

## CHAPTER III

# THE AUTHOR'S CONSCIOUSNESS

As being previously stated in the last chapter, Goldman regards the collective subject as the true subject of creation for it bears what so called *world view* or *collective consciousness* within the process of *structuration* of the literary work. The question arises as to what is the author's contribution towards the work and where should we place him within the creative process.

Putting the collective subject prior to the individual one, Goldman proposes that man can only be authentic only in so far as she or he conceives herself or himself as part of developing totality, which is the world in which she or he belongs (Goldman 14). A literary work is not originated from the author as an individual; it is constituted by the *world view* of the group wherein the author's consciousness is only a partial element. Goldman's alternative to the biographical approach of correlating the works with the author's life is not to center on the text but to correlate the work's structure with what he came to call the mental structure of the author's social group (Jeffersson 183).

The author and the associated society are always in a rupture with the degraded world. Thus the literary work becomes a transformation of aspirations, ideas and expectations unfulfilled in the real social life that functions as means of reaching equilibrium demanded by the group (Goldman

11). The author is significant merely for her or his capacity of giving coherence to reality and thought on the level of imaginary creation. The collective consciousness in which the authentic value resides is often something that the group is not fully aware of. Such value only exists in the author's consciousness as a critical member of the group in a conceptual and abstract form (Faruk 18). Providing the group with a media to sharpen its awareness towards its own consciousness, the author thus elaborates the authentic value implicitly in the literary work.

### **Hurston's Consciousness**

Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama in January 1891. In her early childhood she and her family moved to a town called Eatonville. Her memory on that particular town is so vivid that she is inspired to enclose the town as one of the settings in her later literary works. She described the town as "A pure Negro town". It is the only town where blacks could be elected mayor (her own father was the mayor of the town), council, town Marshall and many other crucial positions that has been under the dominance of whites.

She was taught the basic principle of self-reliance, a strong theme that can easily be captured in her writings, by Booker T. Washington when she attended the Hungerford School. After the death of her beloved mother she had her school years moving from one place to another. She moved to Baltimore, enrolled in night school at Morgan and then moved again to

Washington where she studied at Howard University. Even though she was badly hurt with the death of her mother, it did encourage her to start writing. She never gave up studying and writing. As Hurston herself puts it "Anyway, the force from somewhere in Space which command you to write in the first place, gives you no choice. You take up the pen when you are told and write what is commanded. There is no agony like bearing the untold story inside you" (Gallaher 2). In 1925 Hurston moved to New York when her work was being published.

She once wrote in a sort of journal called *The Crisis* that she did not belong to the sobbing school of negrohood who held that nature somehow gave them a low down dirty deal and whose feelings were all hurt about it (Gates, Afterword 189). She thus claimed that she was not into writings that were based upon what so called racial ideology. Her disapproval of writing in a protest tradition is perhaps, inspired by the basic principle of self-reliance she was taught by Booker T. Washington. Hurston herself exposed her thought on that principle, "Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural, there is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle. So every man's spice box seasons his own food" (Lycos 2).

At Barnard College she finished her literary degree she began at Howard. There she met Franz Boas, a great anthropologist of his day and was encouraged to make trip to the South and to Caribbean. It was when she

began to make documentation on black culture that later became the great impact in her literary achievements. That is why she is capable of depicting the black culture so vividly in the dialect and rhythm of her literary works. Being an author and an anthropologist at the same time makes her works rich with the preservation of the African heritage adapted by the Afro-Americans.

During her life she was associated with the Harlem renaissance, a major black literary and cultural movement in New York's Harlem during 1920's. The movement aims at stimulating pride and confidence in black life and culture (Diesman 2). Instead of stressing on the racial discrimination the blacks has been suffering from, the movement attempts to preserve the black culture throughout art and literature which lead to the recognition of black as a race.

Hurston herself as an anthropologist loves to celebrate the black cultural heritage in her literary works in a hope that other Afro-Americans will cease thinking as inferior race. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also embodies such cultural heritage "She is choosing a collective rather than an individual voice, demonstrating her closeness to the collective spirit of the Afro-American oral tradition...Janie is the *teller* of the tale and Pheoby as the *bearer* of the tale" (Washington vii). While Hurston, she feels herself as both the teller and the bearer; she cannot resist the urge within herself, which is strongly reinforced by her association with her fellow black society.

The blacks have been too long blinded by this slogan of racism that makes them more inferior thus she feels obliged to return the blacks into their true collective consciousness. She provides her writing as means of stimulating the pride of the Afro-Americans throughout its celebrated culture. It is what exactly her male contemporaries criticize. Hurston refuses to share the radical racial ideology embedded in their writings. It is possible that her refusal departs from the basic idea that "Racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is 'deprived' where different, and whose psyches are in the main pathological" (Gates, Afterword 189).

According to Hurston there is no use in protesting about prejudice one suffers without starting right from one's self. One has to pay closer attention to her or his experience for it is an important phase of growth. Self is the only place one can rely on because Hurston then suggests that 'freedom' is "Something internal...the man himself must make his own emancipation" (Gates, Afterword 189). One cannot blame others nor the external circumstances for what she or he undergoes. It is the person herself or himself who should take real action to solve the problems. "I have ceased to think in terms of race; I think only in terms of individuals. I am interested in you now not as a Negro but as a man. I am not interested in the race problem, but I am interested in the problem of individuals, white ones and black ones" (Sunset Freedom 1)



Facing serious financial problems during her later years, Hurston needed to be supported by two patrons. In early 1940 she became some sort of a hermit, living alone on her Florida houseboat. Financially ruined and in poor health, she spent her later years working as a maid. On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1960 she died of her disease and was buried in an unmarked grave in Florida with funds raised by friends.

### **Hurston's Association with the Harlem Renaissance**

Beginning as literary discussions in the lower Manhattan and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City among the black authors and artists, this Afro-American cultural movement became known as 'The New Negro Movement' and later as 'The Harlem Renaissance'. It was not merely a literary movement, nor a social revolt against the white racial prejudice towards the blacks, The Harlem Renaissance was encouraging the Afro-American to celebrate their cultural heritage and to become 'the New Negro'.

One of the factors contributing to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance was the great migration of Afro-Americans to Northern cities (such as New York City, Chicago, Washington, etc.) between 1919 and 1926. In the influential book *The New Negro* (1925), Alain le Roy Locke described the northward migration as "something like a spiritual emancipation". This migration marked also the rise of radical black intellectuals that contribute to

particular style and success of black artists and authors during the Harlem Renaissance period (Diesman 1).

Somehow the movement has offered new perception of blacks struggle. Ever since its founding many black artists, musicians and authors have begun to leave what so called racial ideology. They are not creating in the old protest tradition, which in a way has dragged the blacks into more inferiority. The struggle has been emphasized on the preservation and celebration of the Afro-Americans cultural heritage that will provide a new and better way in seeing their own selves. They are no longer a race that is only capable of reacting to the culture of the whites. They are proud as being a black race, the Afro-Americans- because they have their own celebrated culture and tradition preserved in their own creative works. From then on their works of art has become a means of marking their existence in this universe.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDING A VOICE OF HER OWN