

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Only in recent years Black feminist literature has begun to show its effect in drawing people's attention. People start to treat them seriously as a special literary genre resulted from the silent protest against the dominance of racial and patriarchal values. As Elaine Showalter puts it "It is an angry protest against the neglect of black women's literary tradition by male critics of Afro-American literature" (Showalter 13), Black women's literature had been suffering the sexual discrimination of the male literary establishment and racial prejudice. Long before the resurrection of Black feminist literature in the 1970's, most of them even had been left unread and out of print. One of them was Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Zora Neale Hurston was an anthropologist, folklorist, and novelist. She was born in January 7th, 1891 and died in 1960. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was her second novel, which is -quoting Doris Grumbach in *Saturday Review*- "The finest black novel of its time and one of the finest of all time" (Washington vii). Her consistency in writing is undoubtful. She did not do commercial writing. In fact, she even died in poverty and many of her writings had been out of print. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* had

been one of them until it was reprinted in 1957. During the first publication, the harsher critics came from the black male. Sterling Brown criticized her work for its failure in depicting the harsher side of black life in the South. Brown was blaming Hurston for making black Southern life appear easy going and carefree (Washington viii). Other critics disagreed her since she was not writing fiction in the protest tradition just like the other black authors. She has suggested how 'silent' protest makes us --women-- distinct from men. Women seem not bothering to protest out loud. They use their voice when they think they have to. They pay closer attention to their own inner life because experience is the important phase for growth. The idea meets that of Rosalind Coward in her critic concerning feminist novels, "Often it is when the novel claims to be most naturalistic that it contains very definite ideologies. A feminist approach to literature has exposed how supposedly 'truthful' and 'honest' accounts of 'reality' rely on distinct ideologies, in particular of what men and women should be like" (Showalter 227).

Their Eyes Were Watching God represents a black woman- the minority of the minority- finding her own voice after for nearly half of her life having been subjugated. The determination of stronger people around her had prevented her from realizing her own want. Black women have been forced to recognize their subordinate position; "As a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a non black world" (Gates, Afterword 193). Black women share the same needs of claiming their

voice and freedom out of the determining world of the whites, but they also possess their own needs that are often neglected and left unnoticed by their man folks. This is what actually happened to Janie, the major female character in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Janie had been forced to follow many determining voices that she hardly got the chance to identify her own. Grandma had kept her too long from the real world. Janie had never had a chance to see it herself, to express what she thought of it and what she wanted so much to grab from it. Being a 'mulatto' and unaware of her origin made it hard for her to place herself among the society. That gave grandma the reason- since she was the only track to her origin – to decisively place her among the blacks and pick her a husband she did not love in the name of protection. Yet she took it all as valuable lessons. She had to undergo three marriages to finally find what she always dreamt of; her own voice!

Janie has shown us that a woman's dreams are immortal. People may think that she has forgotten her dreams since she has never mentioned –voiced it up- anymore. Women use their voice when it is necessary. Being silent does not mean that they are afraid. They chose to study their experience, which can finally lead them to consciousness. Once this consciousness is set, they will use their voice to claim their existence.

The writer believes many women would salute Janie's fight since it is not the kind of fight inherited by the patriarchal values. It is a peace and

silent fight. Her struggle is to study the experience as an influential part for growth. She sees her life as a dynamic process that contains significant stages. She is not the pathetic and tragic heroine who just runs away from the determining voices and alienates herself in search of her own voice. She chooses to live with those voices, she takes her time by listening and studying them until she finally identifies her own voice.

B. Statement of the Problems

1. How does she struggle to find her own voice?
2. How is the work related to its author; how far does it represent the author's consciousness?
3. What is the socio-historical background that is foregrounding the author's consciousness?

C. Objective of the Study

This study majorly aims to provide a satisfactory and scientific outcome concerning the previously mentioned problems.

The first objective will be broadened within the analysis as to figure out how the major character, Janie, develops the struggle in stages of her life (from early adolescence to the time of her being a widow).

The objectives are as follow:

1. To discuss what struggle the major character, Janie, develops in finding her own voice.

2. To explain the consciousness of the author, Hurston, and its contribution towards the depiction of Janie's struggle.
3. To briefly present the socio-historical background of black life in the South in order to provide the readers with a vision toward the influential element that has constituted the author's consciousness.

D. Significance of The Study

Since the problem deals much with one's struggle in finding her own voice, the writer thinks the study is significant in presenting how necessary it is for a person to go beyond her or his determined fate/position. One has to fight for the inborn right to being any kind of individual in this universe.

Concerning the capacity of the writer as student of the faculty of letters, Airlangga University, the study is expectedly to provide, in the first place, a significant contribution to the faculty. The study might be a helpful guide for any student of the faculty of letters who is interested in writing about black life focusing either on an individual character or the black life as a race.

Hopefully this study will be noted as one among many positive responses and salutations towards Hurston's works, particularly *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

E. Scope and Limitation

Some writings have lost their main purpose soon as they focus on the unnecessary and misleading objects. In order to avoid such fatality, the writer will focus on firstly, the main character's; Janie's struggle during each stage of her life. Therefore it is inevitable to insert her relations with the other determining characters who prevent her from finding her voice.

Secondly, it is a must to include the socio-historical background of black life in the South –exactly where the work itself takes place- in order to grab the consciousness of the author.

F. Theoretical Background

Literature is not something static. It is the product of the perpetuating socio-historical process that is significant toward a particular society from which the work emerges.

Based on the opinion, the writer considers Goldman' genetic structuralism is applicable to this study. The writer must include the associated society since it is the most influential element that determines the author's consciousness as the medium of the creator. Thus, Hurston's experience as a member of certain society influences her creative process. How she reacts toward the 'world view' of the society is detectable within the element of her work.

Goldman sees a literary work as an imaginary expression of 'world view' thus in order to express it, the author creates imaginary characters,

objects and relations. Literary work is not merely seen as a reflection of the collective consciousness but as "...one of the most important constituent element of this collective consciousness, the element that enables the members of the group to become aware of what they thought, felt and did without realizing objectively its signification". (160)

Goldman regards the homology between the structure of certain society and the literary work through some categories: *human facts, collectivity of the subject, world view, structuration of the literary work* (Faruk 12). Those categories will be *destructured* and *restructured* throughout the *comprehensive-explanatory dialectical method*. This method requires the writer to identify each constituent element (internal and external) and insert it into a larger structure to find its significance.

Since the main character's struggle in finding her own voice is closely related to her existence, the philosophical approach concerning 'free will' and 'self-creation' is necessarily attached to the analysis. The concept of Peter Bertocci's freewill and self-creation rests on the assumption that to some extent a person can create her/his own character (Minton 313). An act of free will means the person is willing to choose among other equally attractive options within her/his limitations (habit, attitude, traits, etc.). Yet free will cannot guarantee the person's achievement. Her or his survival depends on her or his will power that enables the individual to succeed in the face of obstacles she or he confronts.



G. Method of the Study

The study is conducted in accordance to two basic techniques; the technique of data collecting and the technique of data analysis.

The data collecting involves the library research activities, which are mostly done in the Airlangga University library. Unfortunately as far as the research has been conducted, there is hardly an information about Hurston's biography and her particular work *Their Eyes were Watching God*. Thus the writer also conducts an internet browsing to several Hurston's sites. The next step is to classify the data into the primary and the secondary ones. Only the primary one will be inserted into further analysis. Yet in order to fulfill the validity requirement of the data, among the primary ones the writer still has to determine which are related the closest to the previously stated problem of the study.

After all the qualitative data are accumulated, the writer has to perform the technique of data analysis in which the corresponding data will be elaborated into descriptive-interpretative method. The descriptive method refers to the activity of gaining further and thorough information about the qualitative data. Furthermore, the method will lead the writer to the interpretation of the analyzed data.



H. Definition of Key Terms

- Voice** : The right to express one's wish, choice, ideals, etc. or to make it prevail.
- Free will** : -A freedom within limits of a person's inborn capabilities and of the world in which he lives.
-A property of the person who builds and changes his personality within the ultimate limits of his given nature and opportunities or obstacles afforded by his acquired habits, attitudes and traits.
- Will power** : One of the by-products of the organization of the personality which enables an individual to succeed in the face of obstacles, internal and external, she/he confronts.
- To exist** : To being of any kind as an individual in a purposeless universe through an act of free will.
- Silent protest**: A unique kind of protest performed mostly by women to show their resilience towards men's dominance and also to pay more attention to their own inner growth.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK