

***Their Eyes Were Watching
God***

Zora Neale Hurston

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“Freedom is something internal...[each person] must make [his or her] own emancipation proclamation.”



Zora Neale Hurston

- 1940' s -- leading black woman writer in the US
- 1950' s -- working as a maid in Florida
- 1960' s -- died in county welfare home; buried in an unmarked grave
- 1970' s -- grave sought out and marked by Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*
- 1980' s -- restored to the American literary canon, thanks to the work of Walker and, of course, Oprah Winfrey

What Happened?

- Most agree that Hurston's career was spoiled by a feud with fellow black writer, Richard Wright
- Wright's angry, hyperbolic, naturalistic style proved more appealing to the readers of the era than did Hurston's Romanticism and melodrama

Hurston vs. Wright

Hurston	Wright
Romantic view of black life	Realistic view of black life
social document fiction	social protest fiction
presented emerging black culture in a positive light	presented the negatives associated with the emerging black culture

According to Wright...

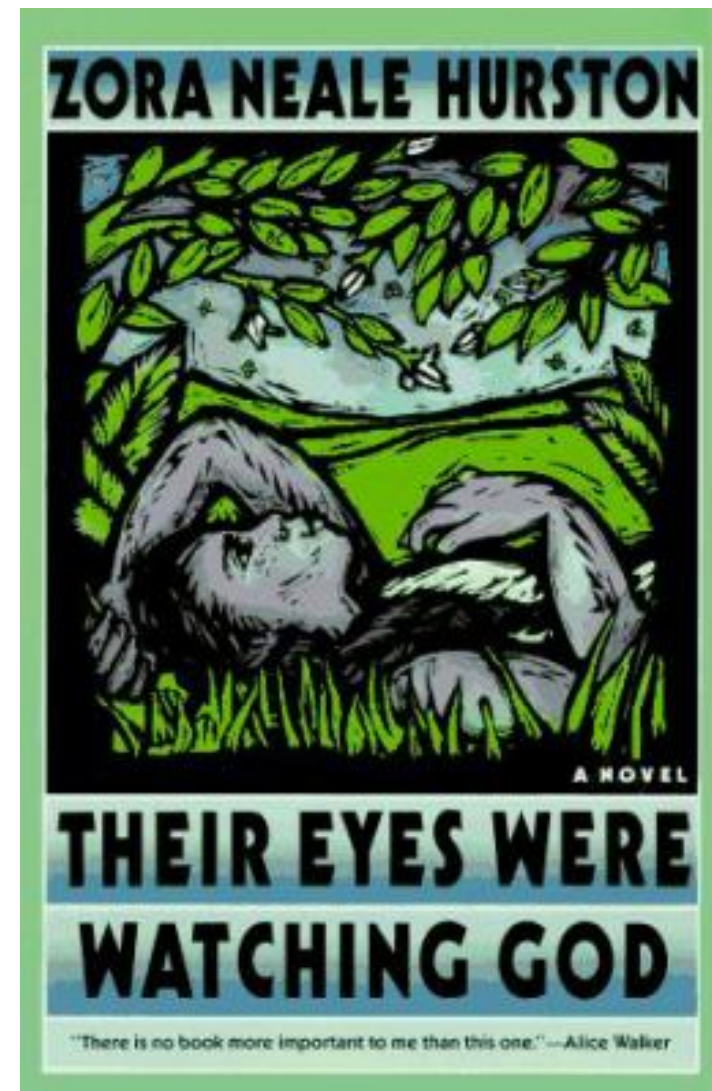
- Hurston is not bitter enough
- Hurston characters are pseudo-primitives
- Hurston writes to “make white people laugh”
- Hurston’s work has “no theme, no message, no thought”

Hurston's Style

- Southern storytelling tradition
- oral tradition of Southern folklore
- framed story / circular narrative
- free indirect discourse
- juxtaposition of black dialect with almost poetic prose
- frequent use of imagery and metaphor

Their Eyes Were Watching God

- JANIE' s journey to self-realization
- JANIE' s struggle for self-knowledge
- JANIE' s struggle to overcome ownership
- the empowering force of community
- the overpowering force of community
- knowledge + self-awareness = POWER



Hurston Quotes

- “Skin color is unimportant. It is up to the individual. If you haven’ t got it, you can’ t show it. If you have got it, you can’ t hide it.”
- “I do not pray because I do not expect God to single me out and grant me advantages over my fellow man.”
- “I have been in sorrow’ s kitchen and I have licked out all the pots.”
- “I love myself when I am laughing, and then again when I am looking mean and impressive.”
- “I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature has given them a low-down, dirty deal and whose feelings are hurt about it.”