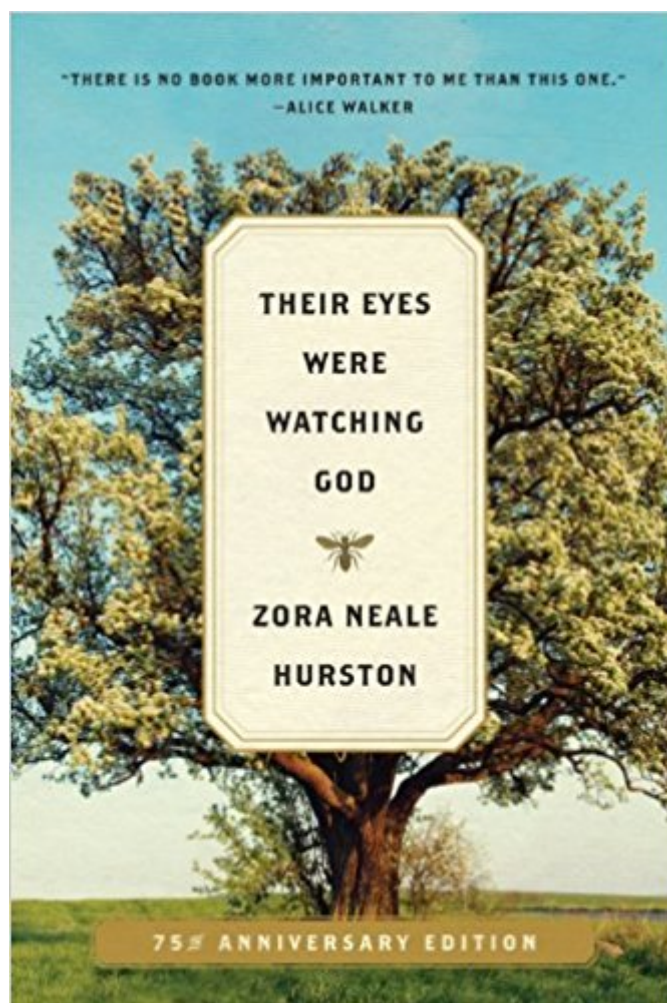


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Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel



Synopsis

“A deeply soulful novel that comprehends love and cruelty, and separates the big people from the small of heart, without ever losing sympathy for those unfortunates who don’t know how to live properly.” —Zadie Smith

One of the most important and enduring books of the twentieth century, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* brings to life a Southern love story with the wit and pathos found only in the writing of Zora Neale Hurston. Out of print for almost thirty years due largely to initial audiences’ rejection of its strong black female protagonist, Hurston’s classic has since its 1978 reissue become perhaps the most widely read and highly acclaimed novel in the canon of African-American literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At the height of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston was the preeminent black woman writer in the United States. She was a sometime-collaborator with Langston Hughes and a fierce rival of Richard Wright. Her stories appeared in major magazines, she consulted on Hollywood screenplays, and she penned four novels, an autobiography, countless essays, and two books on black mythology. Yet by the late 1950s, Hurston was living in obscurity, working as a maid in a Florida hotel. She died in 1960 in a Welfare home, was buried in an unmarked grave, and quickly faded from literary consciousness until 1975 when Alice Walker almost single-handedly revived interest in her work. Of Hurston’s fiction, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is arguably the best-known and perhaps the most controversial. The novel follows the fortunes of Janie Crawford, a

woman living in the black town of Eaton, Florida. Hurston sets up her characters and her locale in the first chapter, which, along with the last, acts as a framing device for the story of Janie's life. Unlike Wright and Ralph Ellison, Hurston does not write explicitly about black people in the context of a white world--a fact that earned her scathing criticism from the social realists--but she doesn't ignore the impact of black-white relations either: It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment. One person the citizens of Eaton are inclined to judge is Janie Crawford, who has married three men and been tried for the murder of one of them. Janie feels no compulsion to justify herself to the town, but she does explain herself to her friend, Phoeby, with the implicit understanding that Phoeby can "tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf."

Hurston's use of dialect enraged other African American writers such as Wright, who accused her of pandering to white readers by giving them the black stereotypes they expected. Decades later, however, outrage has been replaced by admiration for her depictions of black life, and especially the lives of black women. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Zora Neale Hurston breathes humanity into both her men and women, and allows them to speak in their own voices. --Alix Wilber --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"There is no book more important to me than this one." --Alice WalkerA --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I tried and failed several times to read this book, a paperback copy that I picked up at a thrift store several years ago. Finally, my senior in high school son was given it as an assignment. I explained that I'd tried to read it as recently as November (two months ago) and failed BUT I wanted to hear what he thought about the book. Then I read the group assignment he and his friends wrote, which was about the use of water as a certain type of symbolism (I won't be more specific so as not to provide spoilers). At that time, I learned the plot of the book, including several important plot spoilers. Even so, I was determined to "get through it" and bought the audio book, performed by Ruby Dee. It was absolutely mesmerizing. It was only about six hours long, which was slower reading than I normally do (I followed along with the Kindle version, because we owned that too) but was always trying to get back to the book when distracted by life. I found the performance to be

riveting. I could actually understand what was happening in the story. I found the writing amazing (this makes me want to "read" something else of hers, preferably performed by Ruby Dee). I loved the use of personification. I loved the descriptions. I loved many things about it. In the end, I realized that sometimes you need to look at (or listen to) things in a different way. By listening to this rather than trying to read it, I was able to fully appreciate a brilliant book. Would I recommend the book itself to a friend? No. But I'd highly recommend the audio version. Also excellent in the audio performance category: Katherine Kellgren and Victor Garber.

A book club recommendation, I am very pleased to find Zora Hurston back in print and that this book sparked the discussion about who black women are in their complexity and their search for identity and actualization. I particularly liked the conversations of the men on the porch as I felt drawn into the fold and wondered where it was going and who would "win". And one cannot forget Janie's emerging consciousness into womanhood under the flowering pear tree.

Read this for a sexuality and lit class in college. When I was in the class I barely read any of it and instead resorted to things like SparkNotes and summaries of the book to get by. I'm really glad that now I took the time to read it and fully appreciate it. I'm a fast reader, but because of the slang and the overall the story is written totally slowed me down. I know some people were bothered by the at times difficult slang/accent but it's really nothing to worry about if you take your time to read it. The story is really beautiful and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

This book mentions the 'Service of Love'. Throughout the story of Janie's life you see it over and over. Her grandmother's, her birth, first and second husband, the love of her life, as well as friends, neighbors and so on. The service of love has caused me to look at many facets of life. I enjoyed this book. It had the normal racism, etc. But, it also showed life's humanity. I recommend this book.

Picked this one up because i needed to read it for school. Not a bad story at all. The struggles Janie go through are tragic but make her a strong independent woman set in a time where her lifestyle was generally looked down upon. The book can be difficult to read due to the southern dialect presented throughout the novel. The movie adaptation is pretty spot on with the book and is a lot easier to understand.

*spoilersThis book deserves 5 stars for the language alone. Hurston's lyricism and use of the

African-American vernacular of the period is just brilliant. I've never read a book where the characters and time are so vividly rendered through speech. The blending of the narrator voice and characters perspectives is masterful. While race is very important in the book Hurston was not overtly political and this was one of the reasons she fell into obscurity. Her themes about freedom and love are universal but she also provides many insights into different forms of oppression, particularly of women. Her characters are not defined by the relationship to white society and she explores life in a black community in all its facets, showing both the positive and negative sides of this community. I thought it was very poignant when Janie admitted to herself that she hated her grandmother because her limited worldview, shaped by the experience of slavery, meant she couldn't dream of anything more for her granddaughter than a loveless marriage. Janie wants more from life and she's willing to risk everything to find it. It's ironic that her first attempt at freedom lands her in a gilded cage and it's only after her second husband dies that she finds real love through Tea Cake. Their time together is the happiest of her life and his terrible death confirms how much they meant to each other. I did find it a bit annoying that they had to do manual labour in the Everglades because Tea Cake refused to live off her money and his conversation with the other men about beating her was very disturbing but realistic. Throughout the book Janie is defined by her marriages and I really wanted to know more about her life after Tea Cake died. Did she carry on as an independent woman or was she infected by rabies when he bit her and destined to follow him to the grave? There was never any mention of her taking serum but as the doctor knew about the bite maybe we are supposed to assume that she did. Overall a fascinating, enjoyable read.

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