

Narrative Structure and "Textual Architecture" in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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Abstract

Research Article

This article examines the narrative structure and the "textual architecture" of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an African American novel. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr. this masterpiece defines Hurston as a pioneer of a literary tradition aesthetically grounded on the interface of orality and literacy. The analysis is based on a narratological and stylistic approach that addresses the fabric of Hurston's novel often called "tale-novel". The study brings to the conclusion that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* builds upon particular and innovative narrative strategies through the eyes of a competent and implied reader. Hurston presented the novel to the public of its time with innovative narrative strategies, and then pioneered a new African American literary tradition.

Keywords: African American novel, narrative structure, "textual architecture", microtext, macrotext.

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INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston is an African American literary figure born on January 07, 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, USA and died in 1960 in Fort Pierce, Florida. This trained anthropologist, folklorist, and fervent disciple of Dr. Franz Boas is author of several novels including *Their Eyes Were Watching God* [1]. The latter is her masterpiece. It was translated into French in 1993 by Françoise Brodsky under the title *Une femme noire*. It tells the story of a black girl victim of bondage of the American system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Hurston's novel hooks the interest of literary critics because of its major themes and its narrative structure. It is the latter aspect of the novel that grabs my attention in this paper whereby I will highlight the specificity of the choice upon the topic. Indeed, I mean by the term "architecture" the textual framework of the novel. I connote this keyword of my work as such because it literally shapes the beauty of Hurston's novel which received much criticism notwithstanding Hurston's prominence as a great literary figure of the *Harlem Renaissance*.

Even Hurston's contemporary African American writers and critics criticized her works. In fact, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was denigrated by writers and critics such as Richard Wright and Alain

Locke who did not value the way Hurston crafted her novel despite the innovations through the merging literary strategies of different genres and the sophisticated use of elements of folklore, which magnifies Hurston's style with hallmarks of the *local color writing*.

According to Wright, it is difficult and even impossible to interpret *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because of "the lack of precision in the plot and the unclear theme of the novel". Akin to this confusion, through Wright's eyes, the novel addresses race issue only in a humoristic way. From this comment, I am prompted to highlight that Wright's main criticism is to consider the novel less committed. In the same perspective, Alain Locke, the father of the *Harlem Renaissance* Movement, accused Hurston of creating her novel with too much simplicity:

And now, Zora Neale Hurston and her magical title: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie's story should not be re-told; it must be read. But always with this talented writer, setting and surprising flashes of contemporary folk are the main point. Her gift for poetic phrase, for rare dialect, and folk humor. It is folklore fiction at its best, which we gratefully accept as an overdue replacement for much local faulty color fiction about Negroes. But when will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how to

tell a story convincingly - which is Miss Hurston's cradle gift, come to grips with motivational fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already published the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification!

However, the debate over that issue reached a more enlightening point. As a matter of fact, Henry Louis Gates Jr. [2], one of the prominent critics of the African American novel, hardly lets his counterparts take the upper hand in controversial debates like this one. He underlines Hurston's merit with regard to her peers, noting that this female writer's challenge and initiative in the publication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* made her a pioneer of a new African-American literary tradition:

Zora Neale Hurston is the first writer, and perhaps I should say the canons. For Hurston is now a cardinal figure in the Afro-American canon, the feminist canon and the canon of American fiction, especially Hurston's texts sustain delightfully. The curious aspect of the breadth of life is shown in the text.

My own method of reading *Their Eyes were Watching God* stems fundamentally from the debates over modes of representation, on theories of mimesis, which has been suggested to such a crucial part of the history of Afro-American literature and its theory [2].

In the process of my analysis, I will examine the narrative structure and the "textual architecture" of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through a narratological and stylistic approach that enables an in-depth study of the structure of the novel often referred to as a "tale-novel". First, I will deal with the narrative structure which sophisticatedly builds upon embedded narratives by means of merging literary strategies of different genres. Then, I will exploit the "textual architecture" of the novel laid upon on a genealogy whose symbolism plays a significant role in the fabric of the novel.

The embedded narratives

Narrative instance plays a fundamental role in the fabric of a novel. However, it is not necessarily always respected as Western literary canons posit it. In this analysis, I will showcase *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an African American novel, whose author uses uncommon narrative techniques to reinvent the fabric of the novel. The aim of Hurston thereby is not only to reinvent but also to revolutionize the African-American novel for aesthetic purposes.

Developing the narrative instance in this paper consists of studying the narrative voice in order to demonstrate how the highlighted narrative mode has been re-adapted by the author to feature the novel with not only innovative strategies but also with a revolutionary approach according to critics such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. [2] Thus, I deem it necessary to show first the narrative techniques that Hurston uses for a better understanding of the literary tradition she strived to forge by means of a borrowed oral narrative strategy.

In their attempt to revisit the studies carried out on narratology by Gérard Genette, Lucie Guillemette and Cynthia Lévesque [3] endeavored to give an explanation and a more accessible definition of narrative instance in these terms:

Narrative instance is the articulation between (1) the narrative voice (who speaks?), (2) the time of the narration (when does one speak, with respect to the story?) And (3) the narrative perspective (through whom does one perceive?). As to the narrative mode, the study of the narrative instance provides a better understanding of the relationship between the narrator and the story within a given narrative. (my translation)

The above definition gives more precision pertaining to the understanding of certain aspects of narratology. However, for other reasons, authors can deviate from the so-called general rule in order to give more originality to their novels. As a matter of fact, Hurston employs a particular storytelling in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Hurston gives the novel an "architectural" form that relates it to the oral narrative and the Western literary tradition of the novel by means of a narrator and a traditional storyteller. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the reader becomes familiar with different narrators through alternating voices. The mode of narration in question is that of a merging of the *diegesis* and the *mimesis*, that is to say, in the novel, the narrator is distinguished, through the eyes of the reader, as a traditional storyteller. As a result, both the narrator and the storyteller merge into a "meta-narrative" or more precisely a "macro-text". Therefore, this phenomenon gives to the novel the fabric of a tale. This is why the term *tale-novel* is very often used in critical studies of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Such a narrative technique is magnified aesthetically in the novel through different modes, the oral narrative strategy combined with that of the western novel, which is uncommon to some readers particularly as regards the definition provided by specialists such as Gerard Genette.

The African American writer under appreciation presents her novel in the form of a hybrid structure. Striking features such as ‘cosmogonic narration’ and a combination of different voices (narrator and *raconteur*) are apparent in Hurston's *Eyes Were Watching God*. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr. [2], the novel opens and closes with a *heterodiegetic* mode using other strategies of the oral narrative:

The text opens and ends in the third person omniscient voice, which allows for a maximum of information giving. Its third paragraph begins: 'So the beginning of this is a woman and she had come from burying the dead. (77)

The novel starts and ends with a *heterodiegetic* mode of narration. However, it also presents other modes of narration with an alternation of voices. As a matter of fact, Nanny tells her own story in the novel in the form of a “slave narrative”. She uses the first person while her granddaughter, Janie Crawford, uses the third person for hers. These “micro-texts” and embedded narratives heard from the voices of a black girl and her grandmother are sort of memories or embedded slave narratives. They are interdependent microtexts that contribute to the understanding of “meta-narrative” (the main story). Thus, as long as the story progresses, the reader becomes familiar with two narrators, one narrating the microtext and the other the macrotext. I mean by microtext, the embedded “slave narrative” that Janie's grandmother, Nanny, tells her to little girl who, in turn, tells the main story that foregrounds the “textual architecture” of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Such a narrative strategy is more than interesting all the more because the author being a woman gives her novel a feminist perspective. She tries to innovate and revolutionize literary canons through a combination of both oral and literary traditions; then, giving birth to a new mode of narration to be appreciated as an artful model. Indeed, this uncommon technique is not only impressive but also innovative. Feminist critics also show their interest in this type of novel that some conceive as a “feminist narrative perspective” according to Johnson:

Susan S. Lanser suggests that feminist narratology might acknowledge the existence of multiple texts and multiple narratees within a narrative. Certainly there is a web of embedded narrative texts in *Their Eyes*. The first of these embedded narratives is the quasi-slave narrative that is told by Nanny. Nanny serves as the narrator of her story and Janie is her narratee. Nanny's story is the only embedded narrative that is told in the first person. Janie understands why she wants to marry Logan Killicks [4].

Through this narrative strategy, Hurston combines different voices and traditions that aesthetically make the novel both folkloric and attractive. Thus, in order to feature the narrative fabric of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is important to make a link between oral and literary traditions so as to decode the borrowed narrative mode. In this masterpiece, Hurston has technically succeeded in creating a direct relationship between the narrator and the narratee. She succeeds in doing so by creating a sort of audience as the oral tradition has it. It is through this technique that the novel gives itself the typology of an oral narrative. This can also be proven through the style of the novel marked by the free indirect speech and the narrative structure itself that is characterized by a non-linear plot and many flashbacks. The novel starts as follows:

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For the eyes of the world, never again before the world, never again before the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all the things they do not want to remember, and remember everything they do not want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. So the beginning of this woman is coming back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated, the sudden dead, their eyes wide open in judgment [1].

This passage which marks the beginning of the novel unfolds with an external narration. However, as long as the story progresses, one realizes that there are other narrators involved in the storytelling and each with a well-defined role. The beginning of the story is marked by interwoven narrative strategies. The first sentence of paragraph number three of the above passage indicates this interplay in the fabric of the novel: "So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead" [1]. This way of telling the story is typical to the oral narrative.

Further in the novel, two narrators stand out: Nanny, Janie's grandmother, who narrates in the ‘I-mode’ and Janie in the ‘He-mode’. In reality, Janie should tell the story in the ‘I-mode’ for more cohesion; because the novel accounts for a semi-autobiography. Thus, based on some information of the text, Hurston resembles her heroine. Yvonne Johnson [4] testifies it in these lines: "Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a work of fiction, it is autobiographical as well. Hurston reveals her personality through narrative events and the interplay of the author's narrator and protagonist's voice "(43).

Regarding the narrative strategy borrowed from the oral narrative, it operates as such: Janie as a narrator in the macrotext does not tell the story directly to the reader; which urges Yvonne Johnson [4] to talk about "private narrator". In so-doing, Hurston resorts to another character who is Janie's close friend, Phoeby, to whom Janie tells her own story so that she, in turn, tells it to the reader / narratee. It is from this technique that one realizes an audience thus creating an interaction between the narrator (public/private), and the narratee/reader. Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains this technique:

The tale of Janie Crawford-Killicks-Starks-Woods is the best friend of Phoeby, while Janie's back porch. We, the readers; "Overhears" of the tale that Janie narrates to her auditor, whose name we recall means the poet. Phoeby, as we might suspect, is an ideal listener: to reduce Janie into narrating her story, Phoeby confesses to her friend, 'it's hard for me to understand what you mean, from way you tell me it. And then again Ah 'm hard to understandin' at times (p.19) [emphasis added] [5].

In such a technical analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr., it is not easy to identify the real narratee of the novel. Because this one can, indeed, be Phoeby to whom the private narrator - Janie - tells the story and whose voice she uses to unwrap the story. In other words, it is Phoeby the spokesperson or the "tongue" of Janie when she reveals: "*Mah tongue is in my friend's mouth*" (6). This typology of the novel proves that the author combines different genres and traditions. From this type of narration, one can retain two fundamental aspects of the oral tradition: the transmission of knowledge by word of mouth and folktales or oral narratives recounted to an audience. It is in this textual architecture that lies the structure of Hurston's novel.

As a promoter of African American folklore, Hurston strives so obviously to perpetuate the oral tradition by inserting it into the narrative fabric in an aesthetic way. She has significantly made it, which gave her fame as pioneer of a new African American literary tradition according to Gates Jr.. Giving the novel a tale-like structure makes Hurston a precursor in revolutionizing Western literary canons in order to create a specific genre adapted to her community's cultural and literary environment; then rooting it in African-American folklore.

In her attempt to identify the narrators, Yvonne Johnson [4] finds two types of narrators in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* namely a "public narrator" and another who is "private", which she explains in the statement below:

/ ... / The narrators of *Their Eyes* are somewhat distanced from the text. In addition to narrators of short embedded narratives, the reader can identify two main characters of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Lanser would characterize one of them as a public narrator who addresses a private audience, she would consider the other a private narrator who addresses a specific narratee [...] The public narrator is omnipotent and as such has the ability to speak in a voice, to recreate the voices and thoughts of the character-actors, to adopt the dialect used by character-actors, and the public narrator of *Their Eyes* as a multivoiced creator and authority within the story world (60-61).

For Johnson, it is these two different types of narrators who tell the story in the novel. Therefore, on the basis of some information from the text, it is possible to know the gender of one of them who is the public and external narrator. For Johnson, this one is easy to identify thanks to the narrative perspective, which shows some complicity and compassion to Janie the protagonist. In other words, it is a feminist perspective that prevails in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* thus unraveling that the public narrator is a woman. The author assigns this particular narrator the role of truth revealer and denunciator of women's condition in general. Such a task is carried under another form of narration to which one can naturally attribute an authoritative voice. Johnson [4] emphasizes this aspect of the novel:

While the public narrator of their eyes is "unmarked" _ that is, there are no indications within the text as to sex_ the reader can assume that the narrator is female. The reader becomes aware of the narrator's sex because of her sympathy and closest identification is Janie, the female protagonist who embarks on a search for self knowledge. The narrator announces on the first page of the book that "the beginning of this woman is a woman", in order to let the reader know that the perspective is female. [...] The narrator's voice insures that the reader will identify and sympathize with Janie, because it is primarily through her consciousness that the story unfolds. The voice of the narrator, whether speaking with a female (61).

Finding a twofold narration through a public voice and a private one makes *Their Eyes Were Watching God* aesthetically thought-provoking in terms of typology. It not only builds upon an innovative narrative structure but it also opens with other perspectives of the oral genre, which introduces the very novel to the reader as an transformative narrative that recounts the life of a black girl of a mixed origins.

To better elaborate on the influence of the oral genre on the novel, according to Yvonne Johnson [4], it is relevant to mention again the revelation of the protagonist who is character and a narrator as well: "*Mah tongue is in mah friend's mouth.*"(6). This sentence is so much revealing in terms of meaning and narrative aesthetics. It enables critics to show that the narrative mode is borrowed from the tale that Janie tells to the reader through the mouth of Phoeby, her close friend. This revelation made by Janie provides a deeper insight into Hurston's narrative strategies. In other words, there is a strong evocation and influence of the oral tradition that the author tries to highlight by incorporating a narrator and *raconteur* duo that is supposed to be heard by an audience. Therefore, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reads through the eyes of a competent implied reader as a novel that builds upon the perspective of a transformative narrative; hence the tale-novel structure

The symbolism of genealogy in the "textual architecture" of the novel

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, there is a symbolic representation of the narrators. This contributes to the "textual architecture" and the literary aesthetics of Hurston's work. She builds the story upon three symbolic characters: Nanny, Leafy, and Janie. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Nanny Crawford is the grandmother of Janie Crawford. She is a former slave whose representation evokes the sufferings and injustices undergone by African Americans during the slavery epoch particularly the American Civil War. She is an eyewitness of the facts and has experienced painful events that have affected her moral and physical integrity. That is why she wants to make a decision about the life of her granddaughter, Janie, whom, she believes, is an innocent. As such, she marries off Janie to Logan Killicks in order to prevent Janie from being raped or experiencing hard times. Unfortunately, Janie cannot easily understand the rationale behind that choice. The story that Nanny recounts in Chapter 2 of the novel gives many details on her private life. Nanny reveals thereby her sad story and that of Janie.

In Chapter 2 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Nanny exposes to the reader the genealogy of Janie and expounds her pain. Being humiliated in her life, she wanted to keep her granddaughter away from the atrocities of the white supremacy. That is why she was angry when she caught Janie kissing a young man. Suddenly, Nanny reveals to Janie that she hardly has any father or mother; she only lives with her grandmother who is very old now. Nanny makes this observation to Janie in order to raise her awareness:

You can'y go no daddy; you just might not say amam, for the good she do yuh. You are not getting nobody buy me. And mah haed is ole and tilted towards serious. Neither can you stand alone by yo'self. Of thought uh you bein

'kicked around the pillar to post is uh hurtin' thing. Every tear you drop a cup of blood amah heart. Ah, get to try and do it for you 'mah head is cold [1].

In the above passage, Nanny makes Janie understand that she is an innocent. A more striking event occurred in Janie's first steps at school. She did not at all know that she was a black girl instead of a white one. Besides, everyone calls her "Alphabet" and it is at the age of six that she really discovers that she belongs to the black race. She realized it one day when she took a picture at school with her classmates. She looked at the picture and could not recognize herself. So, she saw a dark image at the corner and realized that it was herself. Janie says:

So we looked at the picture and everybody got a tip out there was not nobody left except Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'psoed to be, but oh could not recognize dark chile as me.

So, ah ast, 'where us me? Oh do not be me. '

"Everybody laughed, even Mr Washburn, Miss Nellie, of Mam of the chillum who came back home from her husband daed, she pointed to the dark one and said," Dat's you, Alphabet; do you know yo 'ownself?

"Dey all useter call me Alphabet cause so many people had done named different names. Ah looked at from a picture to a long time and seen it was so, and said, "Aw aw! Ah 'm colored! [1].

Janie was unaware of this reality before engaging into a quest of identity to know her origins and her true story. For the reader, this story is revealed through the embedded narratives, especially those recounted by Janie's grandmother. For Janie it is after her awareness raising that Nanny tells her a sadder story. She discloses to Janie again the conditions in which she was born as well as those of her mother.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Nanny stands for a symbol of suffering and silence. She is also a memory for Janie the protagonist who has to learn from her the secrets of life. Hurston uses this strategy further to artistically craft the novel in the form of a semi-autobiography. She successfully and aesthetically does it through the embedded narrative told to Janie by her grandmother. Knowing that there is likely very little time left to live along with her little girl, Nanny decides to teach Janie her sad genealogy.

From an imaginary perspective, the story reveals that Nanny is a former slave and an eyewitness of history. She experienced the American Civil War during which her daughter Leafy_ Janie's mother _ was born. The story has it that, one day, when all plantation

workers went to fight; her master found her alone in the house and raped her. Consequently, Nanny became pregnant and got a child. When the mistress realized that Nanny had a sexual intercourse with her husband, she threatened her to death and told her that she would beat her and sell her one-month aged baby. Nanny fled to the plantations and hid the female baby in leaves to save it. So, she named the child *Leafy*. This name derived from this context. The idea behind the name is that Nanny saved Leafy by hiding her in leaves so as to escape the atrocities of her oppressor, the white man.

Fortunately, the war ended a few months later and Nanny survived as well as her little baby Leafy (Janie's future mother), but with a bad memory of the past. Nanny saved Leafy and decided to entrust with the Washburns in order for her to benefit from a good education. In fact, Nanny wanted her daughter to become a schoolteacher in the future. Unfortunately, this one too, at the age of seventeen, is raped by her schoolmaster. Worse than that, Leafy's trauma indulges herself in alcohol and she abandons her family. Janie was born in this context subsequent to a precocious and untimely pregnancy. The latter accounts for a bitter fruit of all the sufferings and miseries of the black woman whose representation Nanny prefigures. Janie acts as an innocent; then, becomes a heavy burden for Nanny who talks to her in a sad tone:

You know, honey, we are made from the roots of the world. Ah was born back in slavery so it was not for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of the hold-backs of slavery. But, nothing can not stop from wishin'. You can not beat anyone so low you can rob 'em of they will. Ah did not want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow. It was not going to happen for lak they did. Ah, hated the way you were born. But, all of same Ah said thank God [1].

With a sophisticated language use sprinkled with images and full of meaning, Nanny tries to convince Janie insightfully explaining to her granddaughter her lost origins. Notwithstanding this psychological preparation, Janie cannot escape her destiny. She has undergone too much suffering. She too is a symbol of suffering and silence for Hurston. Through this character-narrator, the reader gets into the dark side of the racial segregation system. Janie's life reflects the hard living conditions of African Americans in general and the black woman in particular. She is deprived of her rights. She has been exposed to three marriages without any success. She feels true love only with her third husband, Tea Cake. Instead, Janie is a symbol of silence. The most illustrative case is when Joe Starks marries her; this one deprives her of freedom.

In the following passage, Nanny recalls the past by means of a flashback and tells about the living conditions during the childhood of Janie's mother:

Ah would not marry nobody, though Ah could have uh heap times, cause ah did not want nobody mistreating mah baby. So here we go with some good white people and come down here in West florida to work and make sun shine on both side of street for Leafy. " Mah madma help me with her just lak she been doin 'wid you. Ah put her in school when it got so much Ah was 'spectin' to make a school teacher outa her. "But one day she did not come from usual time, and she is not a lantern and goes round askin 'her come crawlin' on herhands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day [1].

Subsequent to this sad event, Janie is supposed to understand her grandmother who, from the narrative point of view, is her memory. Hurston aesthetically retraces Janie's story through a symmetrical genealogy from grandmother to granddaughter in the form of a collective memory. What is shocking in this genealogy is its hidden fragment; that is to say the wittingly omitted biological ancestors who, in Nanny's narrative point of view, do not honor the story she wants to tell to her granddaughter. In reality, those who respectively raped them one by one are all white people (though hidden, this is implied in the macrotext). It is this unspoken fact of the story that encapsulates the innocence of Janie, the character-narrator, who first believed firmly to belong to the white race.

Nanny acts from a sense of duty. She has fragmented Janie's genealogy and covers only the maternal lineage: Nanny, Leafy and Janie. This representation is skeletal, because Nanny uses it simply as a pretext and a shortcut of the maternal lineage. She wittingly ignores the dark paternal lineage because of the pains she feels in her own story. However short it might be, this family tree is very symbolic in the structure of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and even beyond its narrative perspective. The story may encompass, to some extent, that of its black readers who may have lost their origins in the same context. This is the part of the story where the silence appears implicitly. But, however abbreviated, the genealogy that Nanny presents in the novel is full of meaning. The rest is not very important to her; because it impedes her existence and does not valorize her well-being. This is the reason why she definitely throws this part of her history into oblivion to strategically endure her suffering and misfortune as well as her children's. Nonetheless, Nanny remains a memory for Janie; and

the most recalling image is in the name she gave to Leafy:

Den, one night Ah heard the big guns boomin 'lak thunder. It kept up all night long. And from next morning, we could see a big ship at a distance and a great stirin 'round. So Ah wrapped Leafy up in moss and fixed her in a tree and picked mah way down to landin '. The men were in blue, and Ah heard people say Sherman was comin 'to meet in Savannah, and all of us slaves was free. So the sun got mah baby in quotation wid people and found a place Ah could stay [1].

Hurston's way of portraying her heroine and retracing her origins through a short genealogy marks her talent as a folklorist and anthropologist. She uses history and story and elements of folklore to depict her own community. It is no surprise to find this aesthetic representation of genealogy as a feature of orality in Hurston's novel in which she targets the black woman and gives a realistic picture of black people in South Florida. Thus, the social stratification is not to be neglected in the aesthetic and symbolic significance of the novel, particularly the portrait of its narrators. The image that Hurston gives to Leafy in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is evocative of African and American folklore.

CONCLUSION

It is important to remind readers the remarks of Henry Louis Gates Jr. positing that the criticisms addressed to Hurston are relative. Equally important, it is not easy to be a pioneer or a precursor in the history of literary traditions, because any kind of criticism will go against the contender. Nonetheless, history proves and critics confirm that Hurston's writings are now more famous and massively exploited after so many years of controversy. In "A Rocky Road to Posterity: The Publication of Zora Neale Hurston", Christine Daley [6] clarifies the public that after many years of controversy, Hurston's works have become more attractive and she ranks among the greatest writers of her time. As an illustration, many testimonials have been made on Zora Neale Hurston, which makes publishers find a keen interest in her works. Since then, editors have made new copies of her works that gained a foothold from the 1980s to the mid 1995. This is also what accounts for the re-edition of Hurston's works. Famous writers and critics such as Maya Angelou, Mary Helen Washington, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. have foreworded some of them.

I also deem it necessary to come back on Alain Locke's comments: "the title of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is only magical while its content is empty and gives a false impression"[7]. To my

understanding, Locke assumes that Hurston lacks direction and does not make the narrator tell the story directly when he states: "Her magical title: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie's story should not be re-told; it must be read ". One can infer from this formal analysis that Locke was not satisfied or did not recognize the novel's aesthetic value and literary dimension. On the contrary, the fact that Janie's story is not directly told and does impress other critics such as Henry Louis Gate Jr. who, in interpreting the novel, resort to history and culture and recognize Hurston as a pioneer of a new African American literary tradition. It is also important to underscore that it takes time for everything to flourish and to reach its climax.

Despite her deviation from Western literary canons, Zora Neale Hurston is considered a pioneer of a new African-American literary tradition of her time. Although she is not the first female novelist in African-American literature, she has given the African American novel a particular style and a "reading flavor".

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