
***Their Eyes
Were Watching God***

— Zora Neale Hurston, 1937 —

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Grew up in Eatonville, Florida (one of the first all-black towns in the U.S.)

Happy childhood, but later led a tumultuous life

Lied about her age in order to finish high school in her 20s; later earned a degree from Howard and studied anthropology at Barnard

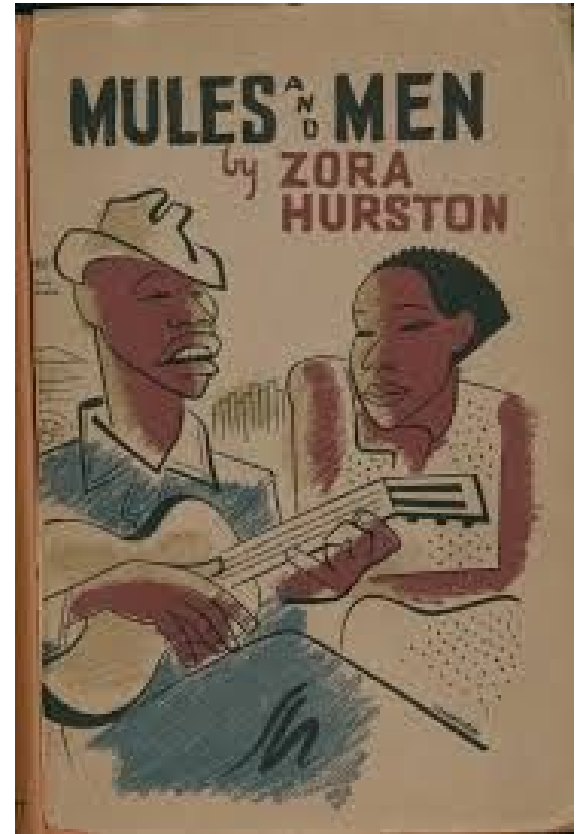


Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Studied and collected black folklore in Florida (*Mules and Men*)

Folklore = customs, superstitions, stories, dances, and songs that have been passed down through oral tradition

Characterized by joking, storytelling, exaggerating (hyperbole), playful insulting



Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Harlem Renaissance = black American literary movement of the 1920s; fueled by the great northern migration of black Americans

Hurston was a controversial figure because her work does not argue that black culture had suffered due to racism; instead, her work documents and celebrates the culture in which she grew up



Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Married and divorced three times

The "love affair of her life" -- Percy Punter / he was 25; she was 44

Anthropological research in Haiti

Wrote *Eyes* in 7 weeks; inspired by her love for Percy

**ZORA HURSTON IN HAITI
WRITING HER FOURTH BOOK** 8/7/37

Ollie Stewart finds noted author occupying home of American Consul.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti—The success and prestige of having three books to one's credit that would taste mighty sweet to millions, is tinged with bitterness in the mouth of Miss Zora Neale Hurston, now writing her fourth book here.

"I'm disappointed," Miss Hurston told me, sitting on the broad balcony, of the home of Joseph C. White, American consul, who has moved out and turned his palatial place and servants over to the writer.

Has Fallen Short
"I don't feel the least bit proud of what I've done. Each book has fallen short of what I wanted to make of it. And despite the fact that some critics have been kind enough to praise my work, can't fool myself."

Miss Hurston spoke rapidly, with bigama-ded legs crossed under her Hindu shawl. She was answering my trite question, "How does it feel to taste the success hat goes with being a three-book author?"

I stared. For I had just finished a Lippincott announcement to the effect that "Their Eyes Were Watching God" is to be released in September, and in the announcement were these words:

"... Miss Hurston has fulfilled the early promise of her first books. Her writing is the essence of poetry; deeply communicative, essed of a primitive rhythm speaks truly to the consciousness even before thought can form. . . This new novel is one of warmth and humor and rich, transcendent beauty.

Story of All Peoples
"This is a story of Miss Hurston's own people, but it is also a story of all peoples—of man and woman and the mystery that the world holds."

But I didn't argue with the writer of "Jonah's Guard Vine" and "Mules and Men." I was too anxious for her to keep talking in her own peculiar way, using hands, eyes, feet and tongue.

And by listening I learned that her fourth book—about Haiti—is almost completed, but that she has "much more material than can be used in one's book"; that early in the spring she was in the States on "a thoroughly enjoyable lecture tour"; that Haitian people are "as courteous and charming as anybody in the world" could be; that there should be many more writers and artists in our group than we can boast of at present;

Hard Work
That writing is hard work; that she can tell one story right after another; that she spent six months in Jamaica—and that colored people have too much to be proud of ever to apologize for anything.

And then we talked about love. Miss Hurston, she confessed, "is 'vaguely interested' in a man in the States—name withheld.

"I want a man who can tell me what to do when I'm stuck," she laughed. "He must be stronger than I am mentally, so that I may ask his advice and judgment. I most certainly don't want somebody who will have to ask me what to do.

"He need not have a lot of money—and he doesn't have to be the handsomest man God ever made. I come from plain, everyday folk in Florida and I'm not used to a lot of money. And nobody could accuse we of being beautiful."

Will Help Others
She expressed sincere zeal for discovering hidden talent in young people who haven't had a chance. She is not afraid of lending a hand to others who might some day eclipse her.

With her since July 7 has been Mrs. Emma Williams, a social worker of Brooklyn, N returns to the States in



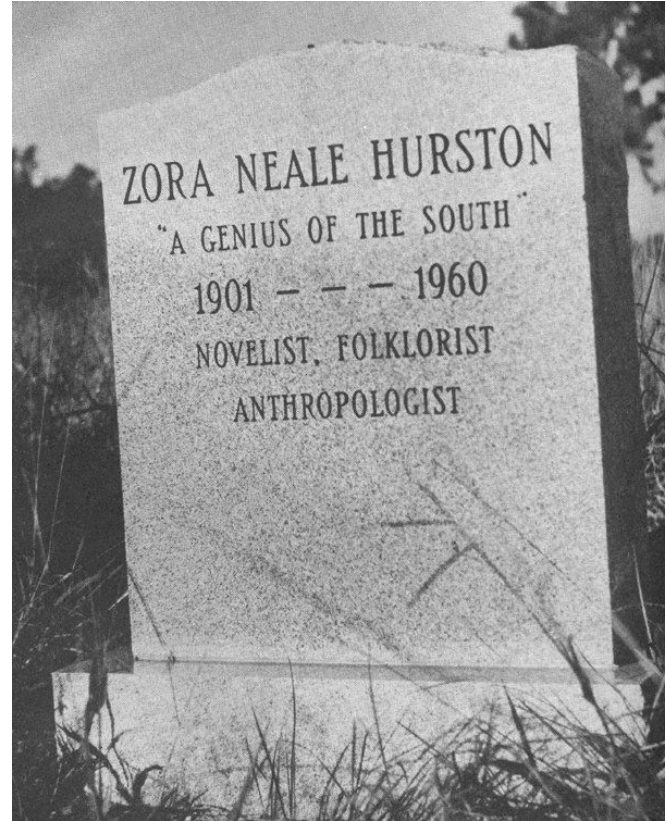
MISS ZORA HURSTON

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

Financial difficulties at the end of her life

Buried in an unmarked grave in Florida

Discovered and marked by Alice Walker in 1973 -- thanking her for inspiring her work ("Looking for Zora" in *Ms.* magazine in 1975)



Their Eyes Were Watching God

Frame narrative

Setting: Eatonville, Florida and the Everglades

Local color: details and descriptions that are common to a certain place

Theme: one woman's search for her authentic self and for real love, for her own voice and power

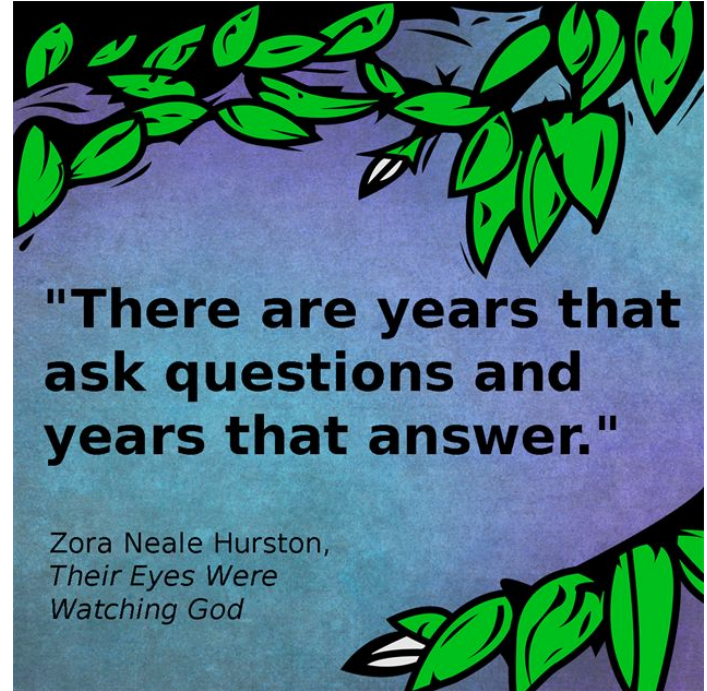


Their Eyes Were Watching God

Hurston's narrative voice -- 3rd person omniscient; formal diction; advanced vocabulary

Dialect of the characters -- colloquialisms, idioms, strong Southern accent

Relationship between language and power



Characters

Janie Crawford

Pheoby Watson

Nanny

Logan Killicks

Joe (Jody) Starks

Tea Cake

