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The Quest of Self-Awareness in the Black Women's Identities: The Analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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Abstract

African American literature establishes a great artistic field with diverse cultural and thematical experiences. Throughout history African Americans live many troubles such as segregations and discriminations in various areas. However, their literature shows a significant resistance towards all the troubles in history. There are numerous writers and artists to explore the themes such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery and a sense of home. One of them is Zora Neale Hurston. This presentation sheds light on the importance of Zora Neale Hurston in African American literature, and it will be supported with other famous Afro-American writers' articles and statements. Why is she so important? From which perspectives did she contribute to the African American literature? Why was her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* mostly criticized? This study will answer the questions with particular examples from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical novel *Dust Tracks on a Road An Autobiography*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Alice Walker's article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston."

Keywords: African American literature; Zora Neale Hurston; *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; race; gender; identity

Subject classification codes: African American Literature

Introduction

African American literature is a significant reflection of the experiences of Black individuals regarding social, identity, and cultural issues. The literature encompasses various themes, such as racism, black segregation,



and slavery. The slave narratives marked the beginning of African American literature, highlighting the harsh and brutal experiences of enslaved individuals. The Harlem Renaissance was a critical period in constructing Black cultural awareness. African American literature can be broadly defined as written works by people of African descent living in the United States. It examines the role of African Americans in the larger American society and the concept of American identity. The African American presence has always been a test case for the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, and inclusiveness. African American literature explores themes such as freedom and equality, African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, segregation, migration, and feminism. It expresses the African American literature as "a post emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation that ensued after the nation's retreat from Reconstruction" (McKay 2014, 5).

In a broad term, African American literature can be defined as writings by people of African descent living in the United States. It is highly varied that African American literature has generally emphasized on the role of African Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an American. It is a crucial point to consider the identity question and belongingness as at that point Americanization with the assimilation that is its ultimate results creates a problem for the Blacks. As Princeton University Professor Albert J. Raboteau has said that all African American study "African American religion speaks to the deeper meaning of the African American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, and the inclusiveness of all" (Raboteau 2014, 1). It explores the issues of freedom and equality long denied to Blacks in the United States, along with further themes such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, segregation, migration, feminism, and more. Numerous writers and artists like Phillis Wheatley, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, and so on, embody the African American diasporic study.

Zora Neale Hurston was a significant figure in African American literature, and her works shed light on the Black South. She was the first Black American to collect and publish African American and Afro-Caribbean folklore. Although Hurston wrote fourteen books, her work fell into obscurity until the 1970s when Alice Walker's article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" revived her literary legacy. This study aims to examine the importance of Hurston's works in African American literature and the perspectives from which she wrote. The analysis will focus on Hurston's important works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road, An Autobiography*. *Dust Tracks on a Road, An Autobiography* is a manifestation of Hurston's personal experiences and contains sections of her intimate confessions regarding love and religion. Her style is authentic and involves personal intimacies with shocking effects. Overall, her unique literary style, coupled with her invincible spirit, creates an intellectual style in literature. Zora Neale Hurston was a scholar whose ethnographic research made her a pioneer writer of "folk fiction" about the Black South. The fate of Zora Neale Hurston, a southern black woman writer who emerged in the limelight of black artistic



circles in the mid 20's, when the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing as the turning-point in the development of Afro-American culture, is an example of what happened to many women writers.

This study aims to highlight Zora Neale Hurston's importance in African American literature and her perspectives in writing her works. It focuses on Hurston's significant literary works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*, which expresses Hurston's personal experiences. This study analyses *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in terms of plot, characters, and themes and discusses Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston."

In her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Zora Neale Hurston shares her personal experiences and perspectives through intimate confessions about topics such as love and religion. Although Hurston does not confess to any past sins, she admits to her youthful mistakes and is proud of her strong emotions, both positive and negative, as well as her friendships and enemies. The structure of her autobiography contains an overt mythic framework, evident in the chapter titles such as "My Birthplace," "My Folks," "I Get Born," "The Inside Search," "Figure and Fancy," and "Wandering." Hurston begins her chapter "I Get Born" by acknowledging that some details of her birth may be inaccurate but affirms that it is established that she did get born. This highlights the archetypal theme of her autobiography. Throughout her autobiography she continues folk tales and repeated anecdotes, in addition to her introspective experiences. Her work of art is more like performances for the benefit of the public than private commentaries for relieving the souls. Her style mostly involves in her original actions, and she entertains her readers with personal intimacies consisting of shocking effects. Her authentic style within the invincible spirit construct an intellectual style in literature. Her unique literary expressions reveal the beauty of blacks, and so it is the cornerstone of both black and black women histories. As a result of her heightened tone, her autobiography takes mythic proportions and Hurston properly emphasizes the climactic events in her life with personal stories from her birth. She also combines her search of identity with an artistic quest.

In her quests, she sophisticatedly presents her blackness with the mythic descriptions. For instance, in her childhood, by reading fluently the tale of Pluto and Persephone, she saves her grade school class before the judgment of two white lady visitors. The ladies continue to send her clothes and books from the North, signs of her election she parades before her peers, enjoying the role of the "golden child" as much as a George Schuyler had. Later, in high school she experiences a more sophisticated encounter, this one with a teacher, at the night high school in Baltimore, who encourages Zora. She expresses her memories as follows:

There I met the man who was to give me the key to certain things. In English, I was under Dwight O. W. Holmes. There is no more dynamic teacher anywhere under any skin. He radiates newness and nerve and says to your mind, "There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. Let's go see what it is." He is a



pilgrim to the horizon. Anyway, that is the way he struck me. He made the way clear. Something about his face killed the drabness and discouragement in me. I felt that the thing could be done (Hurston 1984, 154).

At Howard University she finds another pointer of the way:

The teacher who most influenced me was Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner, head of the English Department... Listening to him, I decided that I must be an English teacher and lean over my desk and discourse on the eighteenth-century poets and explain the roots of the modern novel (Hurston 1984, 174).

Hurston also has an intimate relation with her grandmother who is an important figure in her life as she is an ancestor and wisdom figure. However, because of being grown up in the patriarchal practices, she is oppressed with the male domination in her life. Hurston mentions her grandmother in this way:

My relations with Godmother were curious. Laugh if you will, but there was and is a psychic bond between us. She could read my mind, not only when I was in her presence, but thousands of miles away. But, the thing that delighted her was the fact that I was her only Godchild who could read her thoughts at a distance. Her old fingers were cramped and she could not write, but in her friend Cornelia Chapin's exact script, a letter would find me in Alabama, or Florida, or in the Bahama Islands and lay me by the heels for what I was thinking. "You have broken the law," it would accuse sternly. "You are dissipating your powers in things that have no real meaning," and go on to lacerate me. "Keep silent. Does a child in the womb speak?" She was just as pagan as I. (Hurston 1984, 183-184)

Hurston is always a close relation with her grandmother because the grandmother is an ancestral power and reminder of the past. Thus, her identity is integrated with the childhood memories. Early beginning to search for self, she writes of her childhood visions and dreams: "no matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know... For instance, I had stifled longing. So, I was driven inward, I lived an exciting life unseen" (Hurston 1984, 44-48). Her search for self is also combined with her artistic desires. Her great curiosity towards the nature approaches her into the art itself closer. Her language here indicates how she sees herself inside the fairy-tale with her childhood experiences:

In a way this early reading gave me great anguish through all my childhood and adolescence. My soul was with the gods and my body in the village. People just would not act like gods. Stew beef, fried fatback and morning grits were no ambrosia from Valhalla. Raking back yards and carrying out chamber-pots, were not the tasks of Thor. I wanted to be away from drabness and to stretch my limbs in some mighty struggle. I was only happy in the woods, and when the ecstatic Florida springtime came strolling from the sea, trance-glorifying the world with its aura. (Hurston 1984, 64)

The language of *Dust Tracks* is the reflection of Hurston's self-identity with her own experiences from her mouth, and so it is an authentic primary source in order to understand her life and outstanding writing skills



better. Her resistance to the dominant white hegemony and racist practices are also the projection of her African American identity.

The Image of Independent Black Woman in Their Eyes Were Watching God

The miserable life of black women has been reflected in many works of American literature. Black women lived in the bottom of the society, and they suffered from oppression of both sexuality and racial discrimination. Zora Neale Hurston's masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is taken as one of the Black Americans literary classics, and one of the most crucial works in modern literature of black feminism which focuses on woman's quest for rights and dignity. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1937. Not only is this novel appreciated by African American for its rich Black culture and dialect, but it is also of interest to a wide range of feminists because of females' self-awareness. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is directly related to Hurston's political understanding of the notion of blackness and femaleness as well. In her works, the protagonists are continuously searching for their own self-identities like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It asserts that from the very beginning up to the last sentence of the novel Janie's selfhood undergoes a lot of changes and transformations.

Their Eyes were Watching God is also regarded as the first African American work which describes the awakening of African American women. Black feminist critics analyze the works of black female writers from a feminist or political perspective, and it is seen as a kind of reading race, gender, and class in modes of cultural expression. The black feminists of the Combahee River Collective, in their manifesto of April 1977, declared: "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face." (The Combahee River Collective 2014, 271). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also centers a Black heroine's sensuality in a way that was uncommon in American literature at the time of its publication. For instance, the protagonist Janie Crawford's desire in nature is narrated with a romantic mood:

It was a spring afternoon in West Florida. Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. (Hurston 1937, 10)

At this Janie's moment the nature is integrated with the love and sexual relations. The blooming symbolizes the changes from girlhood to womanhood. These kinds of motifs indicate how Hurston uses diverse images to enrich the stories vividness. Janie is exemplified with her innocent life; however, her grandmother is the



representation of old traditions, and she really wants that Janie has lived up with her husband as she knows she will die in the story. The grandmother is opposed Janie's relation with John Taylor who is a neighbor boy. That is why she insists Janie will be married with the man who has a job. Hurston's narrative focuses on the journey of Janie and at that point, Janie's curiosity in sexual life is limited with her new husband whom her Nanny finds as the embodiment of old patriarchal set of minds. Nanny here tries to protect Janie from poverty and so Logan Killick and Janie got married. As clearly seen the manhood represents the breadwinning and authority in the story. This marriage is a security for Janie and Killick behaves her like an animal as they are in the farm business. Janie runs away from his inhumane behavior, but her second husband Joe Starks is another trap for her. Stark is the representation of patriarchy, and he behaves Janie as an object. The first marriage makes her animal, and the second one materializes her. With both Janie sees the marriage and manhood as an unequal institution. After the death of Joe Starks Janie marries Tea Cake as her third marriage. Unlike other marriages Cake behaves Janie as a human being and invited her to play the game. This invitation shows her approval of identity in the story. Moreover, Cake combs Janie's hair, and it reveals how he sees her feminine identity unlike her first husband Killick. However, Tea Cake is not a perfect husband because he beats her, and it emphasizes the corruption of society. These examples present the society as a patriarchy and racist. The black women are seen on the bottom of society with these examples.

The story also exemplifies how the free black woman tries to survive under the patriarchal and racist society. The following expression reveals being a woman in the eyes of Hurston: "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember and remember everything they don't want to forget." (Hurston 1937, 1) It shows the obedience nature of women with their loyal character, and it is a great manifestation for the self-revelation of women especially blacks who are seen as weak human beings in the patriarchal society. Hurston also creates the black humor with the dilemmatic word choices. She states her desires to love is integrated with the pear tree which is an important projection of Janie's meaning of love:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. (Hurston 1937, 11)

Janie integrates nature and marriage in this quotation, and it is a desire to find the independent self being rather than the oppression coming from the gendered world. The pear tree is the symbolization of love and lust together. The flying bee is the idealized depiction of her freedom in life. Nature itself indicates its eternal atmosphere and in this eternity the tiny bee's actions reveal the idea of productivity and life with its



practices. Furthermore, the gendered and racist points in the novel depict with Nanny w: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (Hurstun 1937, 14). It involves many things such as racism, gender and colloquial language. Nanny recognizes there are some taboos in the society, and they create the burden for women especially blacks. The women are seen as mules in this expression, and it is an inferior statement in order to explain why Hurstun wrote the feministic issues in her works.

There are many characters in the novel and the most significant one is Janie Mae Crawford who is the mixed colored girl. She married three times in her life and each of them attributes diverse development in her identity. She is mostly seen as an energetic and lovely woman, and she is trying to find the real love and marriage in her life. She is a curious character and loves to observe everything around her. However, she came across many discriminations because of her gender and race. Her grandmother Nanny is the first instructor for her, and the following quotation reflects what marriage means and Janie’s feelings towards this situation:

Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. Janie felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn’t seem so destructive and mouldy. (Hurstun 1937, 20)

According to Nanny and ancestral people, love comes after marriage. Especially for the black women love expectation is getting low because of hard circumstances in life. Janie’s reflection occurs after she reluctantly agrees to marry Logan Killicks. She isn’t attracted to him, but she naively believes what Nanny says is true that she will fall in love with him after the marriage. Unlike some who marry purely for security, Janie marries purely for love. Unfortunately, her lack of experience with relationships means that she is easily misled. Janie does not fell love towards Logan who sees Janie as a workforce.

The first husband of Janie Logan Killick is the embodiment of capitalist system of America from the perspective of agrarian background as he is always working, and he also sees Janie as a mule. The following quotation clearly summarizes Logan’s worldviews:

Janie got up with him the next morning and had the breakfast halfway done when he bellowed from the barn. “Janie!” Logan called harshly. “Come help me move dis manure pile befo’ de sun gits hot. You don’t take a bit of interest in dis place. ‘Tain’t no use in foolin’ round in dat kitchen all day long.” “You don’t need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo’ place and Ah’m in mine.” “You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick.” (Hurstun 1937, 29-30)

Logan is seen as the outcast in the white hegemonic society, and he reveals his anger while pushing the other human beings like Janie. Therefore, this system is like a restricted area for African Americans. Other



character is Janie's second husband Joe Starks who is an ambitious and consummate businessman. Joe sees Janie as a sexual object and uses her beauty as a prestige for himself. His expressions stated below show his thoughts towards Janie:

[Joe to Janie:] "You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you." (Hurstons 1937, 28)

Joe's dream is to be a great and important man and he sees Janie as a pretty doll baby. He has different views about women than Janie's first husband Logan Killick. Joe here sees Janie as a valuable object. This is not so different from Logan after all, who also considers Janie an object. For Joe, women are objects to look at; for Logan, they're objects to be utilized. This issue can also be commented from the feminist perspective with American social theorist and writer Murray Bookchin's quotation. Bookchin indicates the pressure of human to the other human in a feminist approach as follows: "the very idea of the domination of nature by man comes from the very real domination of human by human" (Bookchin 1998, 1)

The third husband of her is Tea Cake who is younger than Janie, and he treats Janie as a human being. For example, he wants to play with her. This moment is so important for Janie that she feels her own self with being recognized by Tea Cake. The following statement clearly explains this situation:

He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, overpadded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice! (Hurstons 1937, 91-92)

Tea Cake is also the first real love for Janie, and he provides that Janie achieves her identity search. He encourages her growth toward independence by teaching her skills such as using the gun. Ironically, she kills Tea Cake with this gun. It is a significant irony in the story. She must kill him because of rabies. At that point, the superiority of nature is emphasized with the use of illness as a disaster. Unlike Logan and Joe, Tea Cake treats Janie with her state of being. Her hopeful and strong behavior can be commented as the creative personality for Janie because she has some opportunities in her life.

Zora Neale Hurston is the perfect projector of African American lifestyle from the feminist approach and in the novel, there are many themes which show the essence of African American experiences: love, the local language, faith, race and gender. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not merely a tragic love story; it is a skillful representation of race, gender and class issues in America at that period.



Hurston's most famous and best novel is *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which Blyden Jackson has referred to a novel written by an American Black as one of the best works in the genre. More importantly, the work combines two central themes from Hurston's life: her search for independence and fulfillment and her love for Black folk culture. The first of these themes is reflected throughout the novel in Janie Crawford's search for freedom and fulfillment. This search is integrated with the theme of love because Janie is in the search of real love. In the novel the real love between Janie and Tea Cake is seen in the event how Tea Cake saved Janie from the aggressive dog in the sake of dying. This situation is stated in the following expression:

Janie achieved the tail of the cow and lifted her head up along the cow's rump, as far as she could above water. The cow sunk a little with the added load and thrashed a moment in terror. Thought she was being pulled down by a gator. The dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge. Tea Cake split the water like an otter, opening his knife as he dived. The dog raced down the backbone of the cow to the attack and Janie screamed and slipped far back on the tail of the cow, just out of reach of the dog's angry jaws. He wanted to plunge in after her but dreaded the water, somehow. Tea Cake rose out of the water at the cow's rump and seized the dog by the neck. But he was a powerful dog and Tea Cake was over-tired. So he didn't kill the dog with one stroke as he had intended. But the dog couldn't free himself either. They fought and somehow he managed to bite Tea Cake high up on his cheek-bone once. Then Tea Cake finished him and sent him to the bottom to stay there. (Hurston 1977, 157)

This scene is realistically depicted with Hurston masterful narration and the self-sacrificing of Tea Cake reflects love itself because he takes a risk and saves Janie. Other scene about love and recognition of the identity is that Tea Cake combs Janie's hair that is the feminine symbolization. It reflects both sexual desires and encouragement for the spirit of womanhood. However, some part of the novel Tea Cake beats or lies her, but these scenes are not the embodiment of his anger, but his desperation in love as Janie is both older and richer than him. Thus, it reveals from his anxiety and anger from the side of masculinity. Equally important is Hurston's use of black folk culture. Much of the beauty of the novel's language comes from Hurston's reproduction of the idioms and the figures of southern Black speech. Characters speak in the folk idioms—"Gal, it's too good! you switches a mean fanny round in a kitchen" (Hurston 1937, 5) and Hurston herself incorporates the rhythms and idioms of black speech in her descriptions "Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart" (Hurston 1937, 16). Hurston also celebrates the story with the narrations of contests, storytelling, and folk humor.

Hurston emphasizes the lives of African American in the Southern black dialect in order to show localism in the context. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered a fundamental text due to Hurston's selection of her authorial voice and her appreciation of the vernacular dialect used in the Southern black community. Gray



(2004), as well, agrees that Hurston's use of dialect "shows how a small group of people ground themselves" (515). Awkward (1990) argues that Hurston's narrative strategy "gives a voice to the voiceless" community (20). African Americans have been criticized by white Americans because of their "inability to master standard English" (Lester 1999, 21) and Hurston's use of the "negro" dialect confirms their ability to establish their own speech without having to use standard English. She proves that the Southern black dialect is as expressive as the white American's dialect. Hurston argues that black language can convey a diverse range of emotions and ideas. By doing so, she asserts that black people themselves are the best representatives of their society. Other theme that constructs the most significant background for the novel is race itself. Being an African American is a problem throughout history and Hurston reveals the concept of race with diverse experiences especially in the eyes of African American women. In terms of this aspect, it is a great embodiment of real-life issues. There are many racial expressions in the novel, but the most obvious example is Mrs. Turner who is the racist symbolization for African Americans. The following statement expresses the inferiority of black people from the racist point of view:

Mrs. Turner, like all other believers had built an altar to the unattainable – Caucasian characteristics for all. Her god would smite her, would hurl her from pinnacles and lose her in deserts, but she would not forsake his altars. Behind her crude words was a belief that somehow she and others through worship could attain her paradise – a heaven of straight-haired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs. The physical impossibilities in no way injured faith. That was the mystery and the mysteries are the chores of gods. Beyond her faith was a fanaticism to defend the altars of her gods. It was distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door. Oh, for an army, terrible with banners and swords! (Hurston 1937, 139).

Here is the cruelest aspect of Mrs. Turner's fanatical dream: she thinks she can attain whiteness by good deeds, as if whiteness is salvation. Because of being a Caucasian, Mrs. Turner resents the black African American. It is the most obvious reflection of racism even among Afro Americans. Morrison (1989) once notes: "certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose" (11). Even the black folks are seen as racists in the eyes of Janie because of living hardships, and it shows the blacks in her eyes are even hostile, especially when she is facing murder accusation. The first thing she does after the trial is to visit and thank those kind whites. "The white women cried and stood around her like a protecting wall and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away" (Hurston 1937, 280). This scene symbolizes Janie's isolation from the black community because of her clinging white identification which is like a wall preventing her from embracing her identity. Janie's vague black identification suggests that racism is so horrible and destructive that it makes Janie a marginal stuck between two identities. Without Wright's protesting strategy, Hurston successfully creates a work of racial politics.



Conclusion

Zora Neale Hurston is one of the most significant African American writers especially in the field of feminism. Although she is mostly criticized by some black writers such as Richard Wright or Ralph Ellison, Hurston masterfully represents racial and gender issues. Her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was harshly criticized by her fellow black male writers. Richard Wright, the author of *Native Son* (1940), provided the most critical commentary on Hurston's novel. He stated that it lacked a theme, message, or any significant thought. Gates (2000) comments on the antithetical difference between Hurston and Wright by arguing that "no two authors in the tradition are more dissimilar than Hurston and Wright" (75). Wright wrote more aggressive and angry novels than Hurston. Even though the novel does not provide a direct furious protestation against racism, it portrays its impact on the black society as effectively as any other black contemporary literary work that focuses on racial violence imposed on African Americans.

Hurston acknowledges in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, that the circumstances of time and place have had an impact on her life and work. About the time Hurston remained secretive, telling readers simply that she did "get born." About the place, however, and about the significance of growing up in Eatonville, Florida, Hurston was never secretive. More importantly, the work combines two central themes from Hurston's life: her search for independence and fulfillment and her love for Black folk culture. Moreover, Alice Walker is a great figure to reflect the unknowing sides of Hurston's life with her article. The most common feature between these writers is the black feminism. Alice Walker discusses how Zora Neale Hurston's ability to portray black people as "undiminished human beings" shaped her as a writer. This is evident in *The Color Purple* which, like Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, blends the lyrical speech of the South with other kinds of prose.

It was a few years after Zora's death that Walker read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which sets her on the path of researching Zora Neale Hurston's life and work. Walker admired how Hurston embraced Black culture through her literature. Something the two authors share in their writing style is that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (and other works) and *The Color Purple* both use the Black southern vernacular in their characters' dialogue. In the essay "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston"¹ Alice Walker explored Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, Florida, and came to understand that it was immensely influential to her works. There are some statements from other American writers such as Langston Hughes, Robert Hemenway who is the writer of *Zora Hurston and the Eatonville Anthropology*, Arna Bontemps and so on. While using these writers' expressions about Hurston, Alice Walker creates the richness in her article. Langston Hughes' quotation about Hurston is stated in the article as follows:

But Miss Hurston was clever, too – a student who didn't let college give her a broad "a" and who had great scorn for all pretensions, aca demic or otherwise. That is why she was such a fine folklore collector, able to go among the people and never act as if she had been to school at all. Almost nobody else could stop the



average Harlemit on Lenox Avenue and measure his head with a strange-looking, anthropological device and not get bawled out for the attempt, except Zora, who used to stop anyone whose head looked interesting, and measure it. (Hughes, 1942, 22-23)

Langston Hughes praises Hurston's intelligence and resourcefulness as a folklorist and anthropologist, noting her ability to connect with people without acting superior. He also highlights her ability to capture the culture of the African American community in her writings, particularly through her use of black vernacular language. Hughes also notes that Hurston's work has had a lasting impact on the community, as evidenced by the annual arts and humanities events held in her honor. Overall, Hurston is recognized as one of the most significant African American writers of her time, and her contributions to African American literature are celebrated for their cultural richness.

The article of "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" was first published in Ms. magazine in 1975, later titled "Looking for Zora" by Alice Walker.

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