

**Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Afterword: “Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying’”**  
*Their Eyes* 195-205

195:

**Section I [Overview(?)]:**

¶1:

- Introduction: **presents** anecdotal reference to ZNH to **demonstrate** the existence of a “body of confused and often contradictory rumors” surrounding ZNH.

¶2:

- **presents** biographical background on ZNH, including her schooling, publications, and fall into obscurity.
- **suggests** a possible explanation for that obscurity: “her staunchly independent political stances rather than any deficiency of craft or vision,” difficulty of placing ZNH “into the glib categories of ‘radical’ or ‘conservative,’ ‘black’ or ‘Negro,’ ‘revolutionary’ or ‘Uncle Tom’—categories of little use [?] in literary criticism” (196).

196:

¶3:

- **distinguishes** the rediscovery of ZNH from that of other Af Am writers, which “has usually turned on larger political criteria, of which the writer’s work is supposedly a mere reflection” (196).
- **asserts** that ZNH’s rediscovery has been generated by black women “primarily to establish a maternal literary ancestry” (196).
- **identifies** the importance of ZNH’s use of “black vernacular speech and rituals ... to chart the coming to consciousness of black women, so glaringly absent in other | black fiction” (196-97).

197:

- **associates** *Their Eyes* more with James’s *Portrait of a Lady* and Toomer’s *Cane* than with the more contemporary, “proletarian literature” of Hughes and Wright, “so popular in the Depression” (197).

¶4:

- **compares** Janie’s oppressive, possessive treatment by Logan and Jody with her more liberating and fulfilling treatment by Tea Cake.
- **quotes** the pear tree passage to illustrate his claim

¶5:

- **claims** that Janie’s movement from object to subject is exemplified by the shift from third person to first/third (free indirect discourse), “signifying this awareness of self in Janie” (197).
- **identifies** *Their Eyes* as the first explicitly feminist novel in the Af Am tradition
- **asserts** that many of the novel’s themes—importance of language and voice, selfhood and empowerment—are representative of “Hurston’s oeuvre as a whole” (197).

**Section II [Struggles with Wright, Obscurity, etc.]:**

198:

¶6:

- **describes** the passage from *Dust Tracks* detailing ZNH’s mother’s death as “one of the most moving passages in American literature” (198).

¶7:

- **compares** this passage with a similar scene from Wright's *Black Boy* to **demonstrate** the "rhetorical distance" between ZNH and her contemporaries.
- **reinforces** the distinction b/w ZNH and RW by **contrasting** their relative positions during their remaining years.

199:

¶8:

- **poses the question** of how such a prolific writer could fall into such obscurity
- **suggests** that the reasons may stem from the more negative response to ZNH by many of the influential black male writers of the time
- **explains** that the reasons for this ambivalence "are complex and stem largely from what we might think of as their 'racial ideologies'" (199).

¶9:

- **elaborates** on this point by **explaining** that, traditionally, Af Ams were seen only as respondents to their racial oppression.
- **asserts** that ZNH rejected such a narrow view of Blacks.

200:

¶10:

- **explains** that "Hurston's mythic realism" would have been viewed as "politically retrograde to the proponents of a social or critical realism" (200), causing her to have "lost the battle" (200).

¶11:

- "But not the war" (200).

¶12:

- **celebrates** ZNH's renaissance as "a marvelous instance of the return of the repressed" (200).
- **identifies** Morrison and Walker as descendants of ZNH, representing "a tradition-within-the-tradition" (200).

¶13:

- **claims** that ZNH has been canonized within each of "the black, the American, and the feminist traditions" (200).
- **illustrates** the enormity of her resurgence by **citing** the fact that more people had read ZNH between 1975 and the writing of the Afterword in 1990 than between 1934 and 1975.

### Section III [Use of Black Idiom]:

201:

¶14:

- **expresses** the importance of ZNH's use of black idiom to her success, **explaining** that her use of that language "unites H's anthropological studies with her fiction" (201).
- **presents** examples from *JGV* and Robert Hemenway to **support** his claim

¶15:

- **presents** more quotes from Hemenway to support his claims that ZNH's work "celebrates rather than moralizes; it shows rather than tells" (201).

202:

- **reiterates** the significance of ZNH's accomplishments in the face of her attack by Wright and her being ignored by his literary heirs, **asserting**, "H's ideas about language and craft undergird many of the most successful contributions to Afro-American literature that followed" (202).

#### Section IV [Importance of *Dust Tracks*]:

¶16:

- **identifies** *Dust Tracks* as emblematic of ZNH's "complex and contradictory legacy" (200) in that she writes about her life as a writer, not about the race problem.

¶17:

- **suggests** that ZNH's success is "twofold" then **provides** the first—her focus on her life as a writer
- **proclaims** her mastery of the "linguistic rituals" of both the Western tradition and the black community.

203:

¶18:

- **identifies** the "divided voice" in ZNH as an example of Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness."

¶19:

- **describes** her use of language as "unsettling"
- **provides** a quote [from *Dust Tracks*?] to **illustrate** the unsettling nature of her imagery

¶20:

- **provides** more examples of ZNH's use of black idioms.

204:

¶s 21-22:

- **provides** an example from *Dust Tracks* to **illustrate** his claim that "manner and meaning are perfectly in tune" (204).

¶23:

- **presents** the second reason for the success of *Dust Tracks*: her understanding of modernism: "H uses the two voices in her text to celebrate the psychological fragmentation both of modernity and of the black American" (204).
- **cites** Barbara Johnson to **support** this claim

¶24:

- **asserts** that ZNH demonstrates that "economic limits determine our choices even more than does violence or love" (204-5).

¶25:

- **reiterates** the tragedy of ZNH's final days

¶26:

- **Conclusion:** hope (?) that at this point ZNH's obscurity is permanently behind her