

Anthropological Elements in Zora Neale Hurston's Novels

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Abstract:

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) is one of 20th-century America's foremost fiction and folklore writers. Though she was criticized by some of her contemporaries, including Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, her works are now frequently taught in literature courses and are widely admired for their style and substance. She deals extremely with anthropological elements and sentiments in her novels. This paper explores three of her novels in the perspective selected in the title.

Introduction

This paper analyses such the anthropological elements as people

culture, origin and society portrayed in the novels of Zora Neale Hurston. This paper explains the African-American people's origin, culture and society. It also portrays the culture of the people and how the women were treated in their society. This paper addresses female issues in society such as the socialization of girls and women to define 'self' in the relation to the 'others'. It will be primarily about modern women with particular dreams, delights, despairs and how these women relate to one another in the name of love.

The Major focus is on how women were treated both in black and white society. The struggles they undergone by

physically, psychologically and how they finally fulfil their goal of identity. The emergence of female identity and creativity and barrier to their development and the challenges that these women face are also explored.

To explain these issues the primary sources chosen for this paper are "*Their Eyes were Watching God*, *Seraph on the Sewanee*" and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*" by Zora Neale Hurston.

Zora Neale Hurston was one of the prominent figures in Harlem Renaissance. She was the only women writer in that period who had become famous as a black. She always focuses in the gender politics, secrets, language and identity. The tyrannical social model and family expectation, familial devotion, romantic love, economic, emotional insecurity, self-fulfilment and lack of recognition are the recurring themes in her works.

The most significant and prominent novel is *Their Eyes were Watching God*.

This novel focuses on Janie the protagonist. It narrates about a journey in which the title character, Janie Crawford searches for independence, self-fulfilment and love. Janie's quest for identity is challenged by the norms of her society, and she defies her grandmother, lovers, friends and community in order to escape the imprisonment of their self-degrading ideologies. This novel portrays the atmosphere of Eatonville and Florida. As a single woman when she returns to Eatonville after burying her third husband Tea Cake who made her to learn new thing and developed her knowledge which was restricted to women in their society. This novel tells about the struggles faced by Janie in her development of her psyche. This novel portrays the atmosphere of Eatonville and Florida.

Seraph on the Sewanee is another novel which also takes place around Florida. This is the only novel the protagonist is a white women. This novel takes place in

Sawley town present on the river bank of Sewanee. This novel also tells about the development of the protagonist Arvay in her marriage life. Arvay was all of twenty-one, and according to local custom, should have been married at least five years ago. When the story begins, Arvay is upset with her sister because she takes the man that Arvay wants to marry. Because she feels that the life that she wanted to live is taken away from her, she tries to go into seclusion and ends up marrying a man that she persuaded to love. There are also scenes in the story when Arvay wanted to leave Jim but she couldn't because Jim's influence over her was so great. His force is similar to the force that black women had with whites and oftentimes their husbands.

Jonah's Gourd Vine is the first novel of Zora Neale Hurston. It is her indirect product as anthropologist research work. This work also represents her life in Eatonville and her family life. Lucy Potts,

the character modelled on Hurston's real life mother Lucy, is presented as a tragic figure who stayed loyal to her husband through all of his adulterous affairs and abusive behaviour. In this novel Lucy has an even narrower life space in Alabama. She is locked into the cycle of reproduction that literally ties her to bed. Her physical enslavement as a breeder is also symbolically reified. She is always presented in bed in her marriage both in Alabama and in Eatonville, Florida, too, where she reaches a middle class status on the side of her husband. The metaphor of the bed marks disability and social marginalization that really becomes powerful in contrast with the promiscuous behaviour of John, who is seldom presented in the home, but whose figure is connected to superior physical power and agency.

On her death bed, Lucy says that she has been to sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. This novel also revolves around the Eatonville society and the

culture of the black people. This book also focuses on women, violence, and testimony in the African American society. The author asserts the violently enforced confinement and powerlessness of African American women during 1880s in her novel *"Jonah's Gourd Vine."*

In these three novels, Zora Neale Hurston discusses the culture and society of the black and white people lives around Florida. She had travelled many places and done many research as an anthropologist. So as an anthropologist her writing also filled with the same things such as culture and society around the South Florida.

As a feminine writer all her writings were focused on the women life in their culture, society and around South Florida. How they were crushed in the name of culture and society and how they finally full fill their rights as a women. Most female character in her writing will try to attain self-fulfilment in their life. Being an anthropologist she

combines the culture and society which restrict women development in the social status shown in her works. Hurston's women are often positioned in the private—most prominently: kitchens, bedrooms, back porches, and back yards; and rarely in the public—where they are marginalized and alienated. These women are thus ascribed to inflexible places, where, under the male gaze, they become immobile. However, even if Hurston's women appear in a seemingly free context—outside the home and masculine social space— and acquire a nomadic identity, their stance remains intelligible in the function of transparent space. Her works display a deep interest in the anthropology and feminism.

Thus Zora Neale Hurston novels reflect a strong anthropology and feminism and she examines the lives in and around South Florida. Her research is about their culture and structure of the society and how they see women and how they treat them. All her female character in her

novels seeks for affection, love and self-fulfilment.

Thus this paper analysed Zora Neale Hurston's novels from a cultural, society, feminist literary perspective, examining the women experience and perception of the world, female identity and social constraints on their development.

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