

THE JOURNEY OF AN OFF SPRING OF A SLAVE IN PURSUIT OF ECSTASY

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ABSTRACT

The era served as an inspiration for the African American Artists for years together. It also served as a foundation for the civil rights movement of the 1960's. The kind of literary themes that gained prominence during that time were diverse and occasionally conflicting. They are usually concerned with promoting racial pride and embraced Dan - American sentiment. Most of their works were found to be addressing the feelings of alienation and marginality which were experienced by minorities in the American Society. It was a rich and vibrant tradition at the same time it is kind of complicated marriage between those of progressive ideals with that of traditional custom and folklore of African American tradition.

KEYWORDS: African American Tradition, Civil Rights Movement, Society

INTRODUCTION

The Journey into Self

"I do not attempt to solve any problems [in my novels]. I know I cannot straighten out with a few pen-strokes what God and men took centuries to mess up. So I tried to deal with life as we actually live it-not as the sociologists imagine it." —Zora Neale Hurston, from a letter to Fannie Hurst

As a gate way for the African American writers where journals like 'crisis' and 'opportunity' gave the writers a chance to publish in an unique style that catered to their taste and at the same time found white patrons. Being labeled as the "New Negroes" these Renaissance artist chiseled out a unique African American culture with a mission to improve the race relations at the same time maintain their distinct cultural identity.

Writers like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston had made an indelible mark as hardcore exceptional writers of the Renaissance period. But the young writers were abundantly showered with wondrous encouragement by the older established writers like, W.E.B. Du Bois editor of the journal Crisis and by Charles S Johnson editor of the journal opportunity. It was only because of the nurturing of these writers that Harlem came into existence and sustained and even thrived given the state of affairs. The characteristics of the much talked about Post Renaissance writing had often decried racism; the Harlem Renaissance had emerged as a shift from the moralizing work. Though the literature was excellently written and was also eloquently executed it did very little to change the consciousness of the country. It was for creating an uproar and also to stir the emotions of the outside world, they also encouraged the writes to communicate the ills of the racist world would display exemplary works of art. The advantageous dressings that were enveloped in this capsule for the readers who experienced what was delivered inverse and also through the characters' lives, whereby the message to delivered very subtly and efficiently.

As destiny would have it the economic depression which deepened the renaissance had to slowly fade away. It was only the works of writer like Richard Wright that marked a new era in the history of African American literature. The works of Richard Wright literature saw a transition period for black writers as they bridged the wildly creative period of the Renaissance with that of the more political activity and intense creativity to mark the specialty of the Renaissance like nature. It was during the time that the writers came up with the concept and went against the motto “art for art sake” which believed should die and they wanted to reiterate the point that literature must be directly intended to end racism. It was a period where they were desperate in reiterating the fact that the blacks were an essential part of the American society, a belief that was one of the foundations for the ideology of civil rights movement. There were various other concepts like realistic African American issues and extreme eclecticism were blended by poets who were trying to take various other roads in their quest to be heard. The most vital part was they were rewarded and accepted in the community beyond as they were gaining acceptance. Some of those established poets were Gwendlyn Brooks, Robert Hayden and Melvin B Tolson.

It was during this time the release of “Go tell it on the moontains” by James Baldwin and “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison brought serious African American issues to mainstream culture. They gained worldwide acceptance and was taught in classes around the country Long after the Harlem Renaissance died which was patronized by the whites unlike that of Black Aesthetic movement also known as the Black Arts movement blossomed phrases like “Black is Beautiful” was popularized and the artistic movement was closely paralleled by the civil rights marches, it was a loud and clear call for independence which being experienced in African American community. In the process they were stumbling upon their own identity within the Aesthetic movement. They were writing not only to be heard amongst the world outside but in order to produce works of art that would be meaningful to the black masses. Though the language was shocking there was still a conscious attempt to show power of black activists and their vitality. More than Martin Luther King Jr. it was Malcolm X who was more of an idol as the writers rather than being diplomats opted to be more of revolutionaries. It was believed that artists also had to be powerful political activists so as to be able to achieve nationalist goals. They were strongly driving home the fact that the artists had more responsibilities than just coining down or putting art on paper.

One of the leading voices of the movement was Sonia San Chez. He was one of the most prominent writers who were able to combine feminism along with her commitment to nurture the younger generation and the men of her race to fight for Black Nationalism many women also wrote about double marginalization on how they were forced to play a role in the male oriented black nationalistic movement.

Women writer’s works were encouraged and very well supported by the women’s liberation a movement which served as a channel for them to reach further and wider. The works of writers like Zora Neale Hurston served as an inspiration and impetus for their work. Their own unique voice which reverberated across the world had gained its own appreciation and was able to distinguish the female voice and the pain along with the uniqueness of it. The ecclesiastic band of women writers made their cry loud enough to be heard by the outside world was Gayl Jones, Alice Walker, Ton Morrison, Gloria Naylor and Terry Mc Millan. In fact more than the male authors it was the female authors who produced more quality as well as quantity in the publishing world and created a further in the country. They were all the more rewarded and finally saw light at the end of the tunnel when Toni Morrison was bestowed the Nobel Prize Jon literature. It was the Black Aesthetic movement that the writings of African American because more legitimized in America. The universities around the country started full-fledged departments on black American studies. The set of barriers which were followed in presently various generative was completely broken down and variety became the key word to their writings

during 1950's. They even go on to the extent of denouncing them and blissfully embark on sabotaging their career, which leaves the victim totally shattered.

“There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor linking in my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to that sobbing school of Negrohood who had that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal. Even in the helter skelter skirmish that is my life. I have seen that the world is to the strong regarding of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world – I am busy sharpening my oyster knife.”

Hurston, Zona Neala, *Dust track on, the road* pg : 45

Boldly voicing her view one of the most important writer and anthropologist is Zora Neals Hurston. As it was the only time when so many artists and writers thrived. It was a gash of new view of experiences of the Black Americans which got a vehicle of transportation that is art and writing. She herself was raised in the southern part of United States. She was infact born in Alabama but at a very young age she moved to Florida. It was her undaunted love and quest to understand people as well as the way to get to know their cultures developing took her not only to New York City but also fed her with abundant inspiration to word her emotions in the form of literature packed with experiences. She climbed from a silent school to the rights of Barnard College where she pursued anthropology and was awarded, and it was also the time. When Harlem was in full swing. As her emotions packed with the feelings of her race and the likes she kept on contributing abundantly and was very fast engulfed as a member of the great Harlem Renaissance. It was a mark of first milestone when her story “spunk” was included in the then famous collection called “The New Negro”. Her views were a wondrous portrayal of her view of life. Her works were not always associated with the issues of race alone, though they are significant motifs; they are not the central themes. It is more important to read her books as a profoundly human quest than as a black one's struggle, the effect of which is more fulfilling.

As the base happens to be in Harlem the issue of the race is none the less present. Her perspective on racism was undoubtedly influenced by Franz Baas with whom she studied anthropology. He also strongly argued that ideas of race which are culturally constructed and how skin colour indicates very little where not much innate difference. Racism is a cultural force that individuals can either struggle against or even yield to rather than a mindset which is rooted in demonstrable facts. The cruz of Hurston's search of self is where in the journey of coming of age through the swamps of Florida there arises an astute under pining of an awakening. It may not have emancipated from the slave narrative nor is an unavoidable burst to the post-colonial. It might not even be a painful processing towards that of modernity and that of its inevitable literary endowment of that of the black women's sexual autonomy as that of an American woman. Whereby her protagonist search of self, and that of the very entity being very passionately engulfed in her own quest for mere survival. Her works are not always associated with issues of race, though they are profusely significant motifs, but they are not central themes.

Zora Neale Hurston's childhood was one of bliss and harmony as in the small town in which her father was a minister helped her to let a highly privileged position as the esteemed mayor's daughter and it let her to believe that she had a special destiny.

“My soul was with the gods

And my body in the village”

Hurston was fantasied to Athena, who was born of her father's head, a unique child of imagination, who always insisted on creating her own inimitable identity. Though she grew up to become a graduate of anthropology she must have had a strong motivating factor of her own mythologizing tendency and also strongly or persistently believed that a fantasy tale about her genesis in the first all-black town in fact suited her purposes as a special individual. Robert Hemen way her biographer calls her as a "Women of fierce independence" and as someone who "was a complex woman with a high tolerance of contradiction". She was a unique woman with the capacity and the skill in the art of "masking" disguising her inner life for her own purposes.

Though there were many woman writers among the black women, it was Zora who first caught the attention of all the rising writers during the 60s and 70s.

Zora Neale Hurston is the first writer that our generation of black and feminist critics had brought into the canon, or perhaps I should say the cannons. For Hurston to now a cardinal figure in the Africa American fiction, as our readings of her work become increasingly close readings. Which Hurston's texts sustain delightfully. The curious aspects of widespread critical attention being shown to Hurston's text is that so many critics embracing such as diversity of theoretical approaches seem to find something new at which to marvel in her texts.

Henry Louistatis

The Signifying Monkey: A theory of

African American Literary Criticism.

The novels of Hurston are usually characterized by her autobiographical element which had indeed gone very deep into her fiction. As she draws the material from her own experiences and the socio economic conditions that was prevalent in the black woman in general.

During the time of Hurston's writing numerous voices whose ideas and opinions which were widely expressed had called for gifted black writers to enable them to use their talents to contribute towards themes of protest literature. Right from the days of Phillis Wheatly who was one of the first well known black poet, which was the time of slavery the talented black writers used their skills to fight against racism which was their major role. Their literature makes a genuine attempt to challenge the conditions which were confronting all blacks. It stressed the quality of all the people who exposed the psychological and physical brutality, with the stance of being ironic. A country which is proud of being democratic and religious the brutal reality of slavery, segregation and discrimination in fact ID a sign of strong irony.

The novel "Their Eyes were watching God" thematically explores the journey into interiority. Right from how Janie makes her way from that of a young innocent girl who awakens and realizes her own sexual signs to the development of a mature woman. But she has travelled for as she moves through three husbands and comes back to her beginning point. Literally speaking her path way in geography of Florida figurately shows how she descends into her own self, in the process understanding who she actually is and how a significant part becomes but is not is not the end of all of satisfying or lasting marital life and love. The author also takes the readers in the interpretation of the book's enigmatic title. "Their eyes were watching God, which is a way to thematically demonstrate the hierarchy of power Hurston leaves no chance of interrogation, which God is in charge. She drives home the fact that God's power is greater than that of white man. In the process of doing so she challenges. The contemporary notion that was prevalent that the black writers should use their

potential to portray the injustices meted out to the blacks by the white Americans. As a celebrated writer she was happy that she did not belong to the band of sobbing neighbors and was pleased to stand tall. She was able to see that amidst her own people there was so much to be understood and celebrated.

The author uses the story of her protagonist as a means by which she explores thematically the kind of treatment that was meted out to woman and the role they played in uplifting themselves. Her protagonist Janie married, widowed and married yet again. Eighty percent of the book showcases the protagonist's life in marital state but still makes room to be alone and come to understand freedom and also to hang on to that freedom once she remarries. To portray the readers Janie's development of a woman are portrayed through the images of trees, leaves and branches along with buds and blossoms and bees which powerfully conveys womanhood. Mules and the masculine genders are used to highlight or indicate the treatment to women. In fact mules do literally appear with her husband's Joe and Logan. In her episode with her first husband she is made to work with the mules but fortunately in her experience with her second husband she is spared the ceremonies surrounding the mules, but that very aspect excludes her from her community as well.

One more vital aspect of the novel is signifying a form of oral word play as she is an anthropologist. An unsurprisingly unique and rightfully a Black literature as it deal with their culture which tells the story of the protagonist. Janie Crawford and her three husbands Logan Kellicks, Jody Sparks and Tea Cake. The life of the beautiful, self-assured, middle aged Black woman Janie Crawford's life takes place in rural Florida the 1930's. The story opens with how she walks into the town after years have gone by and she is jointly recognizable by the people of the town, and hence her striding back home creates a flutter. The woman folk in the locality naturally look at her with contempt. But the men nonchalantly gawk and admire her immaculate beauty and gape at her gorgeous physique, and naturally she becomes the topic of gossip among the women folk. In the unfriendly home town she finds only an old compatriot a friend by name Phoebe that stands by her and provides her with food. Not only providing refreshment but makes her aware of mean speculations about her in the town which Janie finds humorous. It is only at this juncture that she takes up the role of a narrator and goes about narrating her story. That is the period that she is away from her hometown and her close friend Phoebe. Though she is not the sole narrator of the novel, she does narrate certain episodes of the story. In fact the narration ends at the end of the story and is in fact recapitulated.

CONCLUSIONS

The novel traces the growth of the lone survivor who was raised up an over powerful and protective Nanny who thought and performed everything for her and on behalf of her. But all that pampering and spoon feeding the right and the wrong things the protagonist is left to fend for her captivated in the shackles of the so called secured marriage. She breaks free and goes in search of all that will make her secure and contented. The long and arduous journey is something that stalls us, how a novice could grow up to handle the male dominated world and come out unscathed

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