

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**HEALING AND FICTIVE SELVES**

My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. Circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no. But I...was afraid to tell a story the way I wanted. (Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 171)

The stuff of my being is matter, ever changing, ever moving, but never lost; so what need of denominations and creeds to deny myself the comfort of all my fellow men? The wide belt of the universe has no need for finger-rings. I am one with the infinite and need no other assurance. (Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 226)

This chapter examines the ways Black American women in their autobiographies tried to present themselves—not as White women, nor in their accepted roles but as care givers, providers as well as career women pursuing goals. The autobiographers during the period of segregation cannot afford to completely ignore it nor remain confined to its narrow structures. They have to look for means of articulation to connect with their own sisterhood as well as other readers. The chapter aims to look into the ways strategically placed silences and gaps in texts can at times be techniques utilized by Black American women writers to revert power structures. It purports to analyze two autobiographies that were published during the 1940s and 1950s: Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and Marian Anderson's *My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography* (1956). The chosen autobiographies have puzzled and irritated critics and general readers alike due to their unequivocal refusal to portray the atmosphere of racial inequity and hatred defining and shaping Black American lives of the time. Despite the fact that they depict the writers' experiences of growing up during the early twentieth century which is replete with numerous race riots, episodes of lynching and other forms of violence, almost none of such atrocities find direct mention in the texts.

As a point of departure, the chapter starts with the following primary hypotheses:

- That the chosen writers despite being severely limited by the system of patronage in which they were entrapped find their own unique ways of confronting it;
- That a recourse to speech/language as an unproblematic medium of resistance is not always accessible by or available to the chosen writers;

- That silence rather than being a passive acceptance of enforced domination can be a weapon of dignified opposition;
- That the writers exemplify how trauma can be “worked through” rather than being “acted out”.

It is shown that the chosen texts’ overt silences around contemporary race issues are deliberate and intended not just to appease Whites in power—the cryptic gaps on a careful reading reveal how muteness can become a mechanism of resistance. The autobiographers under scrutiny consciously manipulate language and infuse meaning to what is directly stated as well as to what remains unexpressed or muted. In so doing, they transform the understanding of silence as manifestations of oppression/victimization to seeing it as an active and agentive, albeit subtle form of resistance. Willful, deliberate employment of silence offers the autobiographers the scope to change general perspectives of Black identity as circumscribed within and therefore, preoccupied with White domination. In other words, the texts under scrutiny in this chapter refrain from projecting a victimized Black identity to present a self that is dignified, composed, and that helps promote the view that despite all atrocities Black Americans have been able to retain their mental equilibrium. We see in them an illustration of how a forcefully imposed deprivation of speech/language can be subverted and put to the victim’s own use. By consciously avoiding explicit discussions of race, the autobiographers engage in ‘strategic’ sustenance and survival of the community while also highlighting how race cannot/should not be the only prism refracting views and perceptions of Black American identity.

In this context, the observations of Marin and Sommer may be referred to in support of the argument. In her discussion of female visual artists’ use of silence in their works, “Dignity and voice in silence: contemporary female visual artists’ quiet empathy,” Candela Delgado Marin writes,

[W]omen, at many points in history, have had to acquire a communicative system to be integrated in the existing discourses, where, traditionally, their voices have been marginalised or silenced. Therefore, they have built a channel to access cultural memory through silence. (71)

Without elaboration, they use their medium to present or state their view/vision. Marin draws attention to “the women artists [who]... have regained possession of the previously imposed muteness,” to use it as part of “a discursive rebellion of the no-longer social and

cultural subaltern” who will adopt a strategic silence when brought to “the podium of representation and visibility” (72). Seen in this light, Marin holds that,

silence in their works becomes a countertale, based on the principle of never overwhelming either the piece of art or the experience of the spectator with words. Conversely, the audience will be granted the chance of reflecting on art, aiming to interpret and to enrich its original indeterminacies. (ibid)

Marin, here, comments on how strategically used muteness can help avoid appropriations of the artist’s work and establish a more egalitarian and fruitful relationship in its place. Placing her perspectives in our context, the gaps force readers to question as to the reason behind the omissions and thereby, force them to leave aside their own preconceived notions of the text, if any. Much as they might assume superiority over the writer’s textual universe, they are met with a knowledge of their inadequacy in claiming full access to or knowledge of the text.

Doris Sommer has also pointed out how strategic omissions in a text can revert power structures, with the writer skilfully manoeuvring through the expectations and demands put upon her. The exercise of the author’s ‘choice’ makes all the difference between viewing her as a passive participant or as willingly and actively frustrating the expectations of readers through the text’s silences. The desire for an uninhibited entry into the author’s life through the medium of the written word can actually be a covert attempt at gaining control. In the words of Sommer:

Maybe empathy...is a good feeling that covers over a controlling disposition, what Derrida calls “an inquisitorial insistence, an order, a petition...To demand the narrative of the other, to extort it from him like a secretless secret.” (198)

The seeking for a bond of familiarity with the textual world, then, is an implicit way of denying the writer’s exclusive authority over his/her text. With their assumptions of gaining complete access to the narrator’s life, readers tend to deprive the author of his/her right to individuality and privacy, despite “the text’s rhetorical...performance of a politically safe distance” (ibid). When the distance between the textual ‘I’ and the reader as an ‘other’ is sought to be removed, it leads to unstable and untenable interpretations/identifications.

It is here that the employment of silence, instead of being an enforced limitation or barrier, becomes an active means of resistance as mentioned above. It allows the writer the requisite agency to fight against her own annihilation in the battle over narrative control. The gaps in the texts pertaining to familiar or expected materials serve to pass the message of her particularity and “cautions privileged readers against easy appropriations of Otherness into manageable universal categories” (199). It is seen that not only is this a feature of Black women’s life writing but a part of such narratives by men (and women) irrespective of colour.

Referring to such strategic use of silence, Sommer cites Henri Lefebvre’s use of the term, ‘screen’ to mean both an apparatus that displays as well as a means of cover. The silences in the text are a sort of screen that allows the writer the ability to show or cover of her own will. Calculated muteness, thus, becomes a powerful narrative technique of resistance or exclusion or for privacy.

The straitjacket within which writers like Hurston and Anderson had to work is traced by Claudine Reynaud to the time of the slave narratives which demanded some sort of authenticating documents by their White abolitionist sponsors in order to be published. While the need for authenticators or guarantors no longer remained after the system of slavery was legally abolished, authoritarian power continued to be exerted by the system of patronage and through editorial restrictions and demands. In her deliberation on the tight limits put on the subject’s agency by such power regimes, Reynaud quotes Robert Stepto’s rephrasing of Bloom’s “anxiety of influence”:

In Afro-American letters...[t]he competition has rarely been between artist and artist for control of an image, line, or trope; rather it has been between artist and authenticator (editor, publisher, guarantor, patron) for control of a fiction—usually the idea of history or of the artist’s personal history—that exists outside the artist’s text and functions primarily as an antagonistic force with regard to this text’s imaginative properties. (56)

The real tension at the heart of the works of Black American women writers like Hurston and Anderson is to get their voices, trapped within a multitude of pressures from different ends, heard. The demands of the patrons, editors, publishers, and the plausible readership create a cacophony of noises amidst which the writer’s voice tends to get drowned. To quote Reynaud again:

The editor...carries on; acting as authenticator, he or she actively competes with the author for control over the production of the text. The resulting unequal dialogue mirrors the racial, sexual, and class tensions of society at large, the Jim Crow laws, the status of women, and especially black women, in the United States of the 1940s. (ibid)

The struggle, therefore, is about “controlling” the narrative. And since prevailing circumstances, as has been discussed, did not leave much scope for direct assertion of the authorial voice, the writers under question had to find alternate narrative strategies—strategies which a careful reading reveals to be coded into the texts. In this regard, the present chapter, as already stated earlier, argues that the chosen texts’ explicit avoidance of discussions regarding contemporary racial atrocities is a consciously chosen narrative technique.

Silence, then, is a tacit form of resistance which also pays heed to “ethically responsible survival,” to use one of Sommer’s phrases again (Sommer 199). It is an especially useful rhetorical device in the case of writers for whom the self-representational project is enmeshed with feelings of anxiety over “excessive self-exposure” which might ultimately endanger the entire community (Smith and Watson 12). The texts examined in this chapter, as stated already, bring to light the plight of Black women writing in the first half of the twentieth century who looked forward to challenge denigration and assert narrative control, but were compelled to do so within the narrow constraints put forth by the very regimes of power they sought to challenge.

It is in the light of these arguments that we intend to examine the self-representational trajectories of the chosen texts. The authors trigger observant readers to see their refusal to detail painful and humiliating racial encounters as strategic omissions. While pain and racial trauma are coded into the texts, they consciously refrain from projecting a victimised Black identity. We finally place the selected writers’ use of silent resistance within the framework of LaCapra’s “working through” of trauma rather than “acting (it) out,” which has been mentioned in the frame chapter.

In what follows, we look into each of our chosen texts individually while trying to justify our arguments.

### *Dust Tracks on a Road*

*Dust Tracks* starts off with a sort of forewarning regarding the socio-cultural and temporal specificity of Hurston's experiences and the role played by those experiences in moulding her views and opinions. To quote from the text:

Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say...[Y]ou will have to know something about the time and place where I came from, in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life. (10)

Such phenomenological approach is also evident elsewhere early on in the autobiography:

Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural. There is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle...Naturally, I picked up the reflections of life around me with my own instruments, and absorbed what I gathered according to my inside juices. (44)

In passages such as these, Hurston's autobiography accounts for an 'objective' reality as well as a subjective understanding and rendering of that supposed reality. She firmly asserts that the worldview she has come to be endowed with is grounded in the experiences of her life. By validating the views she holds in terms of individual experiences garnered from life, she suggests how assumptions regarding the 'shared' worldview of particular communities fail to take into account the differences of circumstances into which different members from even the same community are born into. Such differences colour perceptions and mindsets.

Hurston's autobiography which allows her to retrospectively shape and narrate her life, thus, becomes a sort of defensive justification of her perspectives on race and Black-White relations. The statements regarding unique, individual patterns and trajectories of experience explain Hurston's seeming oblivion to any vicious racial dynamics despite, as Maya Angelou points out in her "Foreword" to the text, being born in a time when "[t]he southern air around her most assuredly crackled with the flames of Ku Klux Klan raiders" and despite having "lived through the race riots and other atrocities of her time" (7). Her birth in the relatively cocooned atmosphere of an exclusively Negro town, the autobiography suggests, forms the basis of her secured outlook:

I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It...was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America. (10)

In the description of Eatonville and her family lineage, Hurston's sense of pride is obvious. The picture she paints of her initial formative years, when her mother was still alive, is one of self-sufficiency: the family had sufficient foods, sufficient rooms for each of the children and never had to depend on others for anything. Moreover, her father was the "elected mayor of Eatonville for three terms" (17) and had also "formulated" (ibid) the laws and guidelines on which the town functioned for a long while. Hurston also credits her mother's upbringing, who always inspired her children to dream big. As she mentions in her text:

Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to "jump at de sun" We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground. (20)

Hurston, however, is also aware of the way Eatonville came into existence amidst the wilderness of Florida as a byproduct of the quest for new frontiers. From the very first chapters of her autobiography, she shows an understanding of the way the wilderness is cut down and cleared for plantation of cotton and other crops. Prior to her parents' shifting to Florida, Hurston gives a brief account of her parents' early life in Alabama.

She mentions that her father John Hurston had been a poor worker who had learnt to read and write even as he carried on his work for farmers. Her father's background draws attention to a class divide within the Black community: the poor people lived "over the creek" which signaled "the wrong side of the railroad tracks" (15). Her mother's family on the other hand was financially secure and she married Hurston despite the family resistance. In fact, Mrs. Potts, the mother, refused to speak to her daughter after her marriage. The father, Mr. Potts was more supportive and escorted his daughter to her wedding along with her brother. John Hurston continued to work for a better life and after the birth of three children he went out to Florida:

Months later he pitched into the hurly-burly of South Florida. So he heard about folks building a town all out of colored people. It seemed like a good place to go.



Later on, he was to be elected Mayor of Eatonville for three terms, and to write the local laws. The village of Eatonville is still governed by the laws formulated by my father. (17)

Hurston's father was part of the group of Black men who set up the village of Eatonville, mostly occupied by Blacks. Her mother joined her husband a year later and set up their new home together.

Hurston describes her parents beginning a new life in Florida and their gradual rise up the social and financial ladder: "Both of them swore that things were going to better, and it came to pass as they said" (19). Further, according to Hurston:

They bought land, built a roomy house, planted their acres and reaped. Children kept coming—more mouths to feed and more feet for shoes. But neither of them seemed to have minded that. (ibid)

Hurston presents a picture of their growing up in that house full of love and care. Not only did their mother care for their basic needs she also attended to their homework. Since there were eight of them, the evening sessions were like a mini classroom:

After supper we gathered in Mama's room, and everybody had to get their lessons for the next day. Mama carried us all past long division in arithmetic, and parsing sentences in grammar, by diagrams on the black-board. That was as far as she had gone. Then the younger ones were turned over to my oldest brother, Bob, and Mama sat and saw to it that we paid attention. (20)

Their mother ensured that they all stayed focused on their studies and encouraged them to aim high. Their father on the other hand was worried about Black people being too spirited. He had apprehensions that there would be a backlash from the White people. In fact, he warned Hurston that she was "going to be hung" before she had grown up. Also,

Posses with ropes and guns were going to drag me out sooner or later on account of that stiff neck I toted. I was going to tote a hungry belly by reason of my forward ways. (ibid)

Her comments on her father's warnings point to the hostility of some of the White people in the background. Whether in Alabama or in Florida, Black people could not afford to deny the racial discrimination controlling most of their lives.

The text's subtle, sly references call attention to a shrewd mind trying to make her way through oppressive structures and challenging readers to find the real Hurston in the complex web that she weaves. She plays with the autobiographical demands of authenticity and accuracy when she mocks with the details of her birth:

This is all hear-say. Maybe, some of the details of my birth as told me might be a little inaccurate, but it is pretty well established that I really did get born. (24)

Such light-hearted, witty remarks regarding perhaps the most basic information in a person's life subtly challenge the 'sacred' conventions of autobiography. Indeed, Hurston, at times, directly affronts readers with the notion of story-telling. Rather than narrating the 'truth' of her lived life, she is weaving a story and it is up to her audience to decide which part of that story to believe and which to disregard, "When I began to make up stories I cannot say. Just from one fancy to another, adding more and more detail until they seemed real" (50). In Hurston's text, then, the narrator is not the conventional autobiographical subject but one who presents herself in the role of a story-teller

The writing of autobiography forms a part of the task of "build(ing) a statue" (28) of the self as Hurston would like to see it. She is conscious of the fact that identities are imposed on people by the dominant segment of society, in this case mainstream White American society. She observes that people tend to project themselves as expected by others:

I did not know then, as I know now, that people are prone to build a statue of the kind of person that it pleases them to be. And few people want to be forced to ask themselves, "What if there is no me like my statue?" (28)

She is conscious of the dangers of falling into the trap of public expectations, often pushed through by the publisher demanding a particular kind of narrative. As much as that statue is self-deceiving, it is also a mask meant to thwart off over-enthusiastic scrutinizers. Only a careful reading of the text would allow readers to see beyond the author's projected image, her statue. Her answer to the problem was to get rid of fear and get on with her work, allowing scope for imaginative flights while not losing connection with reality.

The accusations of harming racial pride in the process of an overt loyalty to Whites come mainly from Hurston's numerous depictions of sympathetic White people who extend helping hands throughout her journey. The first such portrayal is that of the author's

Godfather, a White man who not just assisted with her birth but continued being an influential mentor while she was growing up. The child Hurston's conversations with this man exemplify the kind of self-hatred that young Black children are fed:

I had one person who pleased me always. That was the robust, grey-haired, white man who had helped me get into the world... He called me Snidlits, explaining that Zora was a hell of a name to give a child.

“Snidlits, don't be a nigger,” he would say to me over and over.\* “Niggers lie and lie! (32)

The White man does everything—from belittling her name to depraving her racial group identity—that might infuse the young child with self-loathing. Despite such obvious derogatory remarks on her race, however, the adult author defends her supposed Godfather with a footnote that the word “nigger” was not referred to in a racial sense. She is aware of the fact that the person was also giving her kindly advice to do better than the common people. Like her, he must have been aware of her coloured looks so his words were figurative and not necessarily racial. Seen from this angle, Hurston's refusal to consider his words insulting, appear to be acceptable. Hurston, in fact, continues defending the man by purposely maintaining an apparently ignorant stance regarding the racial implications of his words,

I knew without being told that he was not talking about my race when he advised me not to be a nigger. He was talking about class rather than race. He frequently gave money to Negro schools. (33)

It is unlikely that she would be unaware of the ways race and class were entangled or of the fact that they could not be thought of as separate entities. Yet Hurston chooses to ignore such connections. This obsequiousness is also found in several other descriptions of benevolent Whites. The child author's next memorable encounter with Whites is her coming across the two White women who visit her school and then take an interest in her. These women provide her with what seem to her exotic things like “stuffed dates and preserved ginger,” and “one hundred goldy new pennies” (38)—the beauty of which fill her with unforgettable joy—but most importantly, they send her boxes full of books. Such recognition of the benevolence and magnanimity shown her continues even later in life

when she speaks with fervour regarding the generosity of people like J. W. Lippincott, her Godmother Mrs. Mason, or her mentor Franz Boas.

The exhibition of an overt loyalty and gratitude have, however, made readers and critics alike to ignore some of Hurston's keen observations at times. While speaking of the ladies who load her with many gifts, the author does not fail to notice how, she as a Black girl, is made an object of gaze of the White women. To those women, no matter their kind intentions, a Black child who can read really well is a 'weird,' surprising encounter and someone who would obviously be in need of their condescension:

The whites who came down from the North were often brought by their friends to visit the village school. A Negro school was something strange to them, and while they were always sympathetic and kind, curiosity must have been present, also. (35)

Again, tacitly Hurston mentions how she was put on exhibition in order to amuse the ladies in question:

I was led out on the grounds and they took my picture under a palm tree. They handed me what was to me then, a heavy cylinder done up in fancy paper, tied with a ribbon, and they told me goodbye, asking me not to open it until I got home. (38)

Hurston, then, like an apt trickster, manages to appease those in power with her ardent display of gratitude and yet subtly puts forth the double standards in covering up curiosity mixed with condescension as generous goodwill. This same comprehension of the general attitude towards Blacks is also evident in the way she casually writes about an otherwise very humiliating episode with renowned anthropologist and her mentor, Franz Boas. As Hurston recounts, it was common practice amongst the young researchers under Boas' guidance and mentorship to refer to him as "Papa". Owing to this, when she goes to meet him once, she casually mentions him by that intimate yet respectful term in front of his secretary who warns her to be careful not to use it in front of Boas himself. Notwithstanding the warning, however, Hurston brings up the matter at a social gathering organised by the Department of Anthropology. The response from Boas on hearing his Black student address him as "Papa" is indicative of his racist mindset:

“Of course, Zora is my daughter. Certainly!” he said with a smile. “Just one of my missteps, that’s all.” The sabre cut on his cheek, which it is said he got in a duel at Heidelberg, lifted in a smile. (121)

Hurston exposes the inability and unwillingness of the White society to really accept her as one amongst them without delving directly or too much into it. While Boas was referred to by all as “Papa,” the use of that term by a Black student was an unacceptable misnomer—something which the White anthropologist had to correct by mocking her as one of his mistakes. Despite all his supposedly racial tolerance and acceptance, Boas has to show Hurston her place, even if in an apparently humorous manner. *Dust Tracks*, thus, makes clear Hurston’s modus operandi throughout the text from the very beginning: the juxtaposition of an apparently deferential attitude to power structures with tacit critiques of how that power operates.

As already discussed, then, the author maintains her calm and composure even in cases where her dignity as a human being and a free citizen is questioned and insulted, and deliberately avoids indulging in any reactionary behaviour. While this tends to be interpreted as disloyalty to her racial group, we argue that through such gentle, ladylike demeanour, Hurston actually is upholding the pride of her race. The stance that she maintains throughout *Dust Tracks* allows her, at many points, to debunk the assumptions of White society by sharing knowledge of its inherent hypocrisies without ever putting on a direct frontal attack. In his “Afterword” to the autobiography, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes:

Part of Hurston’s received heritage...was the idea that racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is “deprived” where different, and whose psyches are in the main “pathological.” (242)

Gates points out how the Black existence is reduced to a “pathological” preoccupation or obsession with race and racism. Speaking of Hurston’s response to such views of the Black identity, he further writes:

Hurston thought this idea degrading, its propagation a trap, and railed against it. It was, she said, upheld by “the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature

somehow has given them a dirty deal”...Hurston chose deliberately to ignore this “false picture that distorted...” (ibid)

Read in this manner, *Dust Tracks* becomes the attempt of a Black individual to portray a self that is independent of any racial baggage. Despite consistent assaults to her psychological integrity, Hurston remains undeterred—tenacious and resolute to stand her ground even amidst all injustices. In this regard, Francoise Lionnet in “Autoethnography: The An-Archic Style of *Dust Tracks on a Road*” has linked her philosophy of racial pride to some of Fanon’s ideas developed in *The Wretched of the Earth* and in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Lionnet argues:

Since Fanon, too, denounced revenge and fixation on the past...perhaps he can provide some answer to the questions we ask of Hurston...Fanon states that the quest for disalienation must be mediated by the refusal to accept the “Tower of the Past”...and the problems of the present as definitive, in other words by the belief that only...the future can move and inspire human beings to action and to revolution. (122-123)

Hurston and Fanon, according to Lionnet, go their separate ways only in that the former does not share the revolutionary zeal so typical of both *Wretched* and *BSWM*. *Dust Tracks* is its author’s personal plea against not remaining preoccupied with the past and manoeuvring her actions towards creating a secured future. To her, as exemplified in her autobiography, the best answer to the legacy of slavery and racism is in upgrading one’s own self and culture to the maximum heights possible. This explains her approach towards things in the universities she attends where she decides to focus on her own growth rather than remaining transfixed with the other rich students, both Black and White. While at Barnard, for instance, Hurston writes that she has no “lurid tales” of being discriminated against to hold onto; rather what the institute does is to instil her with a sense of pride and privilege in her own capacity. And this pride, the writer specifically mentions, in no way, issues from comparing herself to White standards or from proving her ability in front of a White audience. It is to be taken “for granted” (121) that her talents and intellectual ability are known to all by dint of the very fact that she was at the university, “Else, why was I at Barnard? Not everyone who cries, “Lord! Lord!” can enter those sacred iron gates” (ibid).

In line with Fanon’s thinking, then, Hurston was adamant in proving that the Black psyche could rise far above being a mere victimised, degraded, and traumatised by-product

of slavery or racism. Despite being exposed to a bitter history of racism in everyday life, Black people have managed to hold their intellectual well-being. It is here that LaCapra's concept of working through trauma in order to attain some sort of meaning comes in. Hurston maintains a balanced approach willing to examine and question the socio-historical forces behind the emergence and prevalence of slavery and racism instead of adopting a vainglorious stance of Black nobility and innocence. Hurston's exposure of intra-racial flaws—of internal loopholes within the Black community—rather than being a betrayal of her kinsfolk, then, is an attempt at placing history in perspective. Instead of indulging in a blame game wherein the opposite party becomes the sole perpetrator of evil, she tries to understand the minute nuances of a very complex history in which, she realises, at many points her own people were as much at fault as the Whites.

This recognition of the need for self-scrutiny becomes especially evident in the author's encounter with Cudjo Lewis as part of her research for the *Journal of Negro History* and Columbia University. Lewis, who had been known as Kossola-O-Lo-Loo-Ay back in his African subcontinent, was the only living "Negro" who had been forced into America on a slave ship. Hurston's conversation with him gives her a firsthand experience of the conditions in Africa which facilitated the slave trade. Lewis re-emphasises her belief that it is only useless to diminish a complicated history with multiple forces behind it into a one-sided story of victims and perpetrators. In a long paragraph which is worth quoting here, Hurston reflects:

The white people had held my people in slavery here in America. They had bought us, it is true and exploited us. But the inescapable fact...was: my people had *sold* me and the white people had bought me. That did away with the folklore I had been brought up on—that the white people had gone to Africa...lured them aboard ship and sailed away. (142)

The writer here introspects on the different factors and agents involved in the African slave trade and observes that Africans themselves were possibly, to some extent, responsible for its success. Continuing her contemplations, she further writes:

It impressed upon me the universal nature of greed and glory. Lack of power and opportunity passes off too often for virtue. (ibid)

This ability to uninhibitedly question one's own implications in a gruesome history and to lay bare one's moral or ethical groundings is, as LaCapra believes, a fundamental step towards working through a traumatic legacy. The "soul-searching" (1852)—to use Moses Hrushovski's term, that Kate Schick cites in "Acting Out and Working Through: Trauma and Insecurity," for a disenchanting critical analysis of the actual circumstances leading to shameful, horrific episodes of history—on Hurston's part makes her aware of the otherwise ignored 'bitter' facts concerning her own racial group and compels her to reflect on the human propensity towards harming others for self-gain. Self-questioning, which also means placing oneself in the others' shoes, allows her insights that ultimately leads the author to a more conscientious, responsible stand. While Hurston has been criticised for her supposedly 'pro-Whites' stand, it is her ability for critical reflection that stops her from an easy recourse to reciprocal cycles of vengeance and violence. Urging people to consciously refrain from mere revenge-seeking and concomitantly from the urge for self-justification, Butler writes:

What role will we assume in the historical relay of violence, who will we become in the response, and will we be furthering or impeding violence by virtue of the response that we make? To respond to violence with violence may well be 'justified', but is it finally a responsible solution? (Butler, *Precarious Life* 17; qtd. in Schick 1852)

Butler, thus, questions the ethical justification of holding on to past injustices and a bitter history. An obsession with revenge or retaliation may only end up perpetuating further violence. As she continues to argue:

[M]oralistic denunciation provides immediate gratification, and even has the effect of temporarily cleansing the speaker of all proximity to guilt through the act of self-righteous denunciation itself. But is this the same as responsibility, understood as taking stock of our world, and participating in its social transformation in such a way that non-violent, cooperative, egalitarian international relations remain the guiding ideal? (ibid)

Hurston's realisation of the futility of holding on to a past—the agents of which have long died, is made evident in her imagined encounter with the progeny of an erstwhile slave-owner. In their conversation with each other, the author imagines the White grandson accusing her of falsely implicating him and holding him responsible for events which



occurred when he wasn't even born, "“Why fix your eyes on me? I respectfully refer you to my ancestors, and bid you a good day”” (195).

While Hurston shares Fanon's zeal in proposing a well-rounded individual free from the shackles of colonialism or racism, then, she is much distanced from his ideas when it comes to violence. "Redemptive violence," she seems to be implying, might be easy but ultimately leads nowhere. An insistence on being preoccupied with the traumatic lineages of the past and holding on to the grievances of a bitter history merely fuels hatred and vengeance. Hurston, instead, believes in working towards creating a better future free from any systemic oppression or injustice. To this end, she promotes Black racial pride by struggling to reclaim their lost cultural heritage and trying to popularise Black culture across all racial and class divides.

In "Acting Out and Working through: Trauma and (In)security", Kate Schick mentions the Harvard Program on Refugee Trauma designed with the intention of emphasising the role of art in trauma healing:

[O]ne aspect of the violence perpetrated against refugees has been the destruction of beauty and culture and that part of the process of recovery is reconnecting with that which was lost. Trauma survivors can access and express their experiences by rediscovering the artistic expressions of their culture: expressing pain through drawing and painting, and telling stories through drama and puppets. (1849)

While the Harvard programme is especially focused on refugee trauma, the argument regarding the disparaged cultural roots of trauma victims and the regenerative power of gaining back access to these cultural elements holds true across variegated episodes of trauma.

Realizing the importance and necessity of preserving art and culture, Hurston records in *Dust Tracks* her efforts to popularise "Negro" songs and music amidst an urban audience comprising mainly of Whites and the Black bourgeoisie. After going to the Bahamas and getting introduced to authentic Bahaman music, she starts feeling that the "music of the Bahaman Negroes was more original, dynamic and African, than American Negro songs" (135). Back in New York, she struggles to present this original, and what she feels as genuine "Negro" music to a larger audience. Failing to gain anyone else's interest and attention, she herself takes on the responsibility and manages to stage

Bahaman songs and dances at the John Golden Theatre in New York. Hurston—aimed with the intention of presenting the “beauty and appeal there was in genuine Negro material, as against the Broadway concept”—succeeds to generate interest amongst a vast audience and creates a “sharp trend towards genuine Negro material” (136).

The author, then, believes and takes pride in her cultural roots and tries to transform views about Black backwardness by pinpointing the specificity and superior quality of what she says to be authentic African music. This same zeal is also apparent in the way she writes about Polk County, Florida and the musicality of its everyday life. Hurston seems to have imbibed its music in the way her descriptions about the place take on a poetic stance and the language becomes rhythmic:

These poets of the swinging blade! The brief, but infinitely graceful, dance of body and axe-head as it lifts over the head in a fluid arc, dances in air and rushes down to bite into the tree, all in beauty...A growling grumble. Then contact! Yeelld-u-u-ow! And a board is laid shining and new on a pile. (126)

The physical toil of the people acquires a poetic grace in the hands of Hurston. In passages such as these, her identification and empathising with the place and its inhabitants become obvious. With the same rhythmic language, the author eulogises the unsung contributions of the Black population to the progress of civilisation:

Polk County. Black men laughing and singing. They go down in the phosphate mines and bring up the wet dust of the bones of pre-historic monsters, to make rich land in far places, so that people can eat...Polk County. The clang of nine-pound hammers on railroad steel. The world must ride. (ibid)

Hurston’s critique of the exploitation of Black men as cheap labour is evident. Her awareness of the ways this labour force is maintained by keeping them trapped in vicious cycles of lawlessness is also made clear: if “[t]he wheels of industry must move” (125), the law must be forbidden from entering the premises of the labourers.

Having gone to Polk County, New Orleans, and then the Bahamas as part of her anthropological research under Boas, she cannot merely remain a collector of data and starts identifying with her roots. As an anthropologist studying a particular culture, Hurston was expected to maintain a detached stance from her object of analysis. But the author as someone studying her own ancestral roots cannot but help become involved in

it. The pages of her autobiography that detail her stay in these places show a person recognizing the beauty of the culture as well as the way the people have been exploited. Instead of remaining the superior observer tasked with ‘saving’ her studied culture from historical erasure, she exposes the double standards in deeming one culture to be inferior to another. As Lionnet has observed, Hurston’s “position of fundamental liminality,” of being as much an internal as an external to Black culture, “reinforce(s) her scepticism about the anthropological project” (115). Born and brought up in the exclusively Black community of Eatonville, she cannot effectively assume the role of the anthropological saviour of ‘other’ cultures which she was supposed to be during the reign of Boasian anthropology.

Hurston similarly relates her first-hand experiences of Voodoo ceremonies when she was in Haiti. Rather than treating it as something illogical and baseless, she equates voodoo with religious beliefs or practices which, according to her, equally defy reason. In fact, she believes that if extensive research is carried out it would be found that “some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power, rather than the gestures of ceremony” (145). Hurston emphasises the need for proper studies and documentation which will reveal the logic and science behind Black cultural practices.

Another significant way in which Hurston tries to preserve the authenticity of the Black cultural idiom is by sticking to rural Black diction whenever presenting the members of her family or community. The autobiography offers us two very different communicative models used by the author: the language that Hurston—the educated Black woman—uses is refined, polished and in keeping with the proper rules of grammar while the one she uses when trying to speak for her racial folks is genuine Black dialect. As scholars like Reynaud have noted, Hurston’s refined language might have been the result of editorial intervention rather than her own choice:

The excision of Hurston’s misspellings—“sumptious” instead of “sumptuous”—and her grammatical “errors”...show how language is emptied of voice...Hurston’s “errors” foreground her double and conflicting identity as both Bernard scholar and Eatonville girl; her characters might have been allowed to speak like that, but she no longer was. (Reynaud 39)

Reynaud, here, is referring to the discrepancies between the manuscript and the first published version which had been significantly edited. The original publication shows how

Hurston had to acquiesce to editorial demands resulting in her letting go of many of her thoughts and at times even her style. Within the limitations set forth for the writer of colour, she does the best she can do: Hurston, the “Bernard scholar” retains the language of the “Eatonville girl” through her characters. As the system of patronage which governed the publishing industry put several constraints on the author and her use of language, she maintains and celebrates the originality of Black everyday language through the Black characters who figure in her text. Scholars critical of Hurston’s conformity to editorial demands fail to appreciate what she does manage to achieve within her highly confined spaces.

*Dust Tracks*, as discussed earlier, shows the author’s complex “working through” of traumatic legacies, whereby she is willing to open up to internal loopholes within her community that helped induce the trauma as much as she presents willingness to uphold and promote those aspects of her culture that would boost racial pride. Far from presenting a notion of her psyche as being distorted or rendered “pathological” by a consistent exposure to trauma, she offers a picture of intellectual well-being, a balanced approach which is ready to accept human nature in all its complex bearings. Hurston’s deliberations on the issue of “racial pride”, for instance, again show her comprehension of the politicisation of the whole thing, “People made whole careers of being “Race” men and women” (152). Yet this is not a hastily arrived at conclusion.

The chapter, “My People, My People” deals with the author’s constant questionings since childhood of what concepts like ““Race Pride”—“Race Prejudice”—“Race Man”—“Race Solidarity”—“Race Consciousness”—“Race”” (ibid) actually denote. She could see the dichotomy when her own people who shouted praises of their race and seemed to exude a sense of pride in their identity on public platforms resorted to cracking “Monkey” jokes later on in close circles. As she questions: “Were Negroes the great heroes I heard about from the platform, or were they the ridiculous monkeys of every-day talk”? (157)

Instead of an easy acceptance of passed down notions, then, Hurston tries to reach at her own conclusion regarding her stand on race and racial pride. And the understanding she finally arrives at is one which refuses to see human beings only in terms of black and white. Blacks, as all human beings, are complex individuals who cannot be typecast into a single idea of Blackness as the overarching or sole driving force. While Hurston shares

a strong solidarity with her race, as her efforts to uplift it exemplifies, she is equally against enforcing stereotypes and demanding conformity in the name of group unity:

Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any racial group as a whole...I learned that skins were no measure of what was inside people. So none of the Race clichés meant anything anymore. I began to laugh at both white and black who claimed special blessings on the basis of race. (162)

Through an unfiltered acceptance of her family roots with no sense of any need to claim special or privileged lineages, Hurston rises above notions of hierarchical identities and puts forth a case for individual merit. This equal emphasis on or prioritising of the individual has in turn again led to several accusations against her of being a race traitor.

In the chapter, “School Again”, the author relates an incident which puts into question her affinity towards members of her own race. While at Howard in order to earn her tuition Hurston had been working as a manicurist in Mr. George Robinson’s G Street shop. Although Mr. Robinson was a Black, his shop catered to an exclusively White clientele and was, in fact, frequented by the city’s elites. The incident which triggers Hurston to question her own race ethics takes place when a Black person once enters the barber shop and demands to be served. The Black employees, however, refuse him service and ask him to rather go to a shop which served Blacks. The man, unrelenting as he was, had to be finally thrown out of Mr. Robinson’s shop. Hurston writes that while she did not directly participate in the quarrel that ensued between that man insisting for service and her fellow black employees, she reciprocated their feelings in that she too wanted the man to be out of the shop.

This particular incident that the author narrates in her autobiography, of course, apparently puts her in the wrong, as she herself admits. Hurston’s deliberations on the issue, however, if keenly read compels us to see a different take on the entire episode. While it most definitely hurt the sentiments and self-respect of a Black man and by implication all Blacks to be denied service by some of his own fellow men, the incident was a complicated one which involved the livelihoods of many. As the author opines, boosting the pride of one Black would have negatively affected the lives of the other Black employees.

As has been discussed above and as is repeatedly sought to be asserted throughout *Dust Tracks*, Hurston was completely of the belief that there was a need for a shift in narrative so far as Black victimisation was concerned. In order for the discourse on Blacks as psychopathological to change, it was necessary to behave with dignity and grace. While the Black man coming to the barber shop was not wrong in insisting to be served, it was nevertheless, Hurston suggests, illogical. He should have known the consequences and acted more judiciously, thereby, preventing his own as well as the other Black employees' humiliation in front of a White public. The endangering of the livelihoods of so many Blacks—the employees as well as the owner Mr Robinson, who as the author says, always helped Black students in need of financial aid—would have only dragged them a little bit more down the social line. And that ultimately would have affected all previous achievements of the various movements and struggles for a more egalitarian society—achievements which made it possible for a Black like Mr. Robinson to be able to open a shop in a posh area of Washington.

Hurston's philosophy of racial uplift suggests working hard with dignity and planning towards set objectives as the way to be at par with the Whites. The adult author, whose upbringing had been in a Black town but had constant exposure to "benevolent" White figures, seems to have imbibed the teachings of her White Godfather:

"Do the best you can, if you have to. But learn right now, not to let your head start more than your behind can stand. Measure out the amount of fighting you can do, and then do it. When you take on too much and get licked, folks will pity you first and scorn you after awhile, and that's bad. Use your head!" (33)

A pragmatic approach that leaves aside bitterness and the urge to retaliate for one that logically calculates the pros and cons of one's action is, then, Hurston's operational strategy. Just like victims of trauma and injustice need a "safe space" in order to communicate their accounts of sufferings, action—whether physical or strategic—in the aftermath of painful events also necessitates the "safety" of its agents. When racial violence, trauma, or inequity are thought of only in collective terms, in terms of how they affect an entire race, individual micro-histories of pain and suffering tend to be ignored. The Black man demanding attention in Mr. Robinson's shop might seem to be doing a heroic deed: had he been supported by Hurston and the other Black workers, it would have been a small landmark in the history of race struggles. However, as the author suggests, it

would have been individually devastating for many of them. Mr. Robinson's business would have most definitely suffered a setback with the plausibility of the shop being forced to shut down. Some of the other Black employees might have been pushed further down the poverty line and their very sustenance threatened. For Hurston, her means of earning her tuition and getting her degree which would facilitate a better social standing would have gone. The achievement of the intended collective goal for the Black race as a whole—the right to be served at par with Whites—would have induced a series of bitter consequences for the concerned individuals.

As discussed, when the benchmark for achieving race ideals is in terms of a huge mass of faceless bodies, it can never be effectively achieved. Unless and until individual narratives are heard and attended to, it is impossible to achieve the collective ideal. Because then stories of pain would only keep perpetuating. When race as a faceless mass is sought to be protected, it instigates retaliatory action often involving violent means in order to uphold the prestige of the group. In the process, necessary steps of working through such as “soul-searching”, to use Hrushovski's term again, are left out. Proper questioning of one's actions can reveal how “redemptive” action can at times harm one's own kinfolks as opposed to just members of the opposite group.

Hurston's racial philosophy, then, reifies an approach that gives attention to individual growth as something paramount to achieving race ideals. *Dust Tracks* upholds the fact that every Black has to strive for excellence and dignity if the Black race has to stand at par with Whites. In “My People, My People” the author discusses how the Black struggle often “lacked reason because they were attempting to stand equal with the best in America without having the tools to work with” (161). The “tools” she is referring to are primarily those of education and financial foothold, the acquirement of which demand some amount of strategic planning.

It is understandable, then, why the Hurston who retaliates with such ferociousness against her stepmother—“If I died, let me die with my hands soaked in her blood. I wanted her blood” (68)—and who holds on to a quest for vengeance even after knowing of her deteriorating health—“All I could do was to wish that she had a lot more neck to rot” (70)—becomes exceedingly understanding and conciliatory in her encounters with Whites. However, as has been emphasized repeatedly in this chapter, we do get glimpses

of that ruthless, unforgiving version of the author in strategically planned manner and positions throughout the autobiography.

Hurston's allegorizing and use of satirical humour and mockery, while speaking of serious issues like religion, colonisation or imperialism, is another instance, for example, when she tries to make light of her otherwise scathing critiques of these things. Delineating on how apparently 'sacred' things like religious faith spread with the aid of physical might, Hurston writes:

We see the Emperor Constantine...start out on his missionary journey with his sword. He could not sing like Peter, and he could not preach like Paul. He probably did not even have a good straining voice like my father to win converts and influence people. But he had his good points—one of them being a sword—and a seasoned army. (188-189)

In the same satirical note, Hurston turns American politics into an allegory of the cult of Father Divine. Somebody holding as distinguished a position as President Roosevelt is hypothesised as a 'peace' caricature of the self-proclaimed Black God man. By turning the First Citizen of America into a devotee of the Black Father Divine, she makes a mockery of racial structures for sure. But she also implies how the lust for power has the capacity to transform otherwise rigid social hierarchies including race dynamics. Continuing her association of religion and spirituality with power politics, Hurston writes her fictional account of Roosevelt becoming a disciple of Father Divine:

Maybe Franklin Delano Roosevelt will fall on his head tomorrow and arise with a vision of Father Divine in the sky and the motto, "Peace! It's wonderful!" glowing like a rainbow above it.

Maybe our President would not even have to fall off of a horse, or a battleship, as the case might be. If Father Divine should come to control thirty million votes, the President could just skip the fall; that is, off of the horse.

Then, we might hear the former Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed as Sincere Determination. Eleanor would be Divine Eternal Commutation. Celestial Bountiful Tribulations would be Sister Frances Perkins. Harry Hopkins, Angelic Sainly Shadow. His Vocal Honor, La Guardia, would be known as Always Sounding



Trumpet, and on his evident good works in his nursery, Harold Ickes would be bound to win the title of Fruitful Love Abounding. (189-90)

This satirical presentation of the American senate as a spiritual organisation headed by the Black leader, in a way, again brings to us Hurston's philosophy of racial uplift: if Father Divine's influence over people could confirm Roosevelt's victory, he would most happily overcome any racial prejudice and form his parliament in line with the former's teachings. The author's knowledge of Father Divine's rich White disciples was like a case point proving her belief that power supersedes any racial ideology.

Claudine Reynaud has pointed out how the satire is also a covert critique of America's political stand before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour took place. The imagining of Roosevelt as an ardent follower of Father Divine's "Peace" movement is a mocking assault on the President's refusal to directly enter the scenario of the Second World War before the December 1941 Pearl Harbour incident. Hurston, writing her autobiography before Pearl Harbour, makes a "wry attack on Roosevelt's politics at the time of World War II". Her political and religious satires bring back to readers of her autobiography "the caricatures the younger Hurston used to draw when she was a wardrobe attendant (DT, 138-39)" (Reynaud 49). Lying beneath the overtly obsequious and grateful woman is that version of her who dares to mock even the highest authoritarian figures with her satirical portraiture.

Hurston's understanding and critique of contemporary world politics as put forth in her autobiography is also commendable. She could see the way American or for that matter European imperialism were mere euphemisms for the brutal institution of slavery. While slavery had been abolished long back, its repercussions in the form of profit-driven colonizing missions continued. In the hypothetical encounter with the White slave-owners grandchild and the ensuing conversation, the author puts forth these thoughts:

What is the principle of slavery? Only the literal buying and selling of human flesh on the block? That was only an outside symbol. Real slavery is couched in the desire and the efforts of any man or community to live and advance their interests at the expense of the lives and interests of others. All of the outward signs come out of that. Do you not realize that the power, prestige and prosperity of the greatest nations on earth rests on colonies and sources of raw materials? Why else are great wars waged? (195)

Passages such as these show Hurston's astute observations on the general human propensity for profit-making at the expense of others. The apparently loyal author displays her ability of critically judging political decisions and actions that are sought to be passed off as 'benevolent' missions in the name of civilization.

Finally, Hurston's philosophy of racial uplift cannot be spoken of in isolation of her views regarding Black womanhood. In the very first few chapters of her autobiography, the author sets about presenting men-women equations in the Black society to which she belongs. In her portrayal of the relationship between her parents, between her Aunt Caroline and Uncle Jim, and in her depiction of the story-telling sessions that took place at Joe Clarke's porch, the writer exposes Black male sexism. The conflict between her parents—with the father threatening physical assault although ultimately verbally outwitted by the mother—offers us glimpses of how the men wanted to assert their masculinity by physically overpowering their female counterparts. Similarly, discussions filled with sexual innuendoes at Joe Clarke's porch, which according to Hurston was the heart of Black Eatonville, expose the way Black women's bodies could be objectified by members of their own race. Moreover, the fact that the story-telling sessions were mostly by men reveal how women were excluded from public spaces of discussions. In this regard, Nellie Y. McKay writes:

Dust Tracks liberated her identity from the straitjacket of racial struggle and replaced it with black womanhood in negative and positive inter- and intraracial and sexual group relationships and encounters. Although most of her peers saw her strategy as a betrayal of the community's political agenda for black writing, Hurston's text boldly inscribed a revolutionary alternative for women's narrative into the black tradition. As autobiography, it expanded the boundaries of the slave narrative tradition and examined previously unexplored gender conflicts and tensions between black women and men. (101)

Hurston's "working through" of history helps her see the futility of merely pointing fingers and also equips her with the knowledge of how racial ideologies take a backseat when sexual politics within the race are involved. Gender discriminations within the Black community hamper the growth of the womenfolk and that eventually stalls the progress of the group as a whole. By exposing the internal follies in her own family and immediate

society Hurston, as McKay observes, makes a case for the emancipation of Black women from the strangles of both racial and sexual domination.

A significant episode in *Dust Tracks* is the one surrounding the death of Hurston's mother. The death scene has been described in a way and language that evokes the child author's sense of deep loss and a shattered world. Indeed, it is the mother's death that serves as one of the first real experiences of pain in a series of traumatic incidents that ensues for the young Hurston. In one of the most poignant passages in the autobiography, she writes:

But life picked me up from the foot of Mama's bed, grief, self-despisement and all, and set my feet in strange ways. That moment was the end of a phase in my life. I was old before my time with grief of loss, of failure, of remorse of failure. No matter what the others did, my mother had put her trust in me. She had felt that I could and would carry out her wishes, and I had not. And then in that sunset time, I failed her. (61)

The author's pain is not just that of the daughter having lost her mother: more than the death, it is the inability to speak for her, the failure to fulfil the dying mother's last wishes that devastate the child emotionally. Hurston—the daughter wants to be the voice of her mother, speaking out the latter's desire to avoid deathbed rituals such as removing the pillow from underneath her head, and veiling of the mirror and clock. The failure to see to the fulfilment of these wishes in the face of societal norms which paid no heed to the dying woman's (or rather her daughter's) pleas fill the child with a sense of helplessness and deep anguish. The loss of the mother and the concomitant void to which she feels herself being thrown continues to be a source of primeval trauma for Hurston even long after the incident.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., in his "Afterword" to the autobiography, has discussed how the death scene serves to show Hurston's "rhetorical distance" from her contemporaries like Richard Wright. Contrasting the scene of the mother's death in Wright's *Black Boy* with that in *Dust Tracks*, Gates points out that while male authors like Wright associated death with silence and a stultifying effect, Hurston remembers the death scene "in terms of a search for voice" (DT 290). Her grief at not being able to represent the mother's voice is then, as Lionnet says, by extension and implication the pain of the woman writer/artist who cannot trace herself in a genealogy of other females. He explains how the customary

veiling of the mirror is a symbolic gesture at covering up the mother's face and thus, pushing into the margins her memory. The patriarchal norms enforcing such veiling sever the daughter's ties from not just her biological mother but from the maternal lineage—from all mother figures of the past whose faces had been veiled into oblivion. The author's futile desire to carry out the last wish of letting the mirror remain unveiled is “to be understood as an allegorical attempt to look into the mirror of the mother's soul, to retain severed connections...and to become the voice that bridges generations” (130).

Hurston, then, through her critique of the flawed gender dynamics within Black society presents a case for the emancipation of Black women from not just racial denigration but sexual domination as well. Far from betraying her people with the portrayal of intersexual relations, she voices the feelings of generations of Black women subjected to abuse and violence by their own men folks. In this regard, as discussed above she tries to free Black women from the clutches of oblivion and creates a history of Black womanhood.

In conclusion, *Dust Tracks* is a moving text that presents a Black woman trying to make the most out of an unjust world by not letting bitterness get the better of her. As discussed, Hurston exemplifies the careful “working through” of trauma whereby she is able to come at an unbiased understanding of the socio-historical factors contributing to that legacy of trauma. Such an approach towards history equips her with the foresight that a one-sided view of events—rendering one's own party entirely free of guilt while putting all responsibilities on the other—only serves to perpetuate trauma. Moreover, such blame-gaming ultimately would present a picture of Blacks as psychologically damaged creatures obsessed with their White counterparts. To this end, she promotes a philosophy which urges for the right to work towards individual achievement as a way of fostering the growth of the Black race as a whole. Determined to project a picture of Black intellectual sanity as opposed to a predisposition towards a pathological bantering of angst, she strategically sails through the straitjacket of White patronage that she finds herself entrapped within. Her obsequiousness, as the chapter argues, is not just the unfortunate outcome of the complex web that engulfs her: it is a strategically calculated approach designed to put forth her views, some of which are scathing critiques as already discussed, amidst the intellectual censorship of her White editors and publishers.

### *My Lord, What a Morning*

Marian Anderson's *My Lord, What a Morning* documents her journey from being a poor, Black girl from Philadelphia to receiving international fame as one of America's leading Black contraltos. From her birth in 1897 to the publication of her autobiography in 1956, Anderson, like Hurston, lived through a period of history that was marked by extreme racial prejudices, segregation, lynchings and also other momentous international events such as the world wars. Yet, in her autobiographical account, such dark historical episodes either do not find any mention at all or only passing references. Instead, what Anderson's retelling of her journey focuses upon is the love, warmth, and support that she received from various corners of life—from the Black community around her for sure but also from Whites who, recognizing her talent, extended their support. Just as has been the case with Hurston, such elisions of racial animosities and tensions from the account render it susceptible to attacks and critiques for complacency or complicity in the power struggle. However, similar to *Dust Tracks*, *My Lord* also holds within it subtle but persistent forms of resistance to the White regime. Rather than presenting the Black racial self as psychologically so affected as to be constantly preoccupied with hatred and anger, Anderson, in her autobiography, creates a self that consciously maintains dignity and grace even amidst tremendous racial prejudices and persecution. Such maintenance and exhibition of a dignified stance rejects any notion of Black existence as a mere foil to White presence.

As has been stated, Anderson's account refrains from adopting any 'combative' stance of resistance. In fact, even while narrating the incident when she was not allowed by the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R). members to perform in the Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., she abstains from any retaliatory rhetoric or blame-gaming. Rather, she maintains diplomacy by pushing the entire handling of the matter to her management team. In 1939, Mr. Hurok, who was handling and managing Anderson's musical career then, decided that she had achieved enough acclaim and fame to be performing in the places where the nation's best artists performed. One such place of repute was the Constitution Hall in the country's capital. The Hall, however, could not be booked for her because the D.A.R. who owned it did not allow its use by 'coloured' people.

The denial by the D.A.R. received huge media attention, and many prominent members like then First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the association. Yet,

Anderson does not show any emotional excitement or upheaval while retelling the event in her autobiography, just as she had maintained her calm and composure when the actual event had transpired. To quote from her autobiography:

[N]ewspaper people made efforts to obtain some comment from me, but I had nothing to say. I really did not know precisely what the Hurok office was doing about the situation and, since I had no useful opinions to offer, did not discuss it. I trusted the management. (185)

The author, thus, consciously avoids expressing her real feelings on the matter. No matter the injustice of the entire situation, she does not indulge in any exhibition of outright hatred or anger, instead choosing to hide her actual emotions beneath claims of ignorance. While one might criticise Anderson's stance, a careful reading shows how she intersperses statements in between that reveal her dilemma and help us understand her refusal in terms of strategic survival rather than complacency. After the assertion that she had no knowledge regarding how her management office was handling everything, she, for instance, again writes:

There were occasions, of course, when I knew more than I said. I did not want to talk, and I particularly did not want to say anything about the D.A.R...I did not feel that I was designed for hand-to-hand combat, and I did not wish to make statements that I would later regret. (188-189)

Passages such as these reveal how precarious Anderson's position was: if she had to 'survive' as a singer, she had to be 'strategic' in her use of words and could not let words betray her actual thoughts. Her attitude can be better understood from her mother's viewing of the entire situation. As recounted in her autobiography, when she asks the opinion of her mother as regards the entire situation, she replies in the following terms:

"It is an important decision to make. You are in this work. You intend to stay in it. You know what your aspirations are. I think you should make your own decision."  
(189)

The mother's statements highlight how Anderson's continued presence and acceptance in the music industry depended on many factors apart from her singing talents. As a Black woman making her mark in White America, she could not afford to 'hurt' White sentiments with a direct, unapologetic statement of her opinions.

However, she does utilise the scope presented by the writing of her autobiography to subtly put forth her views on segregation and the employment of race as a prism through which to view the world. Anderson devotes considerable space to how the open concert held at Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, as an alternative for the cancelled programme at Constitution Hall, was hugely successful, with support coming in from all corners. To quote from the text:

There seemed to be people as far as the eye could see. The crowd stretched in a great semicircle from the Lincoln Memorial around the reflecting pool on to the shaft of the Washington Monument. I had a feeling that a great wave of good will poured out from these people, almost engulfing me. (191)

In writing about the overwhelming response from the crowd, the author shows how the segregationist policies of the D.A.R. ultimately proved futile. While they managed to keep her out of Constitution Hall, the injustice meted out by them opened the doors to the hearts of thousands of Americans who came in her support. *My Lord, What a Morning* implicitly endorses the view that Anderson's staunch maintenance of her dignity in the face of the racial backlash she faced ultimately earned her a spiritual victory over her detractors.

Anderson's autobiography finds her maintaining the same composed outlook regarding the policy changes at Constitution Hall that finally opened its premises to people of all colours. As she writes:

May I say that when I finally walked into Constitution Hall and sang from its stage I had no feeling different from what I have in other halls. There was no sense of triumph. I felt that it was a beautiful concert hall, and I was happy to sing in it. (193)

In rendering the 'hyped' Constitution Hall similar to any other hall, the author deflates its value and by so doing, shows how the D.A.R.'s sense of superiority implicit in its racist policies had always been based on false presumptions. Anderson's insistence that she could feel "no sense of triumph" again is a tacit way of suggesting that she had never bothered herself with any notions of defeat or victory. Constitution Hall, to her, suggested not some idealised, aspired-for venue, but one where she believed she should have the "right" to sing "as an artist" (ibid). To quote from her again:

It may be said that my concerts at Constitution Hall are usually sold out. I hope that people come because they expect to hear a fine program in a first-class performance. If they came for any other reason I would be disappointed. (ibid)

Anderson, here, stresses the desire to be recognised solely based on her merits: if at all people come to Constitution Hall to see her perform, it should be the quality of her performance that draws them and nothing else. Such insistence rejects any notion of a victimised Black identity. Instead, she projects a self that has remained ‘intact’ and ‘capable’ despite severe criticisms, restrictions and limitations owing to her race. If the D.A. R. had prioritised her race above everything else, she, by emphasising her merit, makes a case for looking beyond mere external surface in judging people. Anderson’s subtle mode of resistance, as can be deciphered in her autobiography, makes it possible to critique the racist policies of the D.A.R. without entering into any frontal attack upon them.

There are many other instances in the text which call to question her racial ideologies or the credibility of the views expressed. Anderson’s career in music finds her travelling across different places of the world, including many countries of the European sub-continent. While in Norway, the newspaper reviews depict the author in highly racist terms:

These audiences were not accustomed to Negroes. One of the newspaper reports described the singer as being “dressed in electric-blue satin and looking very much like a chocolate bar.” Another paper made the comparison with *café au lait*. And so it went. (141)

Despite the racial prejudices inherent in such comparisons, Anderson insists that there was no malice or colour bias in them. Rather, speaking of the newspaper comments, she writes:

The comments had nothing to do with any prejudice; they expressed a kind of wonder. (142)

Here too, the author without directly accusing the newspaper people of racism, manages to show how as a Black woman she was always treated as an outsider and hence, an object of “wonder.”

Anderson, similarly, puts into her autobiography tacit critiques of the racist mindsets that informed many in the music industry. She especially notes the patronizing



attitudes of Mr. Judson and his management team from whom she could not receive any substantial help so far as her career graph was concerned. Anderson, for instance, mentions how on being first noticed by the Judson office she had envisioned it as a kind of “step up” (108) in her career. Coming under the management of one of the best managerial teams in the country, she had “imagin(ed) a future of unlimited rosiness” (ibid). As she recounts in her autobiography, however, she was only rudely made aware of the ‘additional’ difficulties and obstacles that come in her way as a Black woman singer. To quote from her:

The change in my itinerary under the Judson direction was not especially marked....When we went South we still got Berth 13...Progress seemed to have stopped; I had substantially the same circuit of concerts but little more. I was beginning to feel that I was at a standstill. (111)

Without directly mentioning race and the problems she had to face because of her identity as a Black woman, Anderson hints at the specific obstacles she had to face owing to her racial identity. In her case, being under the Judson office, which otherwise indicated a level of professional achievement, did little to boost her career. Anderson’s mentioning of the fact that she still had to travel in birth 13 shows her dismay at being subjected to the humiliation of racial segregation despite her talents and establishment as an emerging singer.

Moreover, as already stated, the author also tacitly expresses her dissatisfaction with the condescending attitude of Mr. Judson when it came to her singing abilities and range. She especially shows her indignation at the fact that Mr. Judson suggests she is a soprano instead of a contralto. As she writes:

I confess I was upset. My manager’s uncertainty about whether I was on the right track on so fundamental a thing as the nature and range of the voice could have no other effect on me. It added to the underlying feeling that things were not going too well. (112)

Although she does not directly state it, the awareness that her Black identity is sufficient to make her White manager assume intellectual superiority over her disheartens her. That Mr Judson believes she should change from being a contralto to a soprano based on the

opinion of a certain “woman who knew a great deal about singing” (ibid) suggests how he doubts Anderson’s most basic knowledge regarding her singing.

The author, thus, incorporates into her text implicit critiques of the way American racism affected her career. Apart from one chapter of her autobiography, “Shock,” where she speaks directly and primarily of race, she does not allot much space to such discussions. As recounted in that particular chapter, her first real encounter with racist prejudice comes when she is refused admission to a music school because of her colour. Recalling her hurt emotions, she writes: “It was as if a cold, horrifying hand had been laid on me” (38). Similarly, Anderson talks about the Jim Crow laws which forced Black people to travel in segregated coaches of trains. However, even in these deliberations, though she mentions her hurt feelings, she refrains from showing any outright hatred or anger. In fact, she rounds off her discussions on racism with an insistence on how it reflected the mindset or attitudes of only a section of the people and how Americans were capable of rising above all such differences in times of crises. She ends the chapter by narrating an incident when a storm had partially eroded the “roadbed below Washington” (45) leading to the delay of all trains. When after waiting for the entire night, provisions were finally arranged for a train in the morning, people crowded the train with no space left for application of Jim Crow laws. To quote from the text:

This was an emergency situation...I saw a white woman take a Negro child and hold it on her lap to give the mother a few minutes of rest. I saw other expressions of brotherhood. Negroes and whites talked to one another; they shared their newspapers and even their food. The world did not crumble. (45)

Similar to Hurston, then, Anderson keeps on reiterating throughout her autobiography examples of people, especially Whites who irrespective of any colour divide, were capable of showing genuine kindness and extending real support. As already stated, such desperate need, embodied in her autobiography, to pacify Whites in power represents the extremely narrow avenues for success left open to Blacks. Anderson, no matter her real feelings, could not afford to displease Whites who in a way held the control over her fate. However, as discussed, she does manage to intersperse tacit critiques in between that highlights her subtle manipulation of silence as a means of resistance.

Both writers reach out in their way to a cross-section of readers including White people. Despite the background of racial segregation in which they grew up, their

narratives address parts of the mainstream American society they think would be able to connect with in an empathetic manner. They express themselves in fictive terms, like the 'statue' Hurston mentions at the beginning of her narrative which fulfils expectations but is not an exact representation. Without directly addressing the injustices of racially divided society, both writers offer oblique critiques of the discrimination around them. They also refuse to accept the whole of White American society as narrow and self-serving and present White people who were kind and genuinely supportive of Black people. That being said, both Hurston and Anderson emerge as proud representatives of the African American community through their writing.