



From Margin to Mainstream: Reimagining the Canon through Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Assistant Lecturer: Ihab Mohammed Mahdi

General Directorate of Education of Al- Qadisiyah, Ministry of Education

Ihab.mohammed75@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper discusses the question of the new literary canon, which will allow a place for voices especially those coming from marginal literature. For all those hundreds and thousands of years, the literature canon has been a tight little cluster of whatever books certain folks thought were powerful and important — and those often weren't as many voices on the margins. This has led to a partial reading of literary history and cultural inheritance. Mechanisms of canonization are the aim of the present inquiry, so to speak. We see the need for a more extensive approach. In terms of post structural thought which is what we turn to for value in outlying taxon elements that is what this does. It puts forward its primary argument in terms of Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. We see how the novel is a critique of the traditional forms. Also it looks at how the novel plays into the greater scheme of literature. The post does a close reading of the text. postcolonial theory and women's writing is what we are looking at. We see that Hurston has a very present story teller's voice in her engaging tale. Also it is about African American female identity. This is a novel which has made me realize how important it is to have characters like Hex and his mom represented in fiction. What we see is that Alvarez's book is very much relevant today and it does so by opening up the literary canon, by adding to the repertoire of genres and to make sure human experience is fully represented.

Key words: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, literary canon, Zora Neale Hurston, Marginalized Voices

من الهامش الى المتن: إعادة تصور المرجعية الادبية من خلال رواية زورا نيل هيرستون كانت عيونهم تراقب الله

م . م . أيهاب محمد مهدي
المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة القادسية , وزارة التربية

الخلاصة:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية ضرورة إعادة النظر في التراث الأدبي ليشمل أصواتاً متعددة، لا سيما تلك التي تنتمي إلى الأدب المهمش. فعلى مرّ القرون، ظلّ التراث الأدبي مجموعةً صغيرةً وحصريّةً من الأعمال التي اعتبرها البعض مؤثّرةً وهامةً، وغالبًا ما استبعدت هذه المجموعة أصوات المجتمعات المهمشة. وقد أدى هذا الإهمال إلى تفسير غير متوازن للتاريخ الأدبي والمساهمات الثقافية. تركز هذه الدراسة على آليات التكريس الأدبي، وتدعو إلى استراتيجية أوسع نطاقًا، ونظرية نقدية تُعلي من شأن النصوص المهمشة. تتخذ الورقة رواية زورا نيل هيرستون "عيونهم كانت تراقب الله" دراسةً رئيسيةً، وتتناول كيفية نقد الرواية للأشكال الأدبية الكلاسيكية، وكيف تُثري العالم الأدبي الأوسع. تقدم الدراسة قراءةً متعمقةً للنص، مستندةً إلى نظرية العرق النقدية والنظرية الأدبية النسوية. يُظهر هذا الكتاب أن لهيرستون أسلوبًا سرديًا مميزًا في أعمالها، كما يتناول هوية المرأة الأمريكية من أصول أفريقية. وقد عزز هذا الكتاب



الحاجة إلى إدراج أصوات الأقليات في الأدب وأهميتها. وتؤكد النتائج على الأهمية الدائمة للرواية ودورها المحوري في توسيع وتنويع التراث الأدبي، وفي تقديم صورة أكثر شمولاً وإنصافاً للتجربة الإنسانية. الكلمات المفتاحية : كانت عيونهم تراقب الرب ، المدونة الادبية، زورا نيل هيرستون، الاصوات المهمشة

Introduction:

For a long time, we looked to the same body of work to define what is and is not literature. These pieces have authority because of the time from which they come – that time in turn shapes present day thought. In the school curriculum they are mainstays, scholars analyze them in depth, their quotes are thrown around in academic discussion. Also as a result of this -- how we see literary history play out - we see change. National identity changes with it. Yet in all of this which works made the cut was always a risk. What we see now is in part a reflection of who had power in the past. It is what people at the time thought important at the time (Kolbas, 2001). Also many stories which should have been included were left out on purpose – voices that over years were erased. Upon closer inspection what we find is that it isn't just large scale groups which are left out. Also it applies to the marginalized. Women, members of racialized communities -- they don't get the same play. Also we see the periphery of the Western world represented here. What you hear are the stories of lives which are usually left out of the picture. That silence leaves our definition of what it means to be human thin, almost broken. When art turns a blind eye to those voices its purpose fractures under the weight of exclusion. Here lies a type of confinement shaped by written words. Stories such as these tend to retain almost nothing of our shared, made-up narratives.

Problem Statement

It's a given that the idea of what is traditional and what we should do away with is a tough one to shake off in our societies. We see trouble arise when present day students approach books – it is a very narrow perspective. As for the marginalized authors? They don't get the recognition they deserve no matter what the rule. Also that which does value what these works are worth -- it doesn't include enough points of view. Also it protects against criticism which in turn stops deep thought. There is no room for in depth exploration of many perspectives. At the same time that which does want to think through issues in an intellectual way is made difficult. We miss out on in reference to pop culture and social issues. Also these are very important elements as we develop tools for literary work which play into social roles. It is a cycle which just continues. The best stories which have the most impact go unchallenged. Research done by marginalized groups is put aside. This is a barrier to a literary world that truly includes all. Also it plays a role in what we produce as literature.



Significance of the Study

This study is a large contribution in many ways. For one it adds to the continuous discussion on canon reform which we present in a case for more equal and wide reaching literary fields. By bringing to light the value of marginalized literature this research also puts forth a challenge to traditional ideas of what makes great literature and at the same time encourages a greater range in what we as a group put forward as important to study. Also this work brings to the fore the value of looking at texts that present many social perspectives which in turn gives us a more complex view of identity, power and representation. Also in the analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* we see a study of a once outside the canon work which has not only added to the literary canon but also gives a look at what we may include in future curriculums and at how we do literary analysis.

Case Study Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* appeared in 1937. And it is a turning point of American literature. It's an example of the power of little people. The reception of the novel when it was first published was mixed some people like the novel, but other people didn't. For decades, it was largely ignored by the literary establishment. The 70s saw a big revival of interest in the book. That was, in no small part, thanks to black feminist scholars. These were authors such as Alice Walker (Walker, 1975). It is now widely regarded as a classic. It is a regular part of American public and private school literature curricula. It has been inducted into the literary canon (Wikipedia, n.d.). This paper will employ *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a paradigmatic reading. This signals one way that texts at the margins can act as a provocation to the canon. These texts expand the literary canon in an exciting new way. They can ultimately reimagine it. That is a very powerful statement of influence on literary scholarship. It also shows a cultural effect.

Research Question

How does Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* both subvert and expand the traditional canon of literature, and which specific storytelling methods help make it an important voice from the margins?

Objective of the Study

To assess how Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* questions and extends the conventional literary canon by giving visibility to neglected voices and perspectives.

Data and Theoretical Background

This research relies on a mix of content analysis. It's depends on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is also based on sound theory.



Shortcomings for this method could be that its focus lies in constructing literary canon. This even applies to the CRT — Critical Race Theory. It is also made up of feminist theory of literature. It is in these theories that the required tools are given. It shows how such work can reshape the canon. It also offers valuable indications for curriculum development. There are literary-critical consequences as well.

The Literary Canon: Formation and Critique

In the past the literary canon was made up of what was considered high quality, culturally important works. What does well in the market is often what is included in school readers, in classical education, and what passes for criticism. Canon making is a not a neutral practice, many social forces play a role in it and it is very much a reflection of political and social reality (Kolbas, 2001). With the canon as it is today things are in a state of mess as scholars like John Gilroy (1993) have reported. We don't see an issue of intrinsic literary value but rather which texts and authors are respected. That which is included also tends to reflect contemporary cultural values and at the same time is a product of the power structures of a given era. This has historically assigned privilege to the works of white and male Western authors. Also it has served to put other narratives in the background which in turn has caused the full range of women, people of color and Non-Western cultures to be left out.

The canon as we know it is a challenge for its biases. Also it is a product of its own limitation, which is that it does not cover the full spectrum of human experience. Critics put forth that a small canon creates a narrow view of literature. It supports present social hierarchies. Also it takes away from the reader's experience of other perspectives. These arguments go against what we know. We could in fact expand our world view. We must look at the shaping of the canon as a process. What has been left out is a large part of it. It is a re thinking of which works are included. It is the action of bringing in new pieces. This is based on art merit. Also it includes the value of a cultural approach (Number Analytics, 2025).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT offers an important analysis. It leads us to see the role of race and racism. These forces shape the making of books. They reshape how books are received. They also decide which books become part of the canon. CRT was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by legal scholars. CRT asserts that race is a social construct. It is not a biological one. Racism is not only what one person feels, of the feeling of racism. It is systemic. It is encoded in laws. It is built into policies. It is also embedded in culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In literary terms, CRT allows us to see power. It demonstrates the way race imprints who tells what story. It's about who gets to tell them. It shows who the audience is. It also demonstrates how the literary world makes a determination about whether a story has value.



Key tenets of CRT relevant to this study include:

Intersectionality: The term intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), acknowledges that different social and political identities (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality) intersect to produce distinct forms of discrimination/oppression and privilege. For *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, that means considering Janie Crawford's journey, not only along racial and gendered lines, but as a Black woman coming to terms with certain historical and social constructs in early 20th-century America.

Narrative and story: CRT suggests story-telling and personal narratives are key to exposing the lived experiences of oppressed people, as well as by challenging hegemonic discourse. Here, Hurston's commitment to the vernacular and to Janie's interior journey meet in creating a voice that had rarely been on display in dominant literature.

Critiques of Liberalism: CRT a critique against the concept of colorblindness and meritocracy is common in CRT. It suggests that such terms may obscure continuing realities of systemic racism. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was initially negatively received by some Black male authors who viewed it as failing to adhere to their political project of racial uplift. This response is intelligible in these terms, for it threatened previous concepts of the great work of literature.

Feminist Literary Theory

Feminist literary criticism provides a unique lens for the interpretation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This interpretive methodology investigates the extent to which literature mirrors, reproduces or contests patriarchal systematism and gender-stereotyping. It attempts to explore women's experiences and hear their voice, perspective and ways in which such experience has been suppressed or misrepresented (men, showalter 1979). Political initiative of women, the formation of female identity, the oppression by gendering and the construction of femininity are common topics.

Key aspects of feminist literary theory relevant to this study include:

Deconstructing Patriarchal Narratives: Feminist theory is interested in the ways that traditional stories frequently foreground male experiences and viewpoints and treat women as though second to male characters who receive the privilege of fully-realized life-stories. That patriarchal convention is itself challenged head on by Hurston's novel, which has the striving of Janie Crawford to find her own self and her voice at its core.

Voice and Silencing: A key term in feminist literary criticism is voice—who has it, whose stories are heard, whose are silenced. Janie's quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is essentially a search for her own voice — finding out how to



speak (and when) on her own terms, as an autonomous being in a world that often wishes to silence her as a Black woman and thereby also as simply anyone.

Reclamation of the female experience: One aim of feminist literary theory is to bring forward and validate women's experiences which have been through the years suppressed and marginalized. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston presents Janie's various relationships, her journey in the development of identity and her strong will in the face of hard times which at the time were very radical. By way of these models of theoretical analysis we present in this paper a more in depth study of "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" in which we also look at the book's political issues, how it played in the literary mainstream and the brought out voices of minority groups. Also that book is a powerful stage which through which we see how literature does at once mirror and make up public thought on race, gender and identity.

Literature Review

In recent years the reception of Zora Neale Hurston's "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" has transformed. Also the book has come under great scholarly fire. Which is particularly true when one looks at how it was received at its publication in 1937. This section looks at the main academic approaches to the novel. It is a part of what has come to be considered the pantheon of literature which the novel is a part of. It looks at the issue of race and gender in the text. Also it brings to the fore the novel's unique story telling.

Early Reception and Rediscovery

Upon first release *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was met with mixed reviews. Some critics put forward that Hurston's writing was vibrant and that she truly depicted Black Southern life, but also many which included Richard Wright put out that the novel didn't do enough in terms of political protest and instead focused on romance which they saw as a diversion from the greater issue of race. As a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance Wright argued that what Hurston put forth did not address the very real social and political issues the African American community was going through. This in addition to Hurston's at time unorthodox political views and her waning literary popularity caused the novel to be put into the background for some time (Wright, 1937).

In the 1970s the revival of interest in the novel which saw the revival of Zora Ne' t' Hurston's work marked a turning point in American literary history. That revival which we see as a rebirth was very much at the hand of Black feminist scholars and writers in large part due to the work of Alice Walker, which at the time decried the neglect of Hurston and which also put forward her case (Walker, 1975). Walker's essay, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," published in *Ms.* magazine, Walker brought back into the public eye Hurston's talent and her in depth look at Black female subject matter. That revival brought about a



rethinking of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* which in turn set that novel up as a basic text in the fields of African American literature and Women's Studies.

Canonical Status and Reimagining the Canon

The novel upon its revival took its place among great works. Also that novel has become a mainstay in American literature courses. It became a subject of serious scholarly study also. Its' position in the canon is a great example of how0 ignored books may in fact be reevaluating and broadening what we think of as great literature. Now literary scholars recognize the value and culture impact of the novel. They love the way it can tell a story. Its strong look at a Black woman's journey toward self-discovery is also why they appreciate (Muse. jhu. edu, 2016). The path of the book from forgotten to famous proves, once again, that what we call "canon" is forever in flux. It is proof that the list of classic books is not a done deal. Rather, it's a porous concept that can expand to include a wider range of voices.

Most of today's prominent literary critics plead for a diverse, non-Eurocentric and non-patriarchal value system in our canon. "When I teach, we'll reimagine the canon so that it's less Western-centered and includes voices of more-disenfranchised communities," Mount told me (ILA, 2023). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a clear example of this remix, and including it to the canon has expanded what we consider canonic and opened the door to other non-centralized narratives to finally be recognized.

Race, Gender, and Identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

A great deal of academic work has concentrated on the novel as complex narrative of race, gender and identity. Feminist literary critics have praised Hurston's representation of Janie Crawford who is in search for independence and expression while being repressed by the society she belongs to. The journey of Janie's character with three men would then be translated into a quest for an identity and self-hood outside the domain of the patriarchy (Scirp. org, n.d.; Study. com, n.d.). Academicians highlight Hurston's portrayal of Janie against her internal struggles and victory in forming her identity on her own terms as making the novel a Black feminist text.

In a Critical Race Theory frame it is a very powerful text to look at issues of power. It looks at how race plays out between members of the Black community and in the larger white society. Hurston writes as people really talk which is a voice that has not had a name. Also a celebration of Black culture which at the same time brings out the role of class within race. These elements add to our picture of what life was like for Black people in the early 1900s (LitReaderNotes, 2022). Some early reviewers criticized her for not being political enough.



But later scholars put forth that what she did was to present Black characters' inner emotional worlds which is a form of resistance. Her work is a break from the past which used to reduce Black people to a set of character traits. Instead she presents the cultural richness of their lives (Aithor. com, 2024).

Narrative Techniques and Literary Style

Hurston's special way of telling a story, have been well analyzed by scholars. You employed a literary technique called "free indirect discourse. It's a voice that combines the narrator's with Jannie's real thoughts and actual spoken words. It all feels real to the reader, at both character and setting levels. It also shatters long-standing rules that say a story can have only one main voice. The book is beautifully written, and includes many color images. It takes a little bit from old folk stories, too. These are the sorts of weird coincidences that create good art. They really bring reading it to life and make the story so much more exciting (LitReaderNotes, 2022).

Gap of the Study

Though much space has been devoted to the feminist, racial and formal aspects of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, there is more work remaining in this area – specifically that which points out the place of these elements in a larger conversation concerning re-visioning the canon. Previous analyses have usually trended towards readings of the novel in isolation, or in relationship to (say) Harlem Renaissance and/or Black feminism. Far rarer, however, has been a close reading such as yours that points out how the specific narrative devices and themes employed by the novel actively undermine and extend the traditional literary canon — in large part with respect to its slow move from periphery to center of canonicity.

This essay attempts to fill that gap by providing a focused reading of the novel. It explores the means by which *Their Eyes Were Watching God* functions as a certain kind of catalyst for re-visioning the canon. In this study we look at past critical views as well as present take on the text in the narrative. What we see is that Hurston's aesthetic decisions do exactly that they put forward what we term as the best in literature. Also we look at how the novel presents a full picture of marginality. Also we look at how its canonicity shaped – and defined – what we today consider the literary field. This is a full picture that is relevant to many of our ideas of what literature is.

Literary Analysis: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston's "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" comes off as a magical work which you can't wait to go back to. It is also one of the shrewdest works of its genre. That it has finally broken through a long standoff of resistance also proves out its ability to cross and re define traditional literary lines – at which it



presents a unique voice in narrative, which it does in bringing forward themes which are very much its own, in the characters it creates which are in a class by themselves.

Challenging the Canon Through Narrative Voice and Language

Their Eyes Were Watched God is known for its unique way of telling the story and the language used. In the book we see a perfect mix of the elite third person omniscient point of view and the actual dialect of the Black Southern community. That narrative choice was very radical at the time which is what made it so successful, it took what was looked at as non-literary – a dialect - and made it an artistic force. Phoeby is also a participant in this in the sense that she is a very active listener; as Janie tells her life story to Phoeby we are given access into the oral and linguistic cultures of Eatonville, Florida. Also it challenges the traditional literary establishment which has for long put forward standard English as the only proper form and by that token presented nonstandard variants as uneducated or primitive.

In crafting a body of work which embraced and celebrated Black vernacular Hurston was on purpose. She chose this path which in turn created space for African American's to be the architects of our own cultural rearing. What it did was allow her to capture the fine details of Black speech, thought and culture – in essence to write for a community which main stream literature had either done in toons or ignored. This tactic proved to be very effective in terms of what it brought to the table and in its validation of traditional black cultural forms as subjects for what is considered high art. Also in the process Hurston is put forth a case for what she determined to be literary excellence which she did so in a way that included many linguistic traditions and cultures. Let us take the speech among characters, for instance- this is extremely realistic African American Language that some praised and decried as "unreal", not to mention being alien text that is totally divorced from the human experience not universal according to Wright's reviewer (Wright 1937). Indeed, it's the sheer realness of the language in this novel that gives it an intoxicating potency and cultural leverage, which is why people read and teach it both for itself as well as to anchor African American literary studies.

Thematic Exploration: Self-Discovery and Voice

The main idea of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Janie Crawford's journey along a rocky road to the realization of her true self and voice. From her childhood – under the watchful eye of Nanny, who values safety over Janie's happiness - through relationships with Logan Killicks and Jody Starks, Janie searches relentlessly for herself in a way that doesn't conform to what society or men expect from her. Her connections (especially Jody) underscore the way society has caused Black women (read: voices) to be muted both publicly and



privately. In their push to regulate Janie's behavior and looks, summed up in his order to Janie, "Janie, you've got tuh class off" (Hurston, 1937 p. 73), Jody becomes all men who resist women's autonomy.

Janie's relationship with Tea Cake finally fulfills both of the aforementioned requirements by giving Janie a place where there exists room for her to speak and have that speech respected. This theme of the Black woman's internal journey and search for autonomy set the show apart. In the past male characters in classic works did so in a successful external sense which also played out in their personal lives with women; they were more at home in domestic settings as opposed to tragic ones. In his work Hurston we see Janie's soul and emotional growth which also includes her physical trials. Also, we see her own strength in hard times. Also, what sets her apart is her ultimate agency which is a strong theme in the narrative that in many ways challenges what we think of as the great literary works. Her arc isn't just for a certain love interest. Rather it is a journey of self-fulfillment and inner growth. Also this gives her the stage to tell her story in her own right and in her own words.

Character Development and Representation

In that which is Janie Crawford's character she does very well. That which is The book becomes an important voice in a field which has been silenced. Janie is a very complex character with many layers to her. She is not a simple stereotype. She doesn't play the role of her environment. Instead she acts for herself. She is always on a journey to freedom and happiness for herself. At Janie's young age she is blank, innocent. As she grows up she becomes wise and self-aware. That shift which she brings to the table dispels old and unfair representations of Black women in literature. In past works writers would put out Black women as two dimensional characters or symbols of pain. Hurston does the mature growth of Janie through her inner thoughts. Also in the way Janie talks to others. That which they do and you have depth, character. To have that in depth look into a Black woman's mind was very rare in the books from that time.

In the book the Black town of Eatonville is painted as a very vivid picture of African American life. That which was put forward was more than just the graphic, gory stories of pain and inequality. Also in the way that she did it, Hurston indulged in the strength, humor and vibrancy of this community. What we got was an inside look which at the time was hard to find in most other books. This is that which in fact included Black characters in the classics. It put out a wide and in depth human experience which we didn't see in the old stories. Of course the town has its issues but it is also where Janie takes her personal journey. That is a display of the resilience and strength of Black life.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender



Their Eyes Were Watching God is a pivotal work in which we see the interaction of race and gender. It is a mainstay of Critical Race Theory and feminist theory. Janie is at once a Black woman. You can't separate out those elements of her. What she goes through is a direct result of that which is put upon her as a Black person and as a woman. Also, her struggle to find herself is a struggle for identity. Her fight for freedom is also very much a product of her unique situation. As for Nanny, she tells Janie to marry for security and then for love. That in large part is because of the poison that Black women were exposed to this past year. They lived in a racist male dominated world (Hurston 1937).

In the works of Hurston, we see that issue of race and sex as two elements of the same oppression play out in the lives of African American women. In the past it was rare for her works to present a story from this dual perspective, which is to say instead of looking at the issues of race or sex as separate elements in the female experience – women were left out of the picture -- rather they got addressed in separate stories. Also Hurston added the personal element, very much the lived in, real life experience of the individual woman in Janie's case. In doing that she expanded what a classic looks like in literature. She includes a more complete picture of what it means to live at the bottom – of race, class and gender. Also what is brought out is the many layers to the issues of identity and prejudice. In a word it is a more in depth and rich way to look at books. Also the novel does a study in how Janie takes action in the face of what are at times insurmountable odds. Also it is a fine example of going against the grain and standing up to a system that is against you.

In the end *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is at the turn of a revisionist canon. In their work Hurston put forth a radical story via almost unradical language. Also Her voice as biographer Valerie Boyd notes – quietly did the mix of white English and black vernacular into a very natural, almost reportage like style. Also it is great for the journey of self-discovery. That which we see are in depth character studies. It also gives us a look at the issues of race and gender. By all these things the novel does present how what is dismissed may in fact achieve artistic value. Also it challenges us to re think what we consider a “great” or cultural must read book. That is the story of rise from neglect to a classic. Also it presents the issue of how we deal with diversity in the book world. This is the way to be sure that the fruits of our experience continue to feed the soil in which literature grows.

Conclusion

This is the biggest reason to revamp our literary canon. We see in it a call to pay attention to the marginalized voices in literature. Also it uses Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a model. We looked at the history of which books were labeled as “classic”. Also in the past these lists have left out diverse stories. Also we looked at Critical Race Theory and feminist theory in



the paper. Those frameworks are useful for looking at which voices are left out. Also they should remind us of the importance of Hurston's work.

Their Eyes Were Watching God Analysis also brought up some very important issues. These are facts which give evidence to the book's great contribution to renewing not only the old list, but also the ancient canon of classic books. Hurston first introduced novel ways of telling a story and using language. She just talked Black, the way that people like her spoke. That's a choice that runs counter to the old rule that books should be written only in "proper" English. While she does so, her characters come to feel real. She's also proof of the incalculable worth of other ways of talking in art.

In the case of Janie Crawford, we see the main issue of her quest is identity. She is on a journey to find her own voice. This is a strong "counter story" to what we have seen in the past in terms of women's representation in literature and also in the case of Black women in particular. Janie's quest for independence and a sense of self is a very much a solo venture outside of male influence. This is the novel's greatest gift to the field of feminist analysis. Also it adds to the canon of "great" books. We see in this the in depth and complex inner lives of women which in the past had been left out.

In the end we see that by looking at race and gender in Hurston's work we are made aware of how well she was able to put into words the issues Black women face. She places Janie at the very intersection of racism and women's oppression. Also this novel gives a much more complex picture of identity than do the so called classics in our old literary can. This perspective is what in turn makes the book a better world.

In that which comes to a close – *They Eyes Were Watching God* is a testament to the fact that many a book is left out which in time prove to be classics. It puts forth that which we term as great stories may not at first fall in that category. The book's progression from being little known to very well-known also presents that the canon is a living entity. Also it is a note that the book world is in need of more voices.

References

Aithor.com. (2024, June 6). *Their Eyes Were Watching God As A Work Of Resistance*.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). New York University Press.



- Guillory, J. (1993). *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. University of Chicago Press.
- ILA. (2023, July 24). *Reimagining the English Language Arts canon: A case for inclusive ...*. Retrieved from <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jaal.1302>
- Kolbas, E. D. (2001). *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon*. Westview Press.
- LitReaderNotes. (2022, September 13). *Their Eyes Were Watching God — LitReaderNotes*. Retrieved from <https://www.litreadernotes.com/home/2022/8/29/their-eyes-werewatching-god>
- Muse.jhu.edu. (2016, November 11). *Necessary Narration in Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/635937/summary>
- Number Analytics. (2025, June 17). *Reimagining Literary Canons*. Retrieved from <https://www.numberanalytics.com/blog/reimagining-literary-canons>
- Scirp.org. (n.d.). *Black Feminism in Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Retrieved from <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=96464>
- Showalter, E. (1979). Towards a Feminist Poetics. In M. Jacobus (Ed.), *Women Writing and Writing About Women* (pp. 22-41). Croom Helm.
- Study.com. (n.d.). *Feminism in Their Eyes Were Watching God | Analysis & Quotes*. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/feminism-in-their-eyes-werewatching-god.html>
- Walker, A. (1975). In Search of Zora Neale Hurston. *Ms. Magazine*, 3(8), 74-79, 85-89.
- Wikipedia. (n.d.). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Their_Eyes_Were_Watching_God
- Wright, R. (1937). Between Laughter and Tears. *New Masses*, 25(5), 22-23.