Hurston, Zora Neale


At age 16, Hurston joined a traveling theatrical company, ending up in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance. She studied anthropology with Franz Boas at Columbia University, taking a scientific approach to ethnicity. As an ethnologist, Hurston traveled to Haiti to study voodoo. She ultimately rejected the conventional viewpoint of the scholar in favour of personal involvement with her heritage. In 1931 she collaborated with Langston Hughes on a play, Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts. Her second novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), was both widely acclaimed and highly controversial. It was criticized by blacks because, although Hurston refused to endorse the myth of black inferiority, neither did she portray blacks as victims of this myth.

The tone of Hurston's work is celebratory, rooted in a rural black South reminiscent of her hometown, Eatonville. Her characters act freely within their rich heritage and narrow social position. Hurston influenced such later black authors as Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison. Her autobiography is titled Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), and an anthology of her work, I Love Myself When I Am Laughing and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive, was released in 1979.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.