

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Life is full of choices; yet, we cannot choose where or when we are to be born and raised. Choices are part of human life, but not everyone can make good choices in life. Maturity is required for one to choose wisely and afterward one will be responsible for their decisions in life. Maturity is a stage of one's life when one is truly aware of one's true self. While true self refers to one's real character or personality that is shaped by one's life background. One's true self is shown through the choices that one takes.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is Zora Neale Hurston's novel which reflects this situation; when a person has to make decisions to find one's true self. The protagonist is Janie Mae Crawford, an African American girl who grows under her grandmother's rules and dominance. Hurston focuses on Janie's process of finding her true self through the three marriages she has had. The transformation of Janie's characteristics is shown clearly in the novel.

Hurston was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1936 and she was able to travel to Jamaica and Haiti. In Haiti she began writing her second novel, *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God, which was published in 1937. This novel is highly acclaimed as the most important work of Hurston. “Hurston became the most successful and most significant black woman writer of the first half of the 20th Century. Over a career that spanned more than 30 years, she published four novels, two books of folklore, an autobiography, numerous short stories, and several essays, articles and plays” (Boyd).

Alice Walker, another prominent African-American writer, rediscovered Hurston’s work in the late 1960 and on Hurston’s second novel she claimed that “there is no book more important to me than this one.” Some new books have also been written about Hurston afterwards. “Throughout her country, this novel is the required reading in many high schools and colleges” (Boyd).

Oprah Winfrey also admired *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and she claimed this novel as her “favorite love story of all time.” Therefore, Winfrey produced a television adaptation of it. It aired for the first time in 2005 and it is estimated to have been watched by 24,6 million viewers, which further entrenched the novel in the public consciousness and in the American literary canon (Boyd).

Based on the above facts, I am interested in analyzing the portrayal of the protagonist in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The exploration of the protagonist’s transformation dominates the story. Characterization, as Karen Bernardo states in her article, is a very important element in a good story because the protagonist’s behaviors in some difficult situations can create some challenges for the reader to keep on reading the pages until the end of story (Bernardo). Protagonist is defined as “the main character in a story, novel, drama, or other

literary work; the character that the reader or audience empathizes with” (Wiehardt).

Statement of the Problems

The problems that I am going to analyze in my thesis are as follows:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed?
2. Why is the protagonist portrayed in such a way?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study in my thesis are formulated as follows:

1. to analyze how the protagonist is portrayed.
2. to reveal why the protagonist is portrayed in such a way.

Method of Research

I conduct the library research for my thesis. First, I read the novel and I pay attention mostly to the protagonist in the story. Second, I read several reference books and search for some materials from the internet websites to create an objective analysis. After that, I start to write my thesis from Chapter One and then Chapter Two. In the end, I draw the conclusion from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

I divide my thesis into three parts, preceded by Acknowledgements, Abstract and Table of Contents. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study,

Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is Analysis of Portrayal of the Protagonist in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chapter Three is Conclusion. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which contain the synopsis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the biography.