

1983

## Zora Neale Hurston

Daryl Cumber Dance

*University of Richmond*, [ddance2@richmond.edu](mailto:ddance2@richmond.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/english-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [American Literature Commons](#), [Caribbean Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Dance, Daryl Cumber. "Zora Neale Hurston." In *American Women Writers: Bibliographical Essays*, edited by Maurice Duke, Jackson R. Bryer, and M. Thomas Inge, 321-51. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the English at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

## Zora Neale Hurston

---

She was flamboyant and yet vulnerable, self-centered and yet kind,  
a Republican conservative and yet an early black nationalist.

Robert Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*. Urbana:  
University of Illinois Press, 1977

There is certainly no more controversial figure in American literature than Zora Neale Hurston. Even the most common details, easily ascertainable for most people, have been variously interpreted or have remained unresolved issues in her case: When was she born? Was her name spelled Neal, Neale, or Neil? Whom did she marry? How many times was she married? What happened to her after she wrote *Seraph on the Suwanee*? Even so immediately observable a physical quality as her complexion sparks controversy, as is illustrated by Mary Helen Washington in "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow," Introduction to *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, edited by Alice Walker (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1979), who cites Fannie Hurst's description of her as "light yellow"; Theodore Pratt's description of her as "black as coal"; and Alzeda Hacker's description of her as "reddish light brown." But more important than these issues are some essential questions about her basic personality and philosophy, which continue to be debated: Did she love black people or did she view them with condescension and contempt? Did she have self-respect or was she a shameless suppliant of white patrons? Was she a militant racial

---

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Robert R. Moton Foundation, from which I received a research grant during the period that this study was completed.

I am grateful to the following persons for providing information that assisted me in the preparation of this study: Robert Hemenway; S. J. Boldrick of the Miami-Dade Public Library; Lisa Browar of the Yale University Library; C. R. Williams of the University of Florida Library; J. C. Hickerson and Paul T. Heffron of the Library of Congress; E. E. Bhan of the Howard University Library; A. A. Shockley of the Fisk University Library; and Stephen Catlett of the American Philosophical Society. I also wish to thank the staffs of the Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Union University Libraries for their assistance.

chauvinist or a groveling Uncle Tom? Was she dedicated to her craft and ideals or would she compromise her work and her convictions for fame and fortune? Did she tacitly accept and ignore racial indignations or did she strike out against them? Some new information is occasionally being ferreted out that may help to cast additional light on some of these issues, but quite clearly Zora Neale Hurston will remain something of an enigma—too complex a figure to reach any easy conclusions about, except perhaps that she defies simple characterization. People responded to her (and still do) very emotionally: her detractors despise her bitterly; her defenders love her passionately. All agree that she was eccentric, colorful, entertaining, humorous, and unforgettable.

Perhaps the most crucial question to pose about her is why one of the most important figures in the Harlem Renaissance, the most prominent and productive black folklorist on the scene, the most prolific black female writer that this country had ever produced, one of the most widely known and honored black writers of her time, and one of the most influential authors on contemporary literature (Ernest Gaines asserts, “Probably the only black writer who has influenced my work is Zora Neale Hurston” [*Essence*, July 1975]) was ignored for so long a period by scholars, critics, anthologizers, and the American reading public. Some of the essays discussed herein consider just that question, and certainly this study attests that the problem is being attacked. The enthusiasm and the dedication of the Hurston scholars that began cropping up in the seventies promise that she will no longer be ignored.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

I wrote “Their Eyes Were Watching God” in Haiti. It was damned up in me, and I wrote it under internal pressure in seven weeks. I wish that I could write it again. In fact, I regret all of my books. It is one of the tragedies of life that one cannot have all the wisdom one is ever to possess in the beginning. Perhaps, it is just as well to be rash and foolish for a while. If writers were too wise, perhaps no books would be written at all.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Hurston produced a remarkable number of books, and she therefore had more to “regret” than any other black woman of her day. As a matter of fact, for many years she remained the most prolific black female writer in America, having written four novels, one autobiography, two folklore studies, and numerous plays, short stories, and essays.

The most complete listing of the primary works of Zora Neale Hurston is found in Robert E. Hemenway’s *Zora Neale Hurston*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977). Within his biography Hemenway cites more secondary sources than any other study, but unfortunately he does not compile

a secondary bibliography. Perhaps the most useful bibliography to date is found in Carol Fairbanks and Eugene A. Engeldinger's *Black American Fiction: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978). Their listing of the primary works is not, however, as inclusive as Hemenway's, and they do not include Hurston's essays. Their list of biographical and critical studies is useful, and they also include reviews. Another helpful bibliography is found in *Black American Writers Past and Present: A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary*, edited by Theresa Gunnels Rush, Carol Fairbanks Myers, and Esther Spring Arata (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975). One shortcoming of this work is that the editors list the anthologies and periodicals in which the short stories and essays appear, but they do not list the titles of the works. They do include a useful listing of biographical and critical sources. Another noteworthy listing of secondary sources may be found in Roseann P. Bell et al., *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979). The listing of primary sources is limited, however. Ora Williams's *American Black Women in the Arts and Social Sciences: A Bibliographic Survey* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978) includes several entries for Hurston, but the awkward and confusing arrangement of her book detracts from its usefulness. In her listings according to genre she includes only one short story and one play by Hurston. In the individual bibliography she lists six stories and three plays. A few essays are listed under her "Miscellaneous Subjects" section. Esther Spring Arata and Nicholas John Rotoli in *Black American Playwrights, 1800 to the Present: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976) include a good listing of Hurston's plays and her essays that relate to drama and the theatre. However, they incorrectly attribute "The Negro in the American Theatre" (*Theatre Arts*, August 1942) to Hurston. Arata's *More Black American Playwrights: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978) is not a very useful update. It cites only three plays by Hurston, two of which were listed in the earlier collection, and three critical articles. In his introduction to the selection from *Dust Tracks on a Road in Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), Alan Dundes includes a helpful listing of items dealing with Hurston's folklore studies. Very limited listings may be found in Darwin T. Turner's *Afro-American Writers* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970); Dorothy B. Porter's *A Working Bibliography on the Negro in the United States* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1969); Maxwell Whiteman's *A Century of Fiction by American Negroes, 1853-1952: A Selective Bibliography* (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1974); Geraldine O. Matthews's *Black American Writers, 1773-1949: A Bibliography and Union List* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1975); and Edward Margolies and David Bakish's *Afro-American Fiction, 1853-1976* (Detroit: Gale, 1979).

Brief Hurston bibliographies are included in a few anthologies of Black American literature, such as Arthur P. Davis's *Cavalcade: Negro American*

*Writing from 1760 to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971); and Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon's *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Macmillan, 1972).

## EDITIONS

She is out of circulation and all her books are out of print. One cannot be rectified. The other should be.

Theodore Pratt, "Zora Neale Hurston,"  
*Florida Historical Quarterly* (July 1961);  
 reprinted as "A Memoir: Zora Neale Hurston,  
 Florida's First Distinguished Author" (*ND*, February 1962)

## FULL-LENGTH WORKS

Though Zora Neale Hurston's works were out of print for thirty years, all of her full-length works except *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1938; published in 1939 in England under the title *Voodoo Gods: An Inquiry into Native Myths and Magic in Jamaica and Haiti*, London: J. M. Dent and Sons) have been reprinted, and all except *Seraph on the Suwanee* are now in print. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1934) was reprinted in 1971 by Lippincott. *Mules and Men* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1935) was reprinted in 1969 by Negro Universities Press (Westport, Conn.), in 1970 by Harper & Row, and in 1978 by the Indiana University Press (Bloomington). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937) was reprinted in 1965 by Fawcett Publications (Greenwich, Conn.), in 1969 by the Negro Universities Press, and in 1978 by the University of Illinois Press (Urbana). *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1939) was reprinted in 1974 by Chatham Bookseller (Chatham, N.J.). *Dust Tracks on a Road* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1942) was reprinted in 1969 by Arno Press and in 1971 by J. B. Lippincott. *Seraph on the Suwanee* (Charles Scribner's, 1948) was reprinted in 1971 by University Microfilms (Ann Arbor, Mich.) and in 1974 by AMS Press.

Alice Walker has recently edited an anthology of Zora Neale Hurston's works (*I Love Myself When I am Laughing, and Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive* [hereafter referred to as *I Love Myself*; the title is taken from a comment made by Hurston in a letter to Carl Van Vechten referring to photographs he had made of her]). The collection includes selections from *Dust Tracks on a Road*, *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, all of the longer works except *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Also reprinted are two short stories ("Sweat" and "The Gilded Six-Bits"), five essays and articles, and "The Eatonville Anthology." A dedication and

an afterword by Alice Walker present a moving portrait of Zora Neale Hurston by a woman whose devotion could easily become mere sentiment, but whose talent as a writer and whose objectivity as a scholar result in tributes that are moving but also substantive. The introduction by Mary Helen Washington, who like Walker has been instrumental in the Hurston revival, presents a noteworthy discussion of Hurston's life, works, and critical reception, which should do much to promote a more balanced, objective, and accurate view of this much-maligned woman.

Twenty-five selections from *Mules and Men* appear in B. A. Botkin's *A Treasury of American Folklore* (Crown, 1944). A selection from *Dust Tracks on a Road* appears in Richard Long and Eugenia Collier's *Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, Vol. 2 (New York University Press, 1972); and Alan Dundes's *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel*. A Selection from *Jonah's Gourd Vine* appeared in *L'arbalète; revue de littérature* (Autumn, 1944) as "La Calebasse de Jonas" (translated by Marcel Duhamel).

#### SHORT STORIES

Despite the fact that Hurston wrote numerous short stories, no collection has ever been published. Except for the few popular and commonly reprinted ones, her short stories are difficult to locate, many of them having been published in obscure journals, black journals of limited circulation, and now out-of-print books.

"John Redding Goes to Sea" (*Stylus*, May 1921) was reprinted in *Opportunity* (January 1926). "O Night" appeared in *Stylus* in May 1921. "Drenched in Light" was published in *Opportunity* in December 1924 and has been reprinted in *Readings from Negro Authors for Schools and Colleges*, edited by Otelia Cromwell et al., (Harcourt, Brace, 1931); and Mary Butters McLellan and Albert V. DeBonis's *Within Our Gates: Selections on Tolerance and the Foreign Born of Today* (Harper, 1940). "Spunk" (*Opportunity*, June 1925) has been reprinted in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (Albert and Charles Boni, 1925) and in Charles L. James's *From The Roots: Short Stories by Black Americans* (Dodd, Mead, 1971). "Magnolia Flower" appeared in *Spokesman* for July 1925. "Muttsy" was published in *Opportunity* for August 1926. "Sweat," which came out in *Fire!!* in November 1926, has been reprinted in Darwin Turner's *Black American Literature: Essays, Poetry, Fiction, Drama* (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1970), Nathan Irvin Huggins's *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), and *I Love Myself*. The popular "The Gilded Six-Bits," first published in *Story* in August 1933, has also been reprinted in Whit Burnett and Martha Foley's *Story in America* (Vanguard, 1934), Langston Hughes's *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers: An Anthology from 1899 to the Present* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), Martha Foley's *200 Years of Great American Short Stories* (Boston:

Houghton Mifflin, 1975), Whit Burnett's *Black Hands on a White Face: A Timepiece of Experiences in a Black and White America: An Anthology* (Dodd, Mead, 1971), John Henrik Clarke's *American Negro Short Stories* (Hill and Wang, 1966), Susan Cahill's *Women and Fiction: Short Stories By and About Women* (New American Library, 1978), and *I Love Myself*. "The Fire and the Cloud" was published in *Challenge* in September 1934. "Cock Robin, Beale Street" appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in July 1941. "Story in Harlem Slang" was published in *American Mercury* for July 1942 and is reprinted in Dundes's *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel*. "Conscience of the Court" was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 18 March 1950. "Escape from Pharoah" was published in Ruth Selden's *Ways of God and Men: Great Stories from the Bible in World Literature* (Stephen Daye Press, 1950). "The Tablets of Law" appeared in Frances Brentano's *The Word Lives On: A Treasury of Spiritual Fiction* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951). "Hurricane" is published in Ann Watkins's *Taken at the Flood: The Human Drama as Seen by Modern American Novelists* (Harper, 1946).

Not many plays by Hurston have been published. "Color Struck" came out in *Fire!!* in November 1926. "The First One" appeared in Charles S. Johnson's *Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea* (National Urban League) in 1927. Act three of the controversial "Mule Bone," on which Hurston and Langston Hughes collaborated, was published in *Drama Critique* in the Spring 1964 issue.

#### ESSAYS AND OTHER WRITINGS

Hurston wrote numerous essays, but they have never been collected and many of them are not readily available. They demand attention from the Hurston scholar because they present many of her views on and her studies of black folk life, history, and culture. A brief scanning here will give an impression of the variety of subjects that concerned her over a period of years.

"The Eatonville Anthology," a collection of fourteen sketches growing out of Eatonville life, was published in the *Messenger* in September, October, and November of 1926 and reprinted in *I Love Myself*. The first selections are character sketches. The two sketches in the second issue are short stories. The last sketch is an animal tale. These sketches contain episodes and materials that Hurston later used in *Seraph on the Suwanee* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In *Forum* (September 1926) Hurston gives a version of the popular black folk tale, "Possum or Pig." "Dance Songs and Tales from the Bahamas" appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore* in the July-September 1930 issue. Her famous account of hoodoo in America and her own initiation rites under Samuel Thompson, a hoodoo doctor of New Orleans, the grand nephew of the famous Marie Leveau, are detailed in "Hoodoo in America" (*JAF*, October-December 1931). An

account of this experience also appears in *Mules and Men*. In 1934 Nancy Cunard included several pieces by Hurston in *Negro: An Anthology* (London: Wishart; rptd. in 1969 by Negro Universities Press), including "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "Conversions and Visions," "Shouting," "The Sermon," "Mother Catherine," "Uncle Monday," and "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals." Nathan I. Huggins (*Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, Oxford University Press, 1976) reprints "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "Shouting," "The Sermon," "Uncle Monday," and "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals." "Lawrence of the River," an account of a "con man," which bears a great resemblance to tall tales about folk heroes, appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 5 September 1942. It was condensed in *Negro Digest* as "King of the Cow Country" (March 1943). "High John de Conquer," a poignant account of the black folk hero, appeared in the *American Mercury* in October 1943. It is reprinted in Dundes's *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel*. "Communications," an account of the settlement of Negroes in Fort Moosa and their fights against General Oglethorpe in the eighteenth century, was published in the *Journal of Negro History* in October 1927. "The Last Slave Ship," a moving account of the life and experiences of Cudjo Lewis, who was one of the last boatload of Africans brought to America in 1859, was published in *American Mercury* (March 1944). The account was condensed in *ND* in May 1944 under the title "Black Ivory Finale."

In numerous other essays Hurston comments on American life and politics, commentaries which are indispensable in trying to assess the Hurston personality and philosophy. "The Hue and Cry about Howard University" (*Messenger*, September 1925) is an impassioned defense of its white president, Dr. Durkee. In her review of Lance G. E. Jones's *The Jeanes Teacher in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937) in the *NYHTBW* ("Rural Schools for Negroes," 20 February 1938) Hurston joins in the condemnation of the reconstruction period and delights in the optimistic view of the future of the "New South," which will assuredly "work out all of its problems." In "The 'Pet Negro' System" (*AMer*, May 1943) she paints a picture of the black class in the South whose success she claims is often due to the support of some white friend. This article was condensed in *ND* (1 June 1943) under the title "The South's Other Side," and reprinted in *I Love Myself*. In "Negroes without Self-Pity" (*AMer*, November 1943), Hurston applauds speakers at a meeting of the Florida Negro Defense Committee who rejected the need to ask for pity for the Negroes but counseled rather assertiveness in participating in community life and correcting the irresponsible elements in the race. "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience" (*ND*, June 1944) is an account of the humiliation she suffered when a white doctor, to whom her patron, Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, had referred her, examined her in the closet when he discovered her race. Hurston, who often attacked those who



saw racism as unique to the South, emphasizes the fact that this incident occurred in the North. "The Rise of the Begging Joints" (*AMer*, March 1945; rptd. in *ND*, May 1945 as "Beware the Begging Joints") is an attack on small, inefficient black colleges. In "Crazy for This Democracy" (*ND*, December 1945; rptd. in *I Love Myself*), Hurston lambasts that democratic form of government of which the West and the United States in particular, brags, and notes its worldwide oppression of colored people. "I Saw Negro Votes Peddled" (*American Legion Magazine*, November 1950) is an account of Negroes selling votes, which reflects the kind of gullibility and naiveté for which her critics assail her. In "What White Publishers Won't Print" (*ND*, April 1950; rptd. in *I Love Myself*) Hurston criticizes the publishers and the reading public for their refusal to accept materials that do not reinforce their stereotyped views of minorities. Hurston attacks communism in "Why the Negro Won't Buy Communism" (*American Legion Magazine*, June 1951) and supports Robert Taft in "A Negro Voter Sizes up Taft" (*SEP*, 8 December 1951).

Also of interest are Hurston's accounts of the trial of Ruby McCollum, a well-to-do black Florida woman charged with killing her white lover, a prominent doctor and politician. Hurston's numerous accounts of the trial and portraits of Mrs. McCollum appear in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from October 1952 through May 1953; selections also appear in William Bradford Huie, *Ruby McCollum: Woman in the Suwanee Jail* (E. P. Dutton, 1956).

Hurston's interest in blacks in other parts of the African diaspora is revealed in some of her book review-essays. In a review-essay titled "Bible, Played by Ear in Africa," which is a review of Lorenz Graham's *How God Fix Jonah* (Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946) in the *NYHTBR* on 24 November 1946, she praises the author's capturing of the music of Africa in the telling of the Bible tales, but laments the fact that "The feeling of Africa is lost to a great extent through the omission of native material [such as the tales of the Mandingos, the Golahs and the Krus]." In "Thirty Days Among Maroons" (*NYHTBW*, 12 January 1947), Hurston applauds the description of life among the Maroons in Jamaica and the collection of tales and songs compiled by Katherine Dunham in *Journey to Accompong* (Henry Holt, 1946).

In "The Transplanted Negro" (*NYHTBW*, 9 March 1947), a review of Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits's *Trinidad Village* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), Hurston praises the "laboratory examination" of the life of the inhabitants of Toco, but notes that the authors are sometimes mistaken in what they identify as African survivals. In "At the Sound of the Conch Shell" (*NYHTBW*, 20 March 1949) Hurston describes Vic Reid's *New Day* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) as "a liquid, lyrical thing of wondrous beauty." She applauds the author's historical accuracy and his effective rendering of

Jamaica: "The speech, the attitudes, the geographical descriptions are as Jamaican as a mouthful of ackee in season."

Her comments about her contemporaries also deserve mention. Of special interest is her account of her employer, "Fannie Hurst," which appeared in the *SatRL* for 9 October 1937. "Stories of Conflict" (*SatRL*, 2 April 1938) is a critical review of *Uncle Tom's Children* by Richard Wright, whom she considered talented, but whom she attacked for his subject matter, which she found too dismal and violent.

In 1947 Hurston published *Caribbean Melodies for Chorus of Mixed Voices and Soloists*, arranged by William Grant Still (Philadelphia: Oliver Ditson).

## MANUSCRIPTS AND LETTERS

You have to read the chapters Zora left out of her autobiography.

Student, Special Collections Room,  
Beinecke Library, Yale University,  
cited in *I Love Myself*

Numerous Hurston manuscripts and letters are housed in various collections throughout the country and are indeed necessary to help paint a more complete and accurate picture of this complex personality. Many of these unpublished sources have aided scholars such as Robert Hemenway and Mary Helen Washington to begin to highlight the portrait of Zora Neale Hurston.

Upon Hurston's death a janitor in the welfare home in which she died proceeded to set fire to her effects, including the manuscript of her final work "Herod the Great," but the fire was luckily extinguished by a deputy sheriff (Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*). The charred remains of this and other Hurston papers are a poignant symbol of the precarious survival of this woman within a society all too often completely insensitive to and unappreciative of her talents.

A significant number of Hurston manuscripts, letters, and other materials are housed in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. In addition to the manuscripts of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, *Moses*, *Man of the Mountain*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Yale has the manuscripts of the following pieces: "Are We Citizens" (a fragment); "Book of Harlem" (short play); "The Chick with One Hen" (article); "The Emperor Effaces Himself" (short story); "Harlem Slangue" (vocabulary); "Mule Bone" (play); "How You Cookin' with Gas" (short story—two versions); and "Polk County: A Comedy of Negro Life on a Sawmill Camp, with Authentic Negro Music" (three-act play written with Dorothy Waring), all unpublished except for the third act

of "Mule Bone." Included in this collection are hundreds of letters to, from, or regarding Hurston, written by or to Carl Van Vechten, Ruby Harmon, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Harold Jackman, Walter White, Fannie Hurst, Arna Bontemps, and Barrett H. Clark. Also of interest are a folder of clippings and some photographs.

Considerable Hurston materials may also be found in the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Collection at the University of Florida. There is an incomplete (some pages were burned) publisher's typescript with holograph additions and deletions of *Seraph on the Suwanee*. The University of Florida also has the partially burned manuscript of the unpublished work, "Herod the Great," including Hurston's notes for the work. Among the unpublished shorter works in this collection are the following: "The Elusive Goal—Brotherhood of Mankind" (essay); "The Enemy" (essay); "The Migrant Worker in Florida" (essay); "The Seventh Veil" (short story); "The South Was Had" (essay); "Take for Instance Spessard Holland" (essay); "Unique Personal Experience" (an early version of "The Enemy"); "The Woman in Gaul" (short story); "The Fiery Chariot" (play); "Folklore" (selection from "The Florida Negro"); "Notes on Cuban Music" (notes made by Hurston when locating folk singers); "Art and Such" (essay); and "Cross City: Turpentine Camp" (notes). The University of Florida also has a large number of letters exchanged among Hurston, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Frank Alexander, Martin Anderson, Frederick Augustine, Richard Bardolph, Jesse V. Bates, T. C. Beam, R. Burdell Bixby, Willie Brown, LeRoy Collins, John K. Crippen, Ronald Cutler, Virginius Dabney, Woodrow Darden, George Beebe, Grace Davis, B. H. Dennis, Larry Eisenberg, Robert Emms, M. Mitchell Ferguson, Hoyt Fuller, Harold Gartley, Neil Gandy, P. H. Goddard, E. O. Grover, F. W. Grover, Prudence Hetherington, T. L. Hill, Mary Holland, William Huie, Everett E. Hurston, Sr., Iva Hurston, J. C. Hurston, Harper Brothers, Jean Waterbury, Joseph Keeley, Clennon King, William F. Knowland, J. Edwin Larsen, David Lawrence, Josephine Leighton, H. A. Leonard, J. P. Lippincott, B. L. Lippincott, A. C. Locke, Eva Lynd, Rosine MacLusk, William Morgan, John Scott Mahon, Clark Maxwell, Marjorie Meyer, Maurice Michael, Levi Miller, Helen and Burroughs Mitchell, Richard Moore, William Nunn, Frederick Nelson, Dorothy Owen, F. Pfeiffer, Juanita Russel, Nelson Rutledge, Edna Savoya, T. J. Seller, Waldo Sexton, Constance Sheen, Frank Smathers, W. W. Taylor, Irene Traffero, Louis Waldman, Maudie H. Warfel, Jean Parker Waterbury, D. E. Williams, Madeline Wiltz, Mary Wolfe, Fanny Hurst, and Corita Corse.

Also in the University of Florida collection are several copies of newspaper clippings regarding Hurston, programs presented by Hurston, flyers announcing her productions, and photographs. In addition there are copies of bills, unemployment compensation statements, royalty statements, and life insurance forms.

Interesting materials are also located in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. In addition to several drafts of "Mule Bone" with holograph corrections, Howard University Library has a box of materials relating to the controversy surrounding the play, which served as the major source of Robert E. Hemenway's important reconstruction of that traumatic conflict between Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes (see Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*, Chapter 6, "Mule Bone"). There is, in addition, at the Howard University Library a holograph and typescript draft of "Barracoon" (play) and the manuscript of "The Bone of Contention" (short story). Also included in that collection are several letters regarding Hurston exchanged between Langston Hughes, Arthur Spingarn, Rowena Jelliffe, Samuel French, and Louise Thompson. There are letters exchanged between Hurston and Hughes, Alain Locke, and Arthur Spingarn. In addition there are thirty-nine letters and five telegrams from Hurston to Mrs. R. Osgood Mason. Also of interest are a contract between Hurston and Mrs. Mason, dated 1 December 1927; a contract between Hurston and Fast and Furious, Inc., New York, dated 6 July 1931; some financial statements regarding the John Golden Theatre; notes by Hurston regarding a conference with Harry Block on 26 February 1931; some newspaper clippings; and three photographs of Hurston.

The Archive of Folk Songs at the Library of Congress has 227 discs made by Hurston, Alan Lomax, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle in Georgia, Florida, and the Bahamas during the summer of 1935. They also have twenty-three songs sung by Hurston and recorded in Florida and Haiti in 1935, 1936, and 1939. Also in this collection is a manuscript titled "Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas," written by Hurston when she was with the Florida Project of the Federal Writers Project, Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1939. There are letters exchanged between Hurston, Dr. Ben Botkin, and Dr. Harold Spivack. Of further interest are field recording notes, newspaper articles, and some prints and photographs.

In the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Records at the Library of Congress is correspondence between Hurston and Walter White.

The Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress has correspondence between Hurston and Carter G. Woodson.

The Metropolitan Dade County, Florida, Library has a Czech language edition of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which is autographed by Hurston (23 January 1950) and an autographed Danish language edition of the same novel. In addition there is an extensive newspaper clipping file on Hurston from the Dade County and other Florida newspapers.

The Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University Library, has a folder of letters regarding Hurston's application for a fellowship to pursue anthropological study in Negro folklore at Columbia University under Dr. Franz Boas, including payment vouchers, budget, letters of recommenda-

tion, and newspaper clippings by and about her. Fisk University also has the manuscript of "Black Death," a short story entered in the 1925 *Opportunity* contest.

The American Philosophical Society has a typed manuscript of Hurston's "The Florida Expedition," a report on Negro folklore, in the Franz Boas Collection. They also have correspondence between Hurston and Boas, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and O. Klineberg. The manuscript of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is in the Schomburg Collection in the New York Public Library. The manuscript of "The Florida Negro," a collection of stories, songs, games, slave narratives, and miscellaneous other folk items collected in the Florida WPA project, is in the Florida Historical Society Papers in the University of South Florida Library.

Robert Hemenway (*Zora Neale Hurston*) cites the Charles Scribner's Sons' Hurston files, which he notes contain 102 items, mainly their correspondence with Hurston.

Also of interest may be the series of interviews regarding Hurston that Hemenway made during his research for his biography of her. The interview with Arna Bontemps is at the University of Florida Oral History Collection. Other interviews, still in Hemenway's possession, were conducted with May Miller, George Schuyler, Bruce Nugent, Arthur Paul Davis, Saunders Redding, Herbert Sheen, Taylor Gordon, Sterling Brown, Louise Thompson Patterson, Arthur Huff Fauset, Alan Lomax, Everette Hurston, Sr., Bertram Lippincott, Tay Hohoff, W. Edward Farrison, Dean Elder, Paul Green, Mary Holland, Dorothy Waring, Grant Reynolds, Burroughs Mitchell, Louis Waldman, Jean Parker Waterbury, Everett Hurston, Jr., Sarah Peek Patterson, an unidentified cast member of *The Great Day*, and the unidentified woman for whom Hurston worked as a maid in 1950.

## BIOGRAPHY

The truth is that nobody, not even the closest blood relatives, ever really knows anybody else. The greatest human travail has been in the attempt at self revelation, but never, since the world began, has any one individual completely succeeded. There is an old saying to the effect that: "He is a man, so nobody knows him but God."

Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum," *Pittsburgh Courier*,  
28 February 1953

The life of Zora Neale Hurston is as puzzling, exciting, colorful, poignant, romantic, fascinating, and tragic as her fiction and has proven to be an important ingredient of most of the critical studies. An extremely private person, Hurston often concealed from her friends certain aspects of

her life, such as, for example, her marriages to Herbert Sheen and to Albert Price III. While her own autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, provides some details of her life, it is perhaps more notable for what it doesn't tell us about her. The sincerity of much that she writes there is also highly debatable. Perhaps the most cogent comment on that work is the previously-quoted statement of the student in the Beinecke Library, Yale University: "You have to read the chapters Zora left out of her autobiography." (For a discussion of much of the deleted material see Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*.) Further, as Hurston herself warns: "But pay no attention to what I say about love, for as I said before, it may not mean a thing. It is my own bathtub singing. Just because my mouth opens up like a prayer book, it does not have to flap like a Bible. And then again, anybody whose mouth is cut cross-ways is given to lying, unconsciously as well as knowingly" (*Dust Tracks on a Road*).

Numerous details of Hurston's life remained unclear or unknown, at least until the 1970s when Hurston scholars, notably Hemenway, uncovered certain facts about her life and began to unravel at least some parts of the puzzle. Until that time most biographies of her presented the well-known details that she chose to discuss publicly and which she included in *Dust Tracks on a Road*—mainly her life in Eatonville, her education, and her employment.

Such are the accounts that appear in sources such as B. Alsterlund's "Zora Neale Hurston, a Biographical Sketch" (*WLB*, May 1939); *Current Biography: Who's News and Why, 1942*, edited by Maxine Block (H. W. Wilson Co., 1942); Rebecca Chalmers Barton's *Witnesses for Freedom: Negro Americans in Autobiography* (Harper, 1948); *Who's Who in Colored America*, edited by C. James Fleming and Christian E. Burckel (Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Christian E. Burckel and Associates, 1950), which contains several errors in the titles of the short works; Richard Bardolph's *The Negro Vanguard* (Rinehart, 1959); Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft's *Twentieth Century Authors* (H. W. Wilson, 1942; updated in their 1955 supplement); Russell L. Adams and others' *Great Negroes Past and Present* (Chicago: Afro-American Publishing Co., 1964); *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, edited by Lina Mainiero (Frederick Ungar, 1970); *Afro-American Encyclopedia*, edited by Martin Rywell and others (North Miami, Fla.: Educational Book Publishers, 1974); Wilhelmena S. Robinson's *Historical Afro-American Biographies* (Cornwells Heights, Pa.: The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, 1976); and James A. Page's *Selected Black American Authors: An Illustrated Bio-Bibliography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977).

Another source of biographical information about Hurston may be found in Langston Hughes's treatment of the Harlem Renaissance in "Harlem Literati in the Twenties" (*SatRL*, 22 June 1940; rptd. in *The Big*

Sea, Alfred A. Knopf, 1940). Most of his discussion rather sarcastically treats Hurston's personality: her playing the part of the perfect darkie for the whites, her ability to get whatever she needed from others, her wide contacts in Harlem, her entertaining humor.

Having disappeared from the public view for some years, Hurston popped up briefly working as a maid, and then died impoverished in a welfare home in Florida (her friends solicited money for her burial—including a \$2.50 donation from a group of students [Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*]). Her death (an uncanny fulfillment of her prophesy: "I am not materialistic. . . . If I happen to die without money somebody will bury me though I do not wish it to be that way" [quoted in Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*]) was as melodramatic an episode as the rest of her life, and like the events of her life it provided good copy. Accounts of her death appeared in numerous papers and magazines. In addition to many local papers, obituary notices appeared in the *New York Times* (5 February 1960); *Time* (15 February 1960); *Newsweek* (15 February 1960); *Publishers' Weekly* (15 February 1960); *Wilson Library Bulletin* (April 1960); *Current Biography* (1960); and *Current Biography Yearbook* (1960, 1961). Three memoirs deserve note. Alan Lomax's "Zora Neale Hurston—A Life of Negro Folklore" (*Sing Out*, October-November 1960) recalls his experiences with her, mainly in quest of folklore, and pays tribute to her ability as a folk collector. He laments the lack of recognition of this woman who "was far ahead of her time," and praises *Mules and Men* as "the most engaging, genuine, and skillfully written book in the field of American folklore." He observes the irony of the fact that the week of 28 January 1960, was "a peak week in the great American folk song revival. This was also the week that the most skillful and talented field collector and writer that America has thus far produced died in a third rate hotel in Florida without a penny in her purse or a friend in the world." Theodore Pratt's "Zora Neale Hurston" (*FHQ*, July 1961) recounts her life, presents some interesting episodes from his relationship with her, and gives an account of her funeral. He laments the fact that Florida's only "first-class native-born" author has suffered literary obscurity and pleads for the recognition that she deserves. Fannie Hurst's "Zora Hurston: A Personality Sketch" (*YULG*, July 1961) is a fond memorial of her former secretary, chauffeur, and companion, one which is alternately impassionately moving and embarrassingly condescending. The lovable, irresponsible, colorful figure to whom Hurst immediately (in Zora's words) "took a shine" the first time she saw her, is remembered for "her gay unpredictability," and her being as "uninhibited as a child" and "an effervescent companion of no great profundities but dancing perceptions."

Virginia Burke's "Zora Neale Hurston and Fannie Hurst as They Saw Each Other" (*CLAJ*, June 1977) is based almost entirely on Hurst's "Zora Hurston: A Personality Sketch" and the autobiographies of the two princi-

pals. Burke notes the tendency of each to view the other in exaggerated extremes, so that, for example, Hurston pictures Hurst's family background as richer and more prominent than it was, and Hurst views Hurston's family background as being more impoverished than it actually was. Burke concludes that Hurst did not understand Hurston as well as Hurston understood Hurst, who was unable to see anything beyond the surface exotic primitive image of Hurston's personality. For Hurst, Hurston was merely a diversion; for Hurston, Hurst was a major event.

The only full-length biographical study of Hurston is Robert Hemenway's impressive *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. It is a tremendous undertaking and represents years of extensive research and study. It would be extremely difficult to suggest any sources (manuscripts, publications, letters, individuals) that Hemenway did not consult. His work is carefully documented and interestingly presented. The combination of the fascinating personality of his subject, the drama of her life, and his flair for telling a good story (was he influenced by Hurston?) results in a book that is as hard to put down as an intriguing novel. Hemenway traces Hurston's life from her arrival in New York "with one dollar and fifty cents in her purse, no job, no friends, but filled with 'a lot of hope'" (interspersing flashbacks to her Eatonville childhood and other intervening incidents) to its melodramatic and tragic end, reinforcing all of the paradoxes, ironies, and frustrations that he has detailed so meticulously with his forceful and simple concluding paragraph: "Zora Neale Hurston was buried in the Garden of the Heavenly Rest, the city's segregated cemetery."

Hemenway has introduced new information about some unknowns in Hurston's life and has scrupulously reconstructed certain events that had previously been shrouded in mystery. Though he does not completely resolve the issue of her birthdate, he does present an enlightening discussion of causes for the confusion and makes a convincing case for 1901. He offers interesting new information about her marriages, her relationship with Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason (the "guardmother who sits in the twelfth heaven and shapes the destinies of the primitives" [Hurston, cited in Hemenway]); he presents a lengthy and objective clarification of the issues surrounding the "Mule Bone" controversy (the argument over the rights to the play on which they had collaborated that irrevocably destroyed the friendship of Langston Hughes and Hurston); and he gives a detailed review of the morals charges lodged against Hurston in 1948, accusing her of committing an immoral act with a ten-year-old boy. Briefly stated, Hemenway introduces additional new information and presents an intensive view of every period of the author's life, including in particular the latter years about which little had been written. He also reproduces several photographs of Hurston.

Hemenway's work is as important a critical study as it is a biography. He not only offers noteworthy discussions of all of her full-length published



works, and most of the shorter ones; but he also discusses many of the unpublished texts as well. Each discussion offers critical and interpretive evaluations as well as interesting information about the inception, the composition, the publication, and the reception of each piece.

Hemenway presents his work with something of a disclaimer, motivated no doubt by the fact that he is a white man working on a black female subject during a period in which both blacks and women were jealously guarding their own against outsiders: he observes that he is not attempting a “‘definitive’ book—that book remains to be written, and by a black woman.” Whatever limitations the writer may have placed on himself because he is a white man, he has, in spite of himself, written what must be called the definitive book on Zora Neale Hurston. And while a black woman might indeed bring to a study of Hurston some sensibilities, some perceptions, that only she could share, Hemenway has nonetheless presented her with a formidable yardstick by which to measure her achievement.

In the foreword to Hemenway’s book (“Zora Neale Hurston—A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View”), Alice Walker details her discovery of Hurston and her dedication to correcting the image of this writer who had suffered such vicious misinterpretation: “I began to fight for Zora and her work, for what I knew was good and must not be lost to us.” Both Walker and Hemenway in this and other works have certainly done much to achieve that goal.

## CRITICISM

I suppose that you have seen the criticism of my book in the *New York Times*. He means well, I guess, but I never saw such a lack of information about us.

Hurston, letter to James Weldon Johnson,  
dated 8 May 1934, Yale University,  
cited in Hemenway

Despite the fact that Zora Neale Hurston’s works were rather widely reviewed and frequently lauded, the critics often praised them for the wrong reasons and showed a remarkable ignorance of or insensibility toward some of the issues with which Hurston was concerned. All too often the reviewers did not have the knowledge or sensitivity to appreciate fully the writer’s efforts, and she has suffered as a result. Well-meaning whites, titillated by the exoticism of her blacks, black sophisticates embarrassed by the folk emphasis, male chauvinists alienated by her feminism, and so on, have tended to focus the discussion of her works on isolated issues rather than to initiate intensive evaluations of complete texts. Though Mary Helen Washington may be accused of some slight exaggeration, the basic truth of

her assertion is irrefutable: noting the “groundswell of criticism that would become the intellectual lynching of Zora Neale Hurston” in the 1930s, she declares, “she was a black woman whose entire career output was subjected to the judgment of critics, both white and black, who were all men” (*I Love Myself*).

#### STUDIES OF INDIVIDUAL WORKS

##### *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

Zora Neale Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), was enthusiastically received, especially by the white press whose excessive praises sometimes suggested condescension and racism. Margaret Wallace (“Real Negro People,” *NYTBR*, 6 May 1934) hailed it as “the most vital and original novel about the American Negro that has yet been written by a member of the Negro race,” from which one must infer that more “vital and original” novels had been written by someone of another race. She goes on to note that though the Negro race “is as different from ours as night from day,” Hurston succeeds in making her Negro characters “appeal to us . . . as human beings.” Like most of the reviewers, she praised Hurston's “excellent rendition of Negro dialect.” The review in *Booklist* (July 1934) likewise praised the novel as being “rich in dialect and folklore.” The reviewers were almost unanimous in hailing its accurate portrayal of Negro life in the South: William Plomer (*Spectator*, 4 January 1935) called it “a genuine and in many ways admirable tale of Negro life.” The *NYHTBW* reviewer praised the understanding of Negro life and the objectivity of portrayal. Herschel Brickell (*New York Post*, 5 May 1934) noted the authenticity and objectivity and called the sermon “simply magnificent.” Martha Gruening (*NewR*, 11 July 1934) applauded Hurston's candor, something which she notes is “still sufficiently rare among Negro writers.” The reviewer in *The Nation* (13 June 1934) did note faults in the construction of the novel, but he found much to praise. Andrew Burris (*Crisis*, June 1934) also lauded the “rich store of folklore” and the effectively reproduced dialect, but he found *Jonah's Gourd Vine* “disappointing and a failure as a novel,” weak both in character and plot development.

In his introduction to the 1971 edition of the novel, Larry Neal praises it as “a remarkable first novel” and notes that “the theme, man's search for spiritual equilibrium, is large, mythic, and timeless.”

##### *Mules and Men*

Zora Neale Hurston's collection of black folklore, *Mules and Men* (1935), received an enthusiastic reception similar to that accorded *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, largely from white critics, who were delighted with this colorful inside view of Negro life. Lewis Gannett (*NYHT*, 11 October 1935) declared, “I can't remember anything better since Uncle Remus.” The richness of the

dialect and the quality of the tales were praised by reviewers in the *New York Post* (Herschel Brickell, 26 October 1935); the *NYTBR* (H. I. Brock, 10 November 1935); the *SatRL* (Jonathan Daniels, 19 October 1935); and the *NAR* (T. C. Chubb, March 1936). The reviewer in the *NYHTBW* (13 October 1935) lauded it as a "milestone" in Negro literature. H. L. Moon (*NewR*, 11 December 1935) noted her failure to evaluate her materials or to trace origins but praised her style, which enabled the reader "to feel himself a part of [the storytellers'] circle." Sterling Brown ("Old Time Tales," 1936, unidentified clipping, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Yale University Library, cited in Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*) deplored the unbalanced picture of Southern life, noting her omission of the unattractive aspects of Negro life in the South.

In his introduction to the 1978 edition of *Mules and Men*, Robert E. Hemenway discusses Hurston's development as a folklorist and the events that led to the writing of *Mules and Men*. He emphasizes the fact that the work is not merely a collection of quaint, childish tales, but rather a collection of tales that are "the complex cultural communications permitted an oppressed people." He notes some objections to the book, such as "its lack of cross-cultural analysis, comparative notes, and scholarly apparatus" as well as the absence of social consciousness among the storytellers. But, he argues, Hurston subordinated all of these matters in order to "address the negative image of the black folk publicly held by most Whites and Blacks."

### *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Hurston's second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), was received with less enthusiasm by the American critics. They continued to applaud her reproduction of folk dialect and her portrayal of "simple Florida Negroes" (Otis Ferguson, *NewR*, 13 October 1937), but technical weakness in this work were criticized by S. A. Brown (*Nation*, 16 October 1937), Otis Ferguson, and George Stephens (*SatRL*, 18 September 1937). Lucy Tompkins (*NYTBR*, 26 September 1937) considered the novel a bit sententious at the beginning but concluded that it is nonetheless "a well-nigh perfect story." Richard Wright, in "Between Laughter and Tears" (*NewM* 5 October 1937), lambasted it as having "no theme, no message, no thought," and attacked Hurston for perpetuating a minstrel image for the entertainment of whites.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* has received a great deal more attention from scholars than any other work by Hurston, particularly from black females who applaud its picture of love between a black male and a black female and its portrayal of the quest for freedom and selfhood on the part of the heroine, Janie Stark. Representative of the enthusiastic responses to it are Mary Helen Washington's assertion that it is "probably the most beautiful love story of a black man and woman in literature" (*Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women*, Garden City, N.Y.:

Doubleday, 1971). June Jordan, in "On Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston" (*BlackW*, August 1974), insists that it is the "most successful, convincing and exemplary novel of blacklove that we have. Period." And Alice Walker (*I Love Myself*) exclaims, "Reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for perhaps the eleventh time, I am still amazed that . . . it speaks to me as no novel, past or present, has ever done. . . . There is enough self-love in that one book—love of community, culture, traditions—to restore a world. Or create a new one." And again in her introduction to *Zora Neale Hurston* she simply asserts, "There is no book more important to me than this one."

Lloyd W. Brown's "Zora Neale Hurston and the Nature of Female Perception" (*Obsidian*, Winter 1978) is an interesting discussion of Hurston's presentation of the difference between the male and female modes of perceiving reality. He traces in detail Janie's ability throughout her life to transcend her adversities by living in dreams and concludes that "both as heroic affirmation and as escape, then, Janie's capacity to 'make dreams truth' emerges as an intrinsic part of her limited experiences as woman." Erlene Stetson, in "*Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Woman's Story*" (*RFI*, 1979), considers the novel a work about "survival motions, the survival of one black woman." Tracing Janie's development and maturity through her three "marriages," she notes that Janie "stands alone in relation to previous mulattos in literature." She is an "anti-romantic symbol of the mulatto 'type.'" James R. Giles, in "The Significance of Time in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (*NALF*, Summer 1972), considers the varying views of time in the novel and concludes that those who view time in a rational, materialistic way and whose value system is modelled on the white world's lose out in this novel to those who view time "emotionally and hedonistically" and live for the momentary sexual pleasures. Peter Schwalbenberg, in "Time as Point of View in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (*BALF*, Spring [should have been designated Fall] 1976), also considers the treatment of time in the novel. He notes that at first in the novel time is of no time—there is timelessness. Janie remains static until her marriage to Jody, where time remains exterior. Time becomes interior only with the arrival of Tea Cake. In "The Black Woman's Search for Identity" (*BlackW*, August 1972) Mary Helen Washington details the experiences and the folk traditions of black people, which help to explain Nanny's attitudes toward love and her aspirations for her granddaughter. She discusses the manner in which Janie's quest for freedom and identity lead her away, however, from those white-inspired values of Nanny, Jody Starks, and Mrs. Turner and lead her into the true values of her own culture. Her descent into the Everglades with Tea Cake is a further retreat from white models and a further movement into blackness, Washington notes. Sister Mary Ellen Doyle, in "The Heroine of Black Novels" (*Perspectives on Afro-American*

*Women*, edited by Willa D. Johnson and Thomas L. Green, Washington, D.C.: ECCA Publications, 1975), notes that the novel is representative of the Harlem Renaissance's "rejection of imitation-white refinements and restrictions," but cautions that it is not merely a study in primitivism but rather "a sensitive study...of the ideal man/woman relationship... [asserting] that natural living and loving, working and playing, in an equal partnership worth waiting for, well considered, freely chosen and faithfully sustained make the only real satisfaction or security for a black and womanly soul." Observing the general lack of enthusiasm for the female liberation movement in the black community, S. Jay Walker, in "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Black Novel of Sexism" (*MFS*, Winter 1974-1975), points out that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is unusual in black literature as a work dealing more with sexism than racism. He traces the steps by which Janie fights against male domination and asserts her own dignity and independence and equality until she attains a relationship where there are no sex roles or places.

Several general surveys of black American literature discuss *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Catherine Juanita Starke, in *Black Portraiture in American Fiction* (Basic Books, 1971), briefly discusses Janie as an example of a "youthful female seeker for identity and fulfillment." Judith R. Berzon's *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York University Press, 1978) cites Janie as an exception to the usual female character who lacks depth and points out that she is a woman of spirit and will who "moves steadily toward self-definition." In *Black Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) Roger Rosenblatt observes Janie's progress toward personal freedom.

### *Tell My Horse*

Hurston's next work, *Tell My Horse* (1938), a collection of miscellaneous commentaries and items concerning Haitian and Jamaican life and folklore, including accounts of voodoo in Haiti (which Hemenway calls her "poorest book," in *Zora Neale Hurston*) did not receive the wide nor enthusiastic response that her earlier folklore study inspired. Carl Carmer (*NYHTBW*, 23 October 1938) did praise it for its "unbelievably rich" harvest of West Indian folklore; and the *New York Times* reviewer (23 October 1938) called it an "unusual and intensely interesting book." In a mixed review Harold Courlander (*SatRL*, 15 October 1938) described it as "a curious mixture of remembrance, travelogue, sensationalism, and anthropology." The anthropology, he continued, is "a melange of misinterpretation and exceedingly good folk-lore."

### *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

*Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939, Hurston's retelling of the Biblical story, with Moses and his people being pictured as Egyptians who speak and

act like black Americans, met with mixed reviews. Carl Carmer (*NYHTBW*, 26 November 1939) praised her “uncommon gifts as a novelist” and her characterization. Percy Hutchinson (*NYTBR*, 19 November 1939) characterized the work as a “narrative of great power . . . literature in every best sense of the word.” His enthusiastic response was colored, however, by his condescending attitude. Speaking of American blacks he notes, “even they have traditions that will not die.” Louis Untermeyer (*SatRL*, 11 November 1939) praised the characterization, the style, and the setting, but concluded that the total effect was disappointing. Philip Slomovitz (*CC*, 6 December 1939) considered the book “weak in its interpretations of the ethical contributions of the prophet and its treatment of the code of laws handed down by him,” but praised Hurston’s study of slave emancipation from a Negro viewpoint. Ralph Ellison, in “Recent Negro Fiction” (*NewM*, 5 August 1941), considered it, like her other work, marred by “the blight of calculated burlesque.” Noting that she attempts in the work to do for Moses what *Green Pastures* did for Jehovah, he concluded, “for Negro fiction it [*Moses, Man of the Mountain*] did nothing.”

Despite the fact that several scholars have acknowledged the significance of *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (Hemenway calls it Hurston’s “most ambitious book” in *Zora Neale Hurston* and Darwin Turner asserts that “If she had written nothing else Miss Hurston would deserve recognition for this book” in *In a Minor Chord*), only one study has been devoted to it: Blyden Jackson’s “Some Negroes in the Land of Goshen” (*TFSB*, June 1953). Jackson details Hurston’s faithful rendition of the Biblical story of Moses with characters who are familiar Negro folk characters and praises it for its “beauty of simplicity.” He concludes that Hurston succeeds in showing that “a Negro folk experience of life [can] be seen as what it substantially is, the reliable counterpart of every other human being’s experience of the same life.” While retaining the local charm of the folk she shows that “Negro life need not be parochial, but may anchor securely its substratum in the universal mind.”

### *Dust Tracks on a Road*

*Dust Tracks on a Road* (1949), Hurston’s highly controversial autobiography, received the Anisfield Award in Racial Relations given by the *Saturday Review of Literature* for the best book of the preceding year concerned with racial problems (“Anisfield Awards to Hurston and Pierson,” *PW*, 27 February 1943). The book was reasonably well-received by most white critics while it was attacked by many black critics. The reviewer in the *New Yorker* (14 November 1942) called it “warm, witty, imaginative . . . a rich and winning book.” Phil Stong (*SatRL*, 28 November 1942) praised the style of the work but noted that it was more summary than autobiography. Ernestine Rose (*LJ*, 1 November 1942) noted a lack of finish, but observed that “this literary crudity may have been chosen deliberately, to heighten effect.” Arna Bontemps, in “From Eatonville, Florida to Harlem”

(*NYHTBW*, 22 November 1942) sarcastically observed, “Miss Hurston deals very simply with the more serious aspects of Negro life in America—she ignores them.” Harold Preece (*Tomorrow*, February 1943; cited in Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*) called *Dust Tracks on a Road* “the tragedy of a gifted, sensitive mind, eaten up by an egocentrism fed on the patronizing admiration of the dominant white world.”

In “*Dust Tracks on a Road: Zora Neale Hurston and the Form of Black Autobiography*” (*NALF*, Summer 1975), Ann Rayson argues that because of her colloquial and informal language and style, Hurston can get away with saying things that would ordinarily elicit hostility. She observes that Hurston “portrays herself as a reincarnation of the Melvillian isolato on a continual search for an unknown kind of holy grail” and that she also portrays herself as “a kind of black female Ben Franklin.” She concludes that despite the avoidance of political and social issues and despite the contradictions, “Zora Neale Hurston succeeds in portraying her real self, which is all that any autobiographer can hope to do.” Mary Burgher, in “Images of Self and Race in the Autobiographies of Black Women” (*Sturdy Black Bridges*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), uses *Dust Tracks on a Road* to illustrate her thesis that “more often than not, the route to Black womanhood is fast and direct.” She observes that quite typically, Hurston enjoyed little childhood and had to grow up fast, but despite the fact that she had to accept adult responsibility when she was young, she “remains forever youthful in her optimism and her curiosity about life.”

### *Seraph on the Suwanee*

In *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), Hurston attempted for the first time to portray the lives of Southern whites. Initially the novel was relatively well received, though later critics, particularly her most ardent admirers, tended either to ignore it or to attack it as a futile effort to abandon the source of her inspiration and creativity—black culture. Worth Heddon (*NYHTBW*, 10 October 1948) called it “an astonishing novel” and expressed surprise that someone outside the “breed,” even though a neighbor and an anthropologist, could portray the group so well. Edward Hamilton (*America*, 1 January 1949), who mistakenly assumed this was “Hurston’s first novel,” praised the reproduction of the speech of Florida whites and the picturing of the relationship between Arvay and Jim. Eddie Shiman (*Common Ground*, Spring 1948) viewed it as a study of white Southern culture by an anthropologist, an authority on folk culture “who happens to be a Negro.” Frank Slaughter (*NYTBR*, 31 October 1948) also observed her knowledge of the people and the area that she pictures and commented on the Freudian psychology applied in the study of Arvay.

Carl Milton Hughes, in *The Negro Novelist: A Discussion of the Writings of American Negro Novelists, 1940-1950* (Citadel Press, 1953), asserts that *Seraph on the Suwanee*, “her most finished novel,” places Hurston in “the

avant-garde in Freudian literature among Negro authors." He considers Arvey a perfect example of the hysterical female. He notes also a talent in Hurston that many women writers lack: "she portrays a man's man." He also praised Hurston for her reproduction of the idiom of Florida whites and for her evocation of the Florida locale, especially "her precise description of shrimping on the Atlantic ocean."

#### GENERAL STUDIES

Distinguishing between the critical and biographical studies of Zora Neale Hurston is quite difficult, because most of the critiques of her work also emphasize her life and her personality. Thus some of the studies in this section may immediately appear more appropriate to the section on biography. If, however, the critic presents his work as a study of Hurston's writings, I have accepted his characterization and noted his work in this section.

The controversies about what Hurston did and didn't do, what she believed and didn't believe, what she wrote and didn't write continue in the general studies that treat her work. Hugh Gloster, in *Negro Voices in American Fiction* (Russel and Russell, 1965; reprint of University of North Carolina 1948 edition) briefly discusses *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, praising her handling of folk materials in both books, but observing her weakness in character development and the analysis of social problems in the former. He notes that she is generally "more interested in folklore and dialect than in social criticism" and that she neglects racial tensions. Noel Schraufnagel's *From Apology to Protest: The Black American Novel* (Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards, 1973) dispenses with Hurston in two short paragraphs, which present cursory summaries of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. He does observe that Hurston does not stress social problems. Most of Nathan Irvin Huggins's consideration of Zora Neale Hurston in his study, *Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1971) is devoted to determining whether or not Hurston was really playing the "darky" role. He presents the views of some of her associates that she was putting on an act to fool her white patrons, but notes that her autobiography suggests a sincerity on her part in these relations. He concludes that if she were putting on an act earlier, "by the time she wrote the story of her life, she had become the act." He observes that though Hurston was better trained as a folklorist than Arthur Huff Fauset, she "was far less pure in her handling of folk materials." He describes her folk materials and concludes that Fauset "could complain as much about the sentimentality and artificiality here as in Joel Harris' work."

Arthur Paul Davis, in *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers, 1900-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), praises the use of folk customs, superstitions, and speech in her works, but finds all of



the novels lacking in some respects. Her folklore collections are her most important contributions. He notes her tendency in her works to ignore unpleasant aspects of Southern racism and comments, "This shutting of the eyes on Miss Hurston's part is a kind of artistic dishonesty." Noting her omissions from *Dust Tracks on a Road*, he says that while such ordering of experience is common in autobiographies, "the liberties Miss Hurston takes come dangerously close to plain dishonesty." In "The Negro Novelist and the South" (*SHR*, Spring 1967) Darwin Turner observes that Hurston's novels tend to exaggerate language and overemphasize certain aspects of Negro life, such as the storytelling, at the expense of the work. He notes that her settings are atypical—all-Negro community—and that she emphasizes the exotic.

Darwin Turner's *In a Minor Chord* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971) is a pioneering work, the first major study that presented new information and more intensive interpretation of the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston. His contempt for the woman overshadows his respect for the writer, however, and the overall tone is one of "apparent indifference to her own dignity or that of other blacks." He observes the comments of Hughes, Bontemps, and Hurst, which suggest her assumption of the role of happy darkie. He contrasts her affable reactions to whites in *Dust Tracks on a Road* with her violent and antagonistic reactions to blacks. He accuses Hurston of denouncing some efforts of blacks to secure equal opportunities and concludes that Hurston may be characterized as "an imaginative, somewhat shallow, quick-tempered woman, desperate for recognition and reassurance to assuage her feelings of inferiority." Despite her "psychological limitations," Turner argues that her novels "deserve more recognition than they have received." He notes certain weaknesses, previously detailed in an article cited earlier in this study, but praises her "ear for dialect, . . . appreciation of the folktale, . . . lively imagination, and . . . understanding of feminine psychology." He observes a progressive improvement in the creation of her novels with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* being superior to *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* being her "most accomplished achievement in fiction." Turner considers her final novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, "her most ambitious novel and her most artistically competent." Of her work in folklore Turner says that she is a talented reporter but a weak scholar. His general conclusion about *Tell My Horse* represents his assessment of both collections of folklore. He writes, "*Tell My Horse* reveals Miss Hurston's unusual talent for gathering material, her skill in reporting it, and her characteristic inability to interpret it." Turner concludes his study with this harsh assessment: "Always, she remained a wandering minstrel. It was eccentric but perhaps appropriate for her to return to Florida to take a job as a cook and maid for a white family and to die in poverty. She had not ended her days as she once had hoped. . . . Instead she had returned to the level of life which she proposed for her people."

Turner's study represented a kind of culmination of the harsh male attacks on Hurston, beginning with Hughes, Bontemps, and Wallace Thurman, and continued by Harold Preece, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Nathan Huggins. It was an attack which brought out Hurston's defenders in large numbers during the 1970s. And their defense of her is motivated as much by attraction to Hurston's personality as the attacks are motivated by resentment of her personality. Their defenses may often become as emotional and as subjective as some of the detractor's attacks, for to many Hurston is the representative par excellence of black strength and pride, of self-love, and of female assertiveness; and they tend to speak as often of love for her as they do of appreciation for her art.

In a general survey of the "pervasive narrow views of many male critics towards black women's novels," Rita B. Dandridge, in "Male Critics/Black Women's Novels" (*CLAJ*, September 1979), considers three basic approaches: "apathy, chauvinism, and paternalism." Most of her essay is devoted to a scathing attack on Darwin Turner's "chauvinistic" criticism of Hurston. In a point-by-point analysis, she defends Hurston against many of Turner's charges and attacks Turner for taking a different approach to the study of Hurston than he took with Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer (the other two principals of his study), using hearsay statements and irrelevant remarks to disparage her while completely overlooking "Cullen's alleged homosexuality and Toomer's alleged partiality for white women." She attacks Turner for distorting the facts and characterizes him as "an arrogant fault-finder." She even attacks his choice of placing Hurston last in his study, "a position for a put down." Mary Helen Washington, in "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow" (*I Love Myself*), likewise attacks Turner for evaluating Hurston's work on the basis of her personality while forgiving Toomer's comparable quirks as "philosophically viable and utterly sincere" (Turner, *In a Minor Chord*).

June Jordan, in "On Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston" (*BW*, 23 August 1974), argues that Hurston's obscurity results from the fact that the American media generally determine what figures will be given the dominant place, and in Hurston's era Richard Wright was the solitary black figure presented. One reason that he was acclaimed and Hurston was ignored was the assumption that what we needed was protest writing; and Hurston chose to affirm blackness rather than to protest against whites. She notes that there is a definite defiance in Hurston's works and concludes that it is not necessary to choose between Bigger and Janie: "our lives are as big and as manifold and as pained and as happy as the two of them put together. We should equally value and equally emulate Black Protest and Black Affirmation, for we require both." "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (*Ms.*, March 1975; rptd. as "Looking for Zora" in *I Love Myself*) is Alice Walker's poignant account of her search for Hurston's unmarked grave, which is symbolically a quest for the elusive personality of Hurston. Walker's visit to Eatonville and her conversations with some of the resi-

dents who knew Hurston help to explain the pride of those from this all-black town, who like Hurston, never felt any need to integrate. Walker's quest is poignantly reinforced when, alone in a snake-infested, overgrown graveyard, she yells in frustration, "Zora! . . . are you out there?" Though she never locates the gravesite, it is quite clear that Alice Walker does find Zora Neale Hurston, and her moving portraits in this essay, in the introduction to Hemenway's book, and in the introduction to her recent collection of Hurston's works, *I Love Myself*, suggest her dedication to the proposition that finding Zora Neale Hurston will prove a source of strength to all black women and will help them to love themselves. Carole Gregory, in "A Likely Possibility: Conversation Between Zora Neale Hurston and Carole Gregory" (*Black Collegian*, April/May 1980), argues that Hurston's lack of popular acclaim is a result of her celebration of plain folks, her unsuccessful marriages, racism, color prejudice, and sexism. She applauds the "rediscovery" of Hurston today and the fact that she is now honored for revealing "the heart of Black women." Gregory imagines a dialogue between herself and Hurston, which makes use of views expressed by Hurston in her works, a dialogue which reinforces her dedication to the folk culture and her concerns with Black women, without being a "feminist."

Lillie P. Howard's "Marriage: Zora Neale Hurston's System of Values" (*CLAJ*, December 1977) notes that the marriage relationship and its problems are themes in four of Hurston's short stories and three of her novels and observes that of the eleven marriages she treats, only three succeed. From these three marriages Howard concludes that the necessary qualities for a successful marriage, according to Hurston, are "courage, honesty, love, trust, respect, understanding, and a willingness to work together." She notes that in the unsuccessful marriages, "the male is always eliminated, i.e., killed" and concludes, "A flawed man is obviously less forgivable [*sic*] in the Hurston world than a flawed woman."

Ann Rayson's "The Novels of Zora Neale Hurston" (*SBL*, Winter 1974) presents a rather extended discussion of the four novels but also makes some questionable observations. She calls Arvey a return "to the successful female protagonist she had created in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," a comparison that is highly debatable. She suggests that the theme of Hurston's works is the need to go beyond the "quest for bourgeois life to a comprehension of what is ultimately meaningful—love, fun, a full relationship with one of the opposite sex." This theme is discussed in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but Rayson forgets the theme in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* during the main part of her discussion, which is a comparison with *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, by Roark Bradford. Later she tries to tie this work in with her main thesis by noting that here Moses strives to form a good relationship with God.

In "Zora Neale Hurston" (*Carrell*, June-December 1970), Evelyn Thomas Helmick gives a lengthy account of Hurston's life and a helpful

overview of all of her longer works with a few commentaries on the short stories and essays.

Though many folklore studies have ignored Hurston's work, some anthropologists and folklorists have applauded and noted her contributions. Franz Boas's introduction to *Mules and Men* (1935 edition; rptd. in the 1969 edition) praises Hurston's ability to enter into the lives of blacks as one of them, gain their confidence and thereby penetrate the "affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer from participating in his true inner life." He also praises "the charm of a loveable personality and of a revealing style." In his discussion of the verbal traditions and the images and roles of black women, Roger D. Abrahams, in "Negotiating Respect: Patterns of Presentation among Black Women" (*JAF*, January-March 1975), cites passages from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. He uses illustrations from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* in his discussion of courtship patterns and "fancy talk." Lawrence Levine, in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1977), frequently cites Hurston's observations concerning matters such as the importance of the phonograph and its impact on blacks and her comments on blues, jazz, and work songs. In "Folklore Field Notes from Zora Neale Hurston" (*BlackSch*, April 1976), Robert Hemenway observes that the emphasis on Hurston's art by critics "has led to the neglect of her career as a folklorist." He goes on to detail her formal training and her career as a folklorist and notes that her work did much to illuminate the distinctive culture of black Americans. He then presents several notes that Hurston had intended to publish in "The Negro in Florida," including a discussion of the characteristics of black verbal lore, folk rhymes, and narratives.

It is most unusual that the subject which Ellease Southerland treats, "The Influence of Voodoo on the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston" (*Sturdy Black Bridges*), has not been considered before. After effectively summarizing Hurston's exposure to and experiences with voodoo doctors and ceremonies, Southerland considers various aspects of voodooism in her works, including the use of the numbers three, six, and nine, the emphasis on the colors blue and yellow, the use of the tree in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the portrayal of Moses as a voodoo man. This is a good introductory, ground-breaking article, which suggests the need for further investigation in this area. James W. Byrd's "Zora Neale Hurston: A Negro Folklorist" (*TFSB*, June 1955) reviews Hurston's use of folklore in *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Citing numerous examples, Byrd praises her reproduction of black folk speech, rhymes, games, and superstitions. He acclaims her reproduction of white Southern folkways in *Seraph on the Suwanee*, but points to some instances

where the author attributes black speech patterns to her white characters. Theresa Love's "Zora Neale Hurston's America" (*PLL*, Fall 1976) begins as a discussion of the use of folk materials in the works of Hurston and ends as a discussion of the theme of the need for love in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Seraph on the Suwanee*, as well as in some short stories. Hugh Gloster, in "Zora Neale Hurston, Novelist and Folklorist" (*Phylon*, Second Quarter 1943), attempts to illustrate that "all of Miss Hurston's major works stem from her anthropological interests and investigations." He then goes on to discuss her "capacity for appropriating folklore to the purpose of fiction." Gloster concludes that her folk studies are not scientific: she does not consider sources, but rather treats her materials "much in the manner of the over-enthusiastic tourist." He also observes that her emphasis on folklore has resulted in a lack of attention to style, plot construction, character development, and the like: "As a result, her fiction lacks . . . literary finish, . . . structural craftsmanship, [and] psychological penetration."

Ellesee Southerland's "Zora Neale Hurston: The Novelist-Anthropologist's Life/Works" (*BlackW*, August 1974) is a good overview of Hurston's life and works, with the exception of *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Southerland calls attention to some of the comments in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, which have provoked the criticism that Hurston lacks racial consciousness, but argues that her other works counter this criticism. Southerland's assertion that Hurston and Wright wrote the best novels of the Harlem Renaissance period is not clear, however, since neither author wrote any novels during the period generally referred to as the Renaissance.

In *The Way of the New World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), Addison Gayle considers *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as a tragedy with John Pearson the tragic hero whose flaw is his sexual promiscuity. He considers the most important aspect of this novel the depiction of the character of the black woman. He considers also Hurston's portrayal of the modern liberated black woman in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. He notes that her female characters do not castrate the black male, but are rather the "foundations of a new order, . . . from whose loins will eventually come the new man." Gayle concludes that Hurston was one of those authors who, "despite flaws in perception which often limited their vision, believed in the sanctity of the black spirit, who sought, through their art, to elevate a race of people."

Larry Neal's "Eatonville's Zora Neale Hurston: A Profile" (*BlackR*, No. 2, edited by Mel Watkins, Morrow, 1972; rptd. as "A Profile: Zora Neale Hurston," *Southern Exposure*, Winter 1974) is a good overview of her life and works. Neal gives a detailed explication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which he says is "clearly her best novel." He asserts that her most significant contributions are her studies of folklore, and he praises her for her approach—that of identifying with the folk rather than the scientific

approach of most folklorists. Neal attempts to explain why so little is known about such an important writer and suggests that perhaps her conservative political views and the morals charges against her in 1948 were responsible for her disappearance from the creative scene.

Robert Bone's discussion of Hurston in *The Negro Novel in America* (rev. ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) is reprinted as "Zora Neale Hurston" in *The Black Novelist*, edited by Robert Hemenway (rev. ed., Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1970). Bone considers *Jonah's Gourd Vine* a novel which "has style without structure, a rich verbal texture without dramatic form, 'atmosphere' without real characterization." *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is labeled her best novel and "possibly the best novel of the period, excepting *Native Son*." In his overview of Hurston's life and works James Rambeau, in "The Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston," (*MarkhamR*, Summer 1976), characterizes her folk collections as of "the personal and anecdotal nature of the amateur rather than the professional nature of the trained anthropologist." He praises her use of dialect in her works but criticizes plot construction and narration in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. He suggests that her efforts to leave her own experiences in the black community with *Seraph on the Suwanee* led to her decline. Roger Whitlow, in *Black American Literature* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1974), gives a cursory summary of her life and work and reproduces a lengthy folktale from *Mules and Men* and a long passage from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Among the few brief comments that he makes about the works is the highly questionable statement that *Seraph on the Suwanee* explores a popular new theme, "the relationship between sex and racism." Emma L. Blake, in "Zora Neale Hurston: Author and Folklorist" (*NHB*, April 1966), gives a brief overview of Hurston's life and works, incorrectly referring to Arvey as a mulatto. Robert Hemenway presents a helpful overview of Hurston's life and works in "Zora Neale Hurston and the Eatonville Anthropology" (*The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, edited by Arna Bontemps, Dodd, Mead, 1972), which is expanded in his *Zora Neale Hurston*. Benjamin Brawley's *The Negro Genius* (Biblio and Tannan, 1972; rptd. from the 1937 edition) characterizes *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as a poorly integrated book with little merit but observes that Hurston struck her true vein with *Mules and Men*. In *The Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), Sterling Brown summarizes *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Mules and Men*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, praises Hurston for her poetic rendering of folk speech, but notes her lack of fully-developed characters in the two novels. He applauds her delightful tales in *Mules and Men*, but observes that she "does not uncover so much that white collectors have been unable to get." S. P. Fullinwider's *The Mind and Mood of Black America* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969) gives a brief account of Hurston's life with an emphasis on her personality and discusses *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as a "recapitulation of

her early life in Florida." Nancy M. Tischler's *Black Masks: Negro Characters in Modern Southern Fiction* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969) briefly summarizes *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and cites John Buddy of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as an example of the Negro preacher-womanizer. Noel Schraufnagel's *From Apology to Protest: The Black American Novel* (Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards, 1973) gives a cursory examination of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Seraph on the Suwanee*. George Kent does not treat Hurston at all in his *Blackness and the Adventures of Western Culture* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), but he does mention her "distinguished novels and brilliant book-length folklore studies" and comments, "She still awaits the thorough-going critical analysis that will properly place her in the patterns of American fiction." Marion Kilson's "The Transformation of Eatonville's Ethnographer" (*Phylon*, Summer 1972) traces Hurston's "transformation from ethnographic artist to critical ethnographer," a change which he suggests occurred in the early 1940s. Considering *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, and *Dust Tracks on a Road* as fiction, he notes that after *Dust Tracks on a Road* her primary form changed from fiction to the essay.

The most intensive study of Zora Neale Hurston's short fiction is found in Robert Bone's *Down Home: A History of Afro-American Short Fiction* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975). He considers Hurston's "thirst for experience" a strong aspect of her personality, noting that she constantly rebelled against those who tried to limit her experience because of her race. He notes that "This thrust toward freedom, whose literary mode is the picaresque, is dramatized in three early stories, 'Drenched in Light,' 'John Redding Goes to Sea,' and 'Magnolia Flower.'" He observes that another noteworthy aspect of her early fiction is the local color strain. He also notes the fact that Hurston absorbed the storytelling tradition in Eatonville and "worked primarily within its terms. Her standard plot, for instance, pits the weak against the strong." He considers most of her short stories "apprentice work," and characterizes "Magnolia Flower" and "Muttsy" as "hopelessly incompetent." "Drenched in Light" is labeled a "remarkable first story . . . a portrait of the artist as a young girl." "John Redding Goes to Sea" is a sequel, with the protagonist changed to a boy who longs to escape the confines of the provincial folk community. "Spunk" and "Sweat" are related to the Brer Rabbit tales in their accounts of conflicts between the weak and the strong. Bone considers "The Gilded Six-Bits" "Hurston's principal achievement in the short-story form," noting that it suggests the maturity of style which is reflected in her longer works of fiction. In *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), Margaret Perry discusses three short stories. She praises the vitality of the autobiographical heroine Isis in "Drenched in Light." She considers the folklore strain in "Spunk" and notes that although "John Redding Goes to Sea" is one of her weakest

stories, it is successful in its portrayal of a strong relationship between a black father and son. Perry concludes that while Hurston's dialogue may occasionally be stilted, she successfully handles "the important elements of the short story form—plot, diction, narration, and, especially, mood."

## CONCLUSION

A study such as this one would not have been possible ten years ago. I expect that ten years hence numerous such studies will have, of necessity, appeared. This is the period (a period of increasing black and female awareness) when a figure such as Zora Neale Hurston is eagerly embraced—she was definitely a woman ahead of her time. And while, even now as in previous years, her own overwhelming personality still tends to overshadow her work, the increasing accessibility of her writings will ultimately lead to a fuller evaluation and perhaps a greater appreciation of her works. There will certainly be much debate about how she should be ranked within the scale of American writers. Whatever the ultimate assessment of Zora Neale Hurston, it seems eminently appropriate to apply to her a comment which she made about Ruby J. McCollum:

Whatever her final destiny may be, she has not come to the bar craven and whimpering. She has been sturdy and strong. . . . She had dared defy the proud tradition[s] . . . openly and she awaits her fate with courage and dignity.

"The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum," *Pittsburgh Courier*,  
28 February 1953