watson shows how Voodoo serves the plight of women. The woman tells Zora how a man shot her husband and nevertheless is likely to get released without punishment: "'But, honey,' she all but wept, 'they say ain't a thing going to be done with him. They say he got good white folks back of him and he's going to be let loose soon as the case is tried. I want him punished. Picking a fuss with my husband just to get chance to shoot him. We needs help. Somebody that can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick'" (205). The woman's story notably shows how the black women are positioned at the bottom of the social power structure in the South in which whites rule blacks and black men reiterate the uneven power relationship within the black community over women, while the voices of black women are kept unheard.[13] Such is the contemporary condition of black women which Hurston would so aptly articulate as "the mule of the world" in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and these women, who are negatively identified with nature and thus put in the margin of society, desperately need vengeance. That is exactly when a Voodoo practitioner, in this context the narrator Zora, uses that very nature on behalf of them and "hit[s] a straight lick with a crooked stick." By repeatedly depicting

black women in cruel predicaments and how each practice works for them, Hurston presents the destructive yet empowering aspect of female vengeance enabled by Voodoo.

It is John's second wife Hattie Tyson who most noticeably represents the complex association between women and Voodoo. It is certain that Hurston describes Hattie's use of conjure on John based on her knowledge of Voodoo obtained through her recent anthropological research. In order to keep John's attention, Hattie goes to An' Dangie Dewoe, whose name clearly echoes an Obeah (the Bahamian version of Voodoo) practitioner Aunt Dangie Deveaux / Andangie in "Hoodoo in America" (*Jonah's Gourd Vina* 125; "Hoodoo" 321, 404-05). An' Dangie tells Hattie to stand over the gate of John's place and eat some beans, and says she will use a black cat bone "so's you kin walk out de sight uh men" (126). A similar episode appears in *Mules and Men*, when Zora joins a sacrificial ritual to get the bone so that she can perform conjure secretly: "Sometimes you have to be able to walk invisible. Some things must be done in deep secret, so you have to walk out of the sight of man" (207).

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

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

novel. . . . While readers may not respect the choices she makes, her persistence in making choices for herself, not for her husband, sets her apart from other women in the novel" (508). Unlike Lucy, Hattie would not endure John's change of heart or his abusive attitude. And unlike John's third wife Sally, she never displays a forgiving yet gullible personality in her relationship with John. While Hattie basically represents the negative stereotype of womanhood, Hurston also describes her as a vengeful female self which is helpless in the face of men's social and physical power and yet secretly gets empowerment by Voodoo. In this sense, Hattie embodies Hurston's complex view on Voodoo, that is, it is dark and horrifying yet at the same time empowering.[14]

In contrast to Hattie, Lucy is described as a smart and devoted woman who gives her husband every possible support for his social success, yet is grievously betrayed by him throughout their marriage. In spite of her smartness and the fact that John owes her a lot for his success, Lucy seems submissive and vulnerable in their marital relationship. However, her deathbed scene presents much more complexity than is usually considered. Significantly, as death approaches Lucy shows an unusual attempt to fight back against John's abuse. She says to him, "Youse livin' dirty and Ahm goin' tuh tell you 'bout it. Me and mah chillun got some rights. Big talk ain't changing' whut you doin'. You can't clean yo'self wid yo' tongue lak uh cat" (128-29). Also noteworthy is her mysterious instruction for her deathbed. She tells her youngest daughter Isis, who is modeled after Hurston, "when Ahm dyin' don't you let 'em take de pillow from under mah head, and be covering up de clock and de lookin' glass and all sich ez dat" (130). Isis tries to perform her mother's instruction, but John and the neighbors gathering at the deathbed stop her, quickly removing the pillow and covering the mirror. The reason Lucy asked Isis to see to these things is never made clear, but according to the glossary Hurston added to the novel, "[t]he pillow is removed from beneath the head of the dying because it is said to prolong the death struggle if left in place. All mirrors, and often all glass surfaces are covered because it is believed the departing spirit will pause to look in them and if it does they will be forever clouded afterwards" (206). Elsewhere Hurston reports that "among the Negroes of North American continent the power of the dead to help or harm is common tenet even among those who have discarded hoodoo" ("Hoodoo" 319). She further explains what is commonly done to a person's deathbed: "The spirit newly released from the body is likely to be destructive. This is why a cloth is

thrown over the face of a clock in the death chamber and the looking glass is covered over" (*Mules and Men* 214; "Hoodoo" 398). Being a devout Christian, Lucy is dismissive about the folk belief. Yet her demand for keeping the pillow and the mirror at their place could be her attempt to use that belief to prolong her own agonizing death and leave an eternal trace of her departing spirit to the world of the living. It could be her revenge on John especially because she knows that that is the last thing he desires. After Lucy's death, he is perpetually tormented by the haunting memory of Lucy and the snake, which now embodies both the biblical evil and the destructive power of Voodoo, recurrently coming back to his mind though he thought "the dead snake was behind him" (185). He eventually gets killed by a train which is a symbol of modernity but also horrifyingly evokes the shape of a snake.

On Lucy's mysterious requests at her deathbed, Meisenhelder argues that "[i]n providing limited explanation for these requests, Hurston can control the significance seen in them by readers unfamiliar with the rituals and thus smuggle an act of female retaliation into her novel under cover of what might have appeared mere quaint superstition" (60). Hurston indeed uses the seemingly superstitious Voodoo-based folk belief in order to interpolate a narrative of female vengeance. And by choosing Isis who is the fictional alter ego of herself to carry out Lucy's dying wish, she also emphasizes the bond between the women who are not only a mother and a daughter but also the mutually trusted accomplices in this revenge act.[15] Hurston secretly encloses the story of female bond created in the context of Voodoo, in order to critique the masculine desire for modernization which dismisses the type of spiritualism marked by the conflation of women, nature, and the power of the dead.

John's journey is a process of "leaving behind" the spiritual tie with feminized nature in the course of modernization, yet the fact that the Voodoo imagery associated with women repeatedly haunts him attests to his ambivalent urge to retrieve that very tie with the natural. Barbara Spieceman suggests that John is "a minister who has . . . embraced the concepts and basic symbols of Voodoo" (88). Even though John seems dismissive about Voodoo on the conscious level, he lives and preaches in a Southern black community where the spiritualism based on African tradition remains intact and has become blended into Christianity. Critical rereading of the Old Testament, which Hurston would further explore in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), is a vital part of the religious system of the Caribbean and the Southern blacks who were introduced to Christianity in the course of enslavement. As a black

minister who albeit unwittingly gets involved in the world of Voodoo, John embodies such cultural hybridization. Ultimately, John's Voodoo/Christianity ambivalence revolves around nature/culture opposition against whose backdrop the whole novel is structured. His final sermon which, according to Hemenway, Hurston took almost word by word from the one by the Reverend C.C. Lovelace of Eau Gallie, Florida, on May 3, 1929, is a case in point (Hemenway 197). In the last part of the sermon John incorporates into the traditional Christian context the image of the train, a machine in the garden which, as I discussed earlier, embodies the pastoral middle ground:

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

Hemenway points out that the imageries used in this passage "were familiar to most black congregation in the South, and many of them can still be heard in black churches. The train motif is well known" (197). Yet these familiar imageries also integrate the nature/culture symbolism Hurston has used throughout the novel. The central motif of the "damnation train" clearly symbolizes the encroachment of modernization, but it also evokes the shape of the snake which, in the context of Voodoo, represents the power of nature. The train invested with dual images thus delineates the condition of modern men having gradually lost touch with their tradition closely tied to nature, and yet still possessed by its uncontrollable power. Being such a modern man himself, John tells his audience to get off the train to interrogate if one could find a balanced state between nature and culture. Through John's struggle, Hurston vividly depicts the consciousness of contemporary Southern blacks

experiencing a change in their relationship with nature in the course of modernization.

Like Hurston, Rawlings too engenders nature/culture dichotomy. What is significant about the fencing episode discussed in the first section is that Rawlings, as Rieger correctly points out, "associates these man-made boundaries with the social restrictions placed on women at the time, challenging their naturalness and their legitimacy" (201-02). She questions the rapid modernization which negatively affects the cosmic balance of nature and explores alternatives through her representation of subversive female characters. The characters such as Piety, Kezzy, and Annie Wilson often deviate from the gender role of their period and disrupt the notion of what is natural for women. These women play a significant part in Rawlings's version of Southern pastoral, for they represent the possibility for constructing a more egalitarian relationship with the men and the land. Rawlings's representation of strong and independent female characters is firmly based on her own experience in the scrub. In summer 1931, Rawlings stayed in the scrub with Piety and Leonard Fiddia, after whom she closely modeled Piety and Lant in *South Moon Under*. There she observed and recorded backwoods life style, customs and peculiar idioms. She was accepted by the community without a major trouble probably because she showed no hesitation in witnessing and engaging in activities inside the community that were often illegal from the outside perspective. Rawlings herself reported this to her editor Maxwell Perkins:

> Possibly you wonder how I gain the confidence of these people without being a cold-blooded spy who intends to "use" them. It is so easy for me to live their life with them, that I am in some danger of losing all sophistication and perspective. I feel hurried sometimes, as though I must get "written out" in this country within the next few years, because so much is no longer strange or unusual to me. The life in the scrub is peculiarly right. While I was there, I did all the illegal things too; stalked deer with a light at night, out of season, kept the family in squirrels, paddled the boat while my friend dynamited mullet, shot limpkin on the river edge and had to wade waist deep in cypress swamp to get him. (Tarr 45)

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

In the novel, Rawlings shows how the wilderness setting enables the less rigid conception of gender. Annie, Piety, and Kezzy embody such flexibility in the gender roles of backwoods community. At the fence-raising scene in the first chapter, Annie works and jokes around among men while other women prefer staying inside chatting. Her bold attitude and unconventional behavior often shock other women, and elicit a bitter remark from Piety's mother, Mrs. Lantry: "Tain't mannerly no-ways to go scaperin' acrost to the men-folks that-a-way" (18). Nevertheless, Annie strongly attracts Piety in her girlhood. After the fence-raising, the Lantry family has a huge feast with dancing. Mrs. Lantry refuses to dance with her husband and instead Annie dances furiously with him. Her "warm sweet steam" that "came from [her] flesh" fascinates Piety (27). Here Rawlings stresses Annie's physical and sensual appeal and positively associates it with health and inner contentment.

Like Annie, Piety is characterized by her love for the scrub life as well as by her unconventionality. She prefers working in the field with her father Lantry to staying inside doing housework with her mother and sister. She also learns how to shoot a gun and hunt small animals. Piety and Lantry develop a closer relationship with each other than with anyone else in their family, which sometimes makes her mother and sister feel envious and even hostile. When the mother condemns Piety for doing field work "jest to git away from the housework," the father defends the daughter: "Don't none of you know what you're talkin' about. She perfeckly enjoys it. She's got a knack for it, hit comes to her natural" (36). By making Lantry insist that a woman could be "naturally" good at the work that is conventionally considered to be men's, Rawlings indicates that the gender conception in the nature-oriented environment could be more unstable than one expects it to be. However, the

meaning of the word "natural" fluctuates as Piety reaches marriageable age. Becoming aware of his declining health, Lantry starts worrying about Piety's future and persuades her into marrying Willy Jacklin who had courted her for a while in a rather awkward manner. Seeing his daughter's apparent disinterestedness, Lantry tells her: "A man o' your own's natural. Seems like ever'thing go along better when you do what's natural" (52). This time the word "natural" is used to stress the necessity for Piety to submit to the traditional gender norms embodied in marriage. Even though she does not exactly understand its significance, she accepts her father's advice and marries Willy.

Despite her father's encouragement, Piety could never consider this marriage as "natural." All through her married life she remains emotionally distant from Willy: "She felt a detached affection for her husband, but when he was out of her sight she seldom thought of him" (54). Piety's rather thin affection for Willy could partly be attributable to the emphasis Rawlings places on the father-daughter relationship. Only Piety and Lantry in the family share the love for the scrub and the tenacious efforts to stay there, and Piety later teaches that love to her son Lant, who would likewise choose backwoods life. Through chronicling how the father, the daughter, and the grandson respectively develop a harmonious relationship with the environment beyond their gender roles, Rawlings tries to present a human/nature relationship without using the literary convention which associates both women and nature with passivity and submissiveness.

Kezzy, the step-daughter of Piety's brother Zeke, is yet another female character who calls existing gender norms into question. The love story between Kezzy and Lant forms a significant subplot of the novel, but it is less about a romantic relationship in the idyllic setting as in existing pastoral tradition: It is more about an ideally equal relationship between man and woman which is made possible by the wilderness setting. In stressing this, Rawlings contrasts Kezzy and Lant's first girlfriend Ardis. Ardis is from "over the creek" area which is more populated and developed than the scrub and thus is supposed to be culturally more sophisticated. While Kezzy is strong-minded and sturdily built, Ardis is extremely shy and her body looks light and fragile. Ardis's frail and helpless look attracts Lant as a sign of feminine sophistication and submissiveness, and that very feature irritates Kezzy and Piety. This comparison is apparently based on the country/city, wilderness/civilization binaries often found in pastoral narratives, but through her use of these opposing values, Rawlings makes clear that the conformity to

gender norms is not necessarily something "natural" but rather culturally constructed. That Ardis seems much closer to traditional womanhood than Kezzy and Piety do suggest that gender roles in the wilderness are paradoxically quite blurred.

Like Piety, Kezzy is less interested in marriage. As Zeke aptly states, "You kin gentle a wild hog and a raccoon and a 'possum and a wild horse. I even knowed a feller had a rattlesnake in a barrel. He claimed hit knowed him and wouldn't strike. But don't git nary idee you kin gentle a woman has got no mind to be gentled" (197). Here Rawlings uses the association between women and nature as well as the one between marriage and domestication of animals, only to emphasize Kezzy's untamable character and her power to be able to make her own decisions. She eventually marries Lant's cousin Cleve but remains self-determinined mainly through her willingness for labor. In pastoral tradition, it is usually a faithful husbandman who represents the value of labor in living close to nature. Rawlings revises this tradition by giving the husbandman's role to her female characters. Similar to Annie and Piety, Kezzy does not hesitate to do men's work, and her hard-working nature marks a sharp contrast to Cleve who never works constantly.

Toward the end of the novel, Rawlings redefines the meaning of the word "natural," and in so doing indicates the possibility of more equal men-to-women / human-to-nature relationship. When Cleve informs the revenuers of the location of the stills of the scrub moonshiners including Lant, Kezzy faces the dilemma of choosing either her husband or the communal values of the scrub. Ultimately she decides to let people know her husband's betrayal. She says to Piety, "Hit ain't natural for a woman to go agin her husband, whatever he do. But 'taint natural for Cleve to do what he's a-doing" (308). Here Rawlings gives the word "natural" two conflicting meanings: The first half of the sentence clearly points to the gendered conception of what a woman is supposed to do in marital relationship, while the second half implies a larger, more ethical value which encompasses humans and their environment. In choosing to protect the whole scrub community, Kezzy chooses a larger relationship between men and women, and consequently, between men and nature, which goes beyond the existing gendered human relationship.

Cleve's betrayal marks a climatic moment in the novel. It is described not only as disloyalty against his own people but also as violation of natural law which is the significant theme of the novel. By contacting the federal agents, Cleve breaks the "natural" balance between the people and the surrounding

environment that had been sustained through moonshining. Throughout the novel Rawlings suggests that moonshining is not merely an economic activity which barely sustains the lives of the impoverished scrub people; like farming and hunting, it provides harmony between humans and nature. Rawlings describes Lant working in his still in complete accord with the nature of the scrub:

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

Here Rawlings shows how Lant and his moonshining still perfectly blend in with the surrounding environment. The dense vegetation of the hammock hides the still and protects it from outsiders, and there Lant sits working quietly, with the tentativeness of a wild animal, to the extent that he becomes a part of the entire ecosystem of the scrub. When the federal agents find the still under Cleve's instruction and burn it, they also destroy the hammock surrounding it: "The trees in the swamp had burned for forty feet around, and the flames had licked far up into the hammock. Sweet gum and magnolia and hickory and palm stood sick and charred." Lant, "trembling like a rabbit," says, "Hit'll be a year 'fore the hammock's green agin" (314). Significantly, here Lant is concerned more about the environmental disaster than about the destruction of his still itself. He can build a still again when the agents are gone, but the destroyed nature is not easily retrievable. Though it might sound paradoxical, Lant's concern for the nature of the scrub hints that moonshining has created a non-exploitive relationship between humans and nature. Through moonshining, Lant demonstrates how humans can, against the assumption that they are fundamentally different from all the plants and creatures, develop a cooperative relationship with nature beyond the form of domination and be a significant part of the environment.

At the end of the novel, Lant and Kezzy finally become united as a couple, and Kezzy proposes that they get married and work together at a new still: "You and me git married, and me to he'p you at the outfit?" (332). Kezzy reimagines

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

Conclusion

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *South Moon Under*, Hurston and Rawlings explore the relationship between human and nature with emphasis on its correlation with gender. It should be noted, however, that the two writers' view on nature is considerably different. Hurston does not necessarily describe modernization as harmful to the Southern black community and rather contemplates how to incorporate their tradition into modern life through depicting John as the embodiment of such cultural hybridization. Whereas Hurston looks into the possibility of a balanced middle ground between nature and culture, Rawlings is drawn more to wilderness. Rawlings describes the signs of modernization mainly as undesirable interventions against nature, and when she illustrates the beauty of the scrub she sometimes completely obliterates human presence:

> Men had reached into the scrub and had gone away, uneasy in that vast indifferent peace; for a man was nothing, crawling ant-like among the myrtle bushes under the pines. Now they were gone, it was as though they had never been. The silence of the scrub was primordial. The wood-thrush crying across it might have been the first bird in the world—or the last. (119)

By claiming "a man is nothing" in the scrub, Rawlings emphasizes that wilderness space is ultimately uninhabitable and thus unexploitable. But in doing so she unwittingly falls into the mystification of nature which is a signature of the male pastoral imagination she aims to critique. Her tendency

to idealize the untouched wilderness could lead her into reaffirming the more traditional pastoral narrative mode which romanticizes and feminizes nature as "virgin land."

To Rawlings, the nature of backwoods Florida was a whole new discovery. To a fledgling writer who just found a perfect material, nature was something "out there" that needed to be made familiar through her writing at least at the time she was working on her first novel, and as Rieger points out, that might explain her problematic "othering" of nature (110). In later works such as *The Yearling* (1938) and *Cross Creek* (1942), Rawlings would continue to explore the question of whether humans can build an equal relationship with nature beyond romanticization or subordination (which are both forms of othering), yet in *South Moon Under*, which was her first novel to deal with Southern wilderness landscape, she was yet to resolve her own pastoral impulse.

To Hurston who grew up in Eatonville at the turn of the century, nature was something familiar, yet later as a writer of Harlem Renaissance she often saw blackness strongly associated with nature in the contemporary literary discourse. By and large the writers of Harlem Renaissance used this association to meet their own literary purposes. Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), which fully uses the nature-woman association in an imagistic way, is one good example. As a black female writer, Hurston was aware of the danger that such an association could be used negatively against women and it was thus most urgent for her to turn that negative association into something empowering in a way that would be convincing to her heterogeneous audience. Meisenhelder suggests that the pastoral setting of Hurston's fiction could potentially be a device to tell about the "models of black masculinity and of female resistance to male oppression" to black audience while masking it with quaint images and languages popularized for white audience (36). Ironically, however, contemporary critics of her work, especially male black writers such as Richard Wright and Sterling Brown, generally failed to understand Hurston's motives and criticized the seemingly exaggerated quaintness of the settings and the language of her Southern narratives.[16] For that very reason it is important to reread Hurston's fiction from the pastoral context in order to fully examine how she, as a Southern female black writer, created interventionist narratives through her re-vision of pastoral tradition.

Ultimately, the difference between the two writers' pastoral narratives reflects the process in which each of them respectively came to grapple with nature through their writings. It is nevertheless beneficial to read their work

together, for it would shed a new light on the cultural condition on which these female writers of the modernist era sought to refigure Southern space and its relation to human.

Notes

[1] See Leonard, "Florida in the 1920s," and Rogers, 287-303. Rogers reports on the permanent population increase during the decade: "Florida started the 1920s with 968,470 people, and by 1930 had 1,468,211. The white population rose from 638,153 to 1,035,205, blacks from 329,487 to 431,828" (291).

[2] Bigelow, 3-4 and Lillios, 11.

[3] See Bone, 758.

[4] See Harrison and Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*. For the more general discussions on the link between women and nature in American literature, see Kolodony and Westling.

[5] Marx discusses how the American pastoral imagination has in fact facilitated the acceptance of industrialization by incorporating the new technology into the natural environment based on the ideal of "middle landscape.".

[6] See Rieger, "Don't Fence Me In."

[7] For the relationship of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and the mobility of the southern blacks during the 1920s, see Bone, 759-65.

[8] Meisenhelder discusses how Hurston critiques the oppressive relationship between the Southern black men and women in the novel. West follows Meisenhelder's argument and closely examines the subversive quality of the female characters. Grant also sees John's oppressive nature but further relates the gender issue with the representation of nature in the novel. Lowe in "Modes of Black Masculinity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*," while critiquing John's masculinity, comments that "models of patriarchy . . . contains noble, inspiring, and socially useful functions as well" (104).

[9] In the New Orleans section of *Mules and Men* and "Hoodoo in America," Hurston herself uses the term "hoodoo," meaning both the religious system and conjure/magic practices developed in the American South. Since "hoodoo" sometimes signifies only magical act, I use "Voodoo" to denote the complex system including both religious and nonreligious practices. For the development of New Orleans Voodoo, see Mulira, who notes that "By 1947 the term *Voodoo* had been virtually replaced with *hoodoo* when referring to the money-making traffic of talismans, luck powders, and bottled love. Nevertheless, the nonreligious elements of Voodoo are by-products of Voodoo as a faith system whose origins are African" (63).

Some scholars choose the Creole spelling "Vodou" to signify the Afro-Caribbean religious system, attempting to "differentiate this complex Haitian religion from the erroneous portrayals of 'Voodoo' in Hollywood movies and popular culture" (Rieger,

Clear-Cutting Eden, 181, n.2).
[10] Studies focusing on Hurston's use of Vodou are: Southerland, Dutton, Stein, Lamothe, Trefzer, and Rieger, *Clear-Cutting Eden*, 92-134. Studies that specifically mention hoodoo, *Mules and Men* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* include: Wall, "Mules and Men and Women," Spiesman, and Menke.
[11] The rare exceptions are Wall who considers Voodoo in *Mules and Men* as "the sources of female empowerment," and Menke who points out that *Mules and Men* should be considered "integral companion text" to *Jonah's Gourd Vine* just as *Tell My Horse* is to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Wall 672; Menke 123).
[12] Mulira presents a different view: "The emphasis on hoodoo causes a revolutionary change within the world of the Voodoo. The predominance of female rulers was undermined. Even though women remained part of the religious sects and were numerically well represented in the fields of magic and medicine, the majority of cult leaders and hoodoo practitioners were men, generally referred to as hoodoo or Voodoo doctors, medicine men, root doctors, or conjurers" (56).
[13] It should also be noted that Hurston records several practices specifically dealing with lawsuits and court scrapes, which hints at arbitrariness of the contemporary jurisdiction system ruled by the whites.
[14] Stein notes that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is also "dismissive of Voodoo on a conscious level but is suffused imagistically and formally with Voodoo belief" (71).
[15] Hurston revisits the deathbed scene in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*. For the mother-daughter relationship in *Dust Tracks*, see Lionett, who discusses on the deathbed scene as follows: "the folk custom of veiling the mirror (so that the dead may rest in peace and not trouble the living) is implicitly criticized: the dying mother suggests that the mirror should not be veiled if the past and the faces of our mothers in it are to leave their imprint on the memory of the living so that we may live in peace with history and be thus able to 'think back through our mothers'" (117-18).
[16] For this topic, see Guttman, Hearn, and West, *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture*.

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