

Black Leadership of Moses and Enslaved Hebrew in Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

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Abstract: This paper dwells on the investigation of Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, a man of the Mountain. It investigates the leadership quality of Moses and enslavement of Hebrews. It explores various themes in the novel like slavery, religion, race, freedom, class, nature which built upon a biblical narrative framework. This paper examines the mannerism of male-centred character. This is an endeavour to investigate from various activist points of view, the mission for the male role of a protagonist Moses (*Moses, Man of the Mountain*). The hero's involvement is both spiritual and human world meet. Additionally, this novel rewrites the story of the Book of Exodus of Moses and Israelites from an Afro-American perspective. Concerning the discoveries, it applies some themes and motifs commonly addressed in African –American culture, subverting the story of Moses. The uses of natural imagery like animals, insects, reptiles, water and mountain to accentuate plot. The method applied is a modified form of rhetorical criticism, which is understood to provide an interpretive perspective on the text. This is accomplished through the investigation of its main literary character Moses. The goal of this paper is to break down the enslavement of Hebrews out of Egypt, the quality and leadership of Moses display in the Old Testament in the Book of Exodus. Also, this paper demonstrates how the difficulties looked by the protagonist and how their enslavement in Egypt ends up in the general public and the partition from slavery, race, religion, freedom, class and nature in the general public. In general the notion of race and racial purity and it is a profoundly philosophical exploration of the very nature of freedom and self-empowerment.

Keywords: Mediator, Leadership, Slavery, Race, Religion, Freedom, Class and Nature.

INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), is a unique and familiar work where Zora beautifully blends fiction, religion and humour creating one of the most intriguing works in African American literature. This novel based on the familiar story of the Exodus, Zora Neale Hurston blends the Moses of the Old Testament with the Moses of black folklore and song to create a compelling allegory of power, redemption and faith and narrated in a mixture of biblical rhetoric, black dialect and conversational English. She is an African American novelist, folklorist, short story writer and playwright. Her books revealed insight into the different manner by which African ladies are abused due to slavery, class, race, gender, religion and freedom. *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, considered being a Bildungsroman novel, and it stands out in contemporary American scholarship as Hurston's most celebrated work. This novel is regarded as her second best novel after *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West give Hurston more credit in their unreserved assentation that Hurston is actually 'the first novelist to depict a black woman's successful quest to find a voice and to overcome male oppression'(132) Hurston was one of the highly visible effervescent personality during the Harlem

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Renaissance. All books of Hurston received good reviews and sold well, But black male critics dismissed Hurston 's work as irrelevant, unrealistic and useless because it did not ideologically further the struggle for black equality or depict the horrors of life in the south for many Negroes. Even though there was significant opposition, she raised her voice against racism, classism and sexism.

In *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Hurston retells the Old Testament story of Moses, chronicling his quest to lead the Israelites out of slavery under the Egyptians and to freedom. The Israelites' struggle out of slavery is used to parallel and analogise the same struggle faced by black slaves in the United States. Hurston traces Moses's life from the day he is launched into the Nile River in a reed basket, to his development as a great magician, to his transformation into the heroic rebel leader, the Great Emancipator. From his dramatic confrontations with Pharaoh to his fragile negotiations with the wary Hebrews, this very human story is told with great humour, passion and psychological insight—the hallmarks of Hurston as a writer and champion of black culture. The novel is thus a commentary on the nature of oppression and the struggle for freedom and equality. Whereas in her other novels Hurston employs ample use of biblical allusion to enrich her narratives, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is primarily a Bible narrative that is retold from a modern perspective. Hurston's powerful version of this tale of Moses and the Exodus 'gives the biblical story a compelling immediacy' (Howard 115). This text was inspired by Hurston's short story *The Fire and the Cloud*, and in fact, important aspects of the novel's last chapter were created here.' She composed the novel in 1938, and it was published the following year.

As a daughter of a minister, Hurston was influenced by religion from an early age, and religious references form an essential basis in her oeuvre, including this novel. But Hurston's focus on Moses also falls squarely in the African –American tradition. Valerie Boyd writes that Moses was 'a figure of unparalleled splendor in black folklore' (330). In folklore and song, blacks had a long tradition of referring to the plight of the Israelites as a means of contextualising their own. In such allusions, Moses functions as a heroic figure, a symbol of freedom and emancipation. For many African Americans, then the figure of Moses served as the model for emancipation as they charted their course from bondage to freedom. She earned an uncontested legacy among contemporary black women writers, who view Hurston as their 'foremother'(131) and 'spiritual ancestor'(61). Interestingly these black writers encouraged Hurston's work and its themes regarding gender politics and racial upliftment. Hurston was a free-spirited artist, not an angry protester of racism and she wrote of life as she knew and observed it. Because she refused to be 'tragically black' all of her works were out of print when she died. Matrilineal ancestors of African American fiction rediscovered Hurston and reclaim 'Their eyes were watching god' as one of the best novels of the 20th century. Many readers are inspired by Hurston's bold, outrageous and mesmerising personality her thoroughly unconventional lifestyle and her refusal to compromise her genius to any obstacles, including brief marriages, criticism from black authors, lost jobs and fellowship, occasional extreme poverty and devastating false accusation of child sexual abuse. Richard Wright, an influential critic and twentieth-century writer. In his short review titled 'Between laughter and Tears' wright observes:

Miss Hurston voluntarily continues... the tradition which was forced upon the negro in the theatre that is the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh... The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic taste she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is 'quaint' the phrase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the superior race (76)

Moses, Man of the mountain, is quite distinct in comparison of Hurston's other works of long fiction in that it retells the story of Moses from the Old Testament of the Bible; however, Hurston uses this biblical framework as a means of treating many of the themes present in her other novels, including religion, gender, class, freedom and nature. Hurston's text was a product of the early 20th century, and in dealing with issues relevant to African Americans post slavery, this text uses biblical events as a parable for current events. In fact, Hurston was following in a long tradition of appropriating Bible stories to comment on current social and political woes. The Hebrew in the novel parallels the plight of the African Americans; the Egyptians parallel Euro American slave owners in the United States before abolition. Canaan symbolises freedom, not just a geographic area where a free people live, but also a state of mind. Framed by the story of Moses and the Egyptians, the novel then speaks to the struggle for freedom faced by African Americans and their search for a newfound identity as a liberated people. Alice Walker who praises the novel:

Moses, Man of the Mountain, is one of the rarest, most important books in black literature and should be required reading for all black children. It successfully blends the Biblical story of

Moses's struggle to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and the twentieth-century black personality—post slavery but pre-liberation—obsessed with the same kind of great endeavours. (176)

Moses, Man of the Mountain, is considered to be a well-structured spiritual and religious book which is compared to Africans as Israelites (black) and Americans as Hebrews (white). The book can be divided into four equal parts. Each part is consisting of ten chapters. First part depicts the early life of Moses till he crosses over. The second part focuses on a new beginning in Moses' life, where he meets God and achieves his greatness. Third part mark Moses's return to Egypt and his duel with Pharaoh where he defeats him. Last part deals with Moses' march with the Hebrews in search of the Promised Land and Moses travels down to the other side of the mountain.

MEDIATOR

Moses is the leading character in the chapter of Exodus, Old Testament from The Bible. The author fleshes out the own view of Moses and thereby develops a picture of a thoroughly committed mediator between Yahweh (God) and Israel. Sternberg's general assumption for the biblical portrayal of human characters is also valid for Moses in Exodus, 'With biblical man... there is usually a distance- and often a clash- between the impression produced on its first appearance and the one left after his last' (237) Exodus-5, 21 records the Israelites handing over of Moses to divine judgement, clearly indicating their negative verdict. As a mediator between God and Israelites, he knows what's happening especially god's prediction of the Pharaoh's refusal. But certain doubts might remain as to whether or not Moses acted wisely during his first meeting with the king. Again leadership issues are raised by the characters in the narrative. Again an explicit judgement is being passed on Moses by a character inside the story. The subject questions the ability and authority of Moses to lead the people. With the Egyptian army in sight, the Israelites question Moses integrity and leadership qualities. Moses is not tempted to doubt leadership abilities. At the end of the character, Israel follows. 'Israel saw the great power that Yahweh used against the Egyptians, so the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and his servant Moses' Moses is positioned between the different demands of Israel and Yahweh (god).

LEADERSHIP

Moses leadership expressed the compassion of God. The leader of archetypical in the Bible is Moses, who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, on a long trek through the desert to the borders of the land of promise. From the beginning till the end Moses was the leader. God knows the leadership quality of Moses. Manliness can be seen as representing strength, bravery, courage, and leadership; the roles of father, husband and leader are the sources of power. First, the command starts when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, on the top of the mountain. He declared, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.'

The sufferings of the people touched God's heart. Moses expresses affection toward his wife, but his ultimate devotion to his leadership, spiritual and military pursuits suggests a strain in their relationship and that she serves as a secondary figure in Moses' life. Moses expresses affection toward his wife, but his ultimate devotion to his leadership, spiritual and military pursuits suggests a strain in their relationship and that she serves as a secondary figure in Moses' life.

RELIGION AND FREEDOM

Religion functions as the primary narrative framework, which allows Hurston to treat various other themes in the novel. The tensions between the Hebrews (or Israelites) and the Egyptians derive from the central questions of religion and power. In the novel's opening pages, Pharaoh decrees a ban on male children and sets some other laws meant to oppress the Hebrew people, viewing the Hebrews as a threat to his power and authority.

The Hebrew womb had fallen under the heel of the pharaoh. A ruler great in his newness and new in his greatness had arisen in Egypt, and he had said. "This is la. Hebrew boys shall not be born. All offenders against this law shall suffer death by drowning."(1)

The pharaoh views the Hebrews as inferior, and their worth as people is defined solely by the work they do as slaves- and even the work, according to the pharaoh, is not sufficient, as he complains about them working too slowly or not enough. But Hurston presents the Hebrews as resisters to these forms of oppression through the characters of Amram and his wife, who have a child and hide him to save his life. Amram and Caleb got off and plodded on home. Amram was full of feelings about his wife's condition, and Caleb talked about the protest meeting. He wanted Amram to go if he could. (8)

This child Moses was the product of resistance against the oppressive laws, and it thus fits that he is the ultimate victory over the pharaoh. Moses himself comes from a slave family; yet his slave father, Amram, holds high hopes for a son who could achieve manhood and power. Moses' ascendance in society is permitted because he grows up a free man, raised as an Egyptian by the pharaoh's daughter who claims him as her own. He thus gains opportunities that he would not have had otherwise. Hurston characterises Moses as a leading religious figure with mental, physical and spiritual powers. Although he is raised in the pharaoh's household by the pharaoh's daughter, who claims he is her son, he will ultimately break free from the royal household after devoting himself to study and gaining much experience and while living in the pharaoh's household. Moses engages in spiritual and intellectual pursuits that will later lead to enlightenment and the knowledge of how he is to lead. While viewed as a person of royal lineage in Egypt, Moses's actual ethnic background is hinted at, particularly when his wife accuses him of being Hebrew after hearing rumours. Moses also finds himself responsible for killing an Egyptian supervisor who was taunting a Hebrew man; this symbolises his new empathy toward the Hebrew people. The event with the foreman becomes a catalyst in his life, the turning point at which he begins to realise his fate as the leader of the Hebrews. The animosity toward Moses propels him to leave Egypt and thus begin his important spiritual and religious journey. During his travels, Moses sees Mount Sinai which symbolises divinity and the relation between man, nature and divinity. Sinai functions as a religious site in the novel and important revelations and battles occur there. Moses' encounter with Jethro and his family in Midian becomes a pivotal moment in his spiritual odyssey. Jethro reveals that,

"Jethro is the name my father named me. As chief of my clan, I am chief Jethro. Otherwise, I am Ruel. Among the Kenites, a priest has a formal name, too. Pretty general habit all over the land of Midian. But I guess you already know that." (87)

Moses gains the favour of Jethro and his family after he helps them to retrieve some missing livestock. Jethro and Moses share knowledge and experience most notably about religion. Jethro eventually transforms Moses into a priest figure, granting him special powers that enable him to transform the world. For example, he causes frogs to appear to encourage Zeppo and his family to leave Jethro's household. Here especially, we see a connection between this novel and the conjuring stories that Hurston tells elsewhere. Jethro himself acknowledges Moses's conjuring power, calling him "the finest hoodoo man in the world." These powers continue after a journey to Kops, in which Moses retrieves the book from the river and internalises its contents by copying the ideas onto paper, soaking the paper in beer and drinking the beer. Later, after returning to Midian, Jethro informs Moses of the journey he will have to take. He must free the Hebrews and tell them of the real God. Through his evolving powers over nature, Moses becomes a conduit between the people and God.

GENDER

As in other Hurston novels, gender roles play an essential part in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Notions of masculinity and femininity are crucial determiners in the characters' actions as Hurston positions characters about their acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles. Manliness can be seen as representing strength, bravery, courage, and leadership; the parts of father, husband and leader are the sources of power. Femininity is defined less on its terms than about the men itself a revealing fact and women are often seen as subservient or merely relying upon the actions and strengths of men.

Manhood or manliness serves as an essential characteristic in the novel, especially in Hurston's portrayal of Moses himself. Opposition to the pharaoh characterises Moses. Who, while strong practices the illegitimate form of the authority of dictators. The pharaoh possesses social, political and economic control over the Egyptians and the Hebrews. The idea of Hebrew manhood threatens him as a direct challenge to his authority, so he decrees that all newborn males will be killed female children, on the other hand, are not perceived as being a threat to his power.

Have mercy! Lord, have mercy on my poor soul! Women gave birth and whispered cries like this in caves and out-of-the-way places that humans didn't usually use for birthplaces. Moses hadn't come yet, and these were the years when Israel first made tears. (1)

Moses represents the greatest individual challenge to the pharaoh, and while he is portrayed as a strong, brave man, that is not the only way in which he challenges the pharaoh's authority; it is also his spiritual powers his relation to God that ultimately triumph over the pharaoh. While the Pharaoh exerts power in economic, social and political ways, he cannot compare with Moses's connection to higher religious power. This is ultimately what distinguishes the two men; Moses leads using strength and compassion, while Pharaoh leads with an error. Moses assumes his manliness through his military knowledge and skill. He illustrates this by winning a trophy at an army contest and proving to be more adept than Ta-Phar.

As a tribute to his skill, Moses later becomes head of the military; then, he would practice a subtler but more powerful leadership role as liberator of the Hebrews. Hurston also presents Moses as a wise man in his roles as judge and as lawgiver. Hurston depicts Moses' journeys after leaving Egypt initially as a quest toward manhood and identity formation and when he sees the young women in trouble. Moses comes to the rescue and ultimately ends up marrying one of them. Zipporah, her father, Jethro is also a potent symbol of masculine power and patriarchy; in Jethro's household, the women serve food to the men. Clearly, it is showing that gender roles are upheld in the family. Jethro even regrets that he does not have other male offspring, which may explain his very close relationship with Moses. He is a mentor to Moses and Moses, his student. More significantly, he becomes a father to Moses and teaches him everything he knows, just as the old stable man Mentu had done during Moses's youth.

SOCIAL CLASS

Moses, Man of the Mountain, also serves as a commentary on social class distinctions and how they affect or relate to individuals' actions. In the novel, Hurston comments on the question of upward mobility through Moses. He has achieved his status in the royal family by accident; if he had remained a slave, he would not have had the same opportunities. Despite being raised in Pharaoh's home, Moses aligns himself with the lower classes in choosing to defend the Hebrews. Moses' relationship with his mentor Mentu, a lower class man, reveals his empathy for the lower classes. Mentu helps him and earns great respect from Moses. Mentu understands his low status, indicating that he should not have viewed Moses in the military contest, but he wanted to see Moses in action. When Mentu dies, Moses ensures that he receives a proper funeral. Before he leads them, he believes Hebrews should have equal rights as Egyptians, such as enlisting in the military and becoming citizens. His killing of an Egyptian who was taunting a Hebrew is such an example. The irony is that Moses himself came from a lowly slave family; unbeknownst to him, he remains close to his roots. He "repudiates his position of power in Pharaoh's court and choose to side with his people, the oppressed Hebrews, because he feels compassion for their plight" (Stanford 114-115). Later, as leader of the Hebrews, he resists the opportunity to capitalise on status accorded him by his people fully and when the people desire him to have a crown. He refuses.

Hurston reveals the reliance of the upper class on the lower levels. Hurston depicts Ta-Phar's resistance to freeing the Hebrews as mostly economic. What he cares about most is having the Hebrews there to do work for him. His status, as a rule, rests entirely on his power over a subjugated people, as he is shown to be politically and militarily weak in the face of his enemies. In Midian, the social structure is far different, as there is no slave class. Leaders and ordinary people are part of the same society, even if there are still class distinctions as evidenced by the fact that Jethro possesses servants. Zipporah often talks about class, wealth and image. For example, Zipporah instructs Moses to don beautiful clothes to impress others; Jethro says she does this because she wants other women to envy her. Her desire to travel to Egypt is rooted in the same obsession with status, as she wants to experience his high background there. Otherwise, Zipporah's interactions with Miriam are fraught with class and status tensions. Miriam, insecure about her position, dislikes Zipporah and remarks upon the differences in class between the two of them. Since she is so obsessed with status, Moses teaches her a lesson by temporarily transforming her into a leper and banishing her from the camp.

NATURE

Hurston presents the connection between the natural world and the spiritual world as an integral part of this retelling of the Moses story from the Bible. In this novel, nature- in the form of animals, insects, water and mountains plays an important role. It serves as a source of spirituality, life and death; it is where humans and god connect. The novel's title, Moses, Man of the Mountain indicates that the mountain is a critical aspect of this story.

"...that brought his thoughts around to the hundreds of questions he wanted to ask of Nature. It gave him a freshening hope, as he fled for his life from Rameses. The man who interprets Nature is always held in great honour. I am going to live and talk with Nature and know her secrets."(75)

The mountain functions as a symbol of God and God's power over humanity; the mountain is where Moses goes to communicate with God and also for solitude and reflection. Some of the most important scenes of the book occur on the hill, such as when Moses gets the rod, when he writes down the commandments from God and when he reflects upon his life at the end of the story. Moses, through his engagement with nature, proves to be an essential bridge between the natural world and the spiritual world, ultimately making use of the natural world to lead his people in spiritual development. Moses also

possesses the ability to manipulate, control or transform the natural world using what amounts to conjuring.

Hurston presents Moses as being connected with nature early on when he is placed in the basket to drift in the Nile River. The suggestion is that Moses's fate is being left to nature to decide. The Nile River thus becomes a source of life for young Moses, for it is here that he is rescued. Growing up in the pharaoh's household, he seeks to learn more about the natural world through his mentor Mentu. Mentu teaches Moses about lizards, for example, and also about horses, which gives Moses an edge in his later military activities. It is also Mentu who reveals the secret about the book buried in the river, which becomes a central quest of Moses' life. In his travels to Koptos, he finds the box in the river and battles a snake, further suggesting his power over nature.

Hurston illustrates Moses' special relationship with nature throughout the novel, but he begins to commune with nature once he leaves Egypt. Jethro believes that Moses is "the son of the mountain," and he will introduce Moses to the Mountain, but only when he is ready. With Jethro, Moses also studies to be a priest and develops mastery over nature: he can cause animals and insects to appear, and he can produce changes in weather conditions. Once he does travel up the mountain, he witnesses the burning bush and hears a voice from the heavens. The sound, which represents God, tells him to free the Hebrews and informs him that it will join him during his journey. He also obtains his wooden rod which can turn into a snake and which he uses to wield God's power. Moses uses his special powers to control or produce natural events in his dealings with Ta-Phar. First, he turns water to blood and makes his rod set into a snake. And each time Ta-Phar refuses to free the Hebrews. Moses produces a plague, including frogs, lice, flies, hail and darkness. These natural events affect the land and people, and Pharaoh says they can leave. During the journey, they see a fire which Moses says represents God. Most significantly, Moses divides the Red Sea so they can walk across it. Here again, water is a force for life, but it also brings death.

Moses believes that Mount Sinai demonstrates the power of God and that the mountain will inspire people to have faith in God. Hurston writes that the mountain is 'the altar of the world.' God communicates with Moses from the mountaintop, giving him orders and the commandments themselves are inscribed on stone tablets, themselves evoking the nature theme, as the word of God is written on the natural material. In the episode with the calf worship, the calf is not a real calf, but an artificial calf; this is crucial because the people are thus not worshipping a product of God, but a product of man. The Hebrews must also interact with nature when Moses casts them into the wilderness after realising they are not ready for life in Canaan or the Promised Land. Hurston presents Moses's final engagement with nature when he heads up Mount Nebo with his rod. He contemplates his life as he looks over the landscape and he communicates with a lizard. He raises his rod, causing the mountain to tremble and thunder to burst out and while on the hill, however, he constructs his tomb, where he will return on the earth: while he has a special connection to God and nature, in the end, he is a man, not a god, and thus is mortal like all other men.

RACE

The theme of competition plays a most prominent role in this novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Through the theme of race, Hurston applied the myth of racial purity in this novel. The race was not considered to be a biological concept but a cultural concept. At the initial part of the novel, it described the mighty king of Egyptian Pharaoh. He too has Hebrew blood in his body. Hebrew believes Pharaoh's racial origins because his grandmother was a Hebrew. "There is plenty of Hebrew blood in that family already...He scared somebody will come along and tell who his real folks are" (101) Thus, it seems that Pharaoh is a half-blood Hebrew who merely passes off as an Egyptian. Hurston explores that Moses was probably Egyptian.

CONCLUSION

This paper is attempting to feature part of leadership, mediator, slavery, race, religion, freedom, class, gender and nature from the novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. The protagonist (Moses) of this book had undergone various sufferings from the Hebrew King Pharaoh. This paper wind up the novel of Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* explains the enslavement of Israelites from Hebrews. There is a rise of elite black male leadership. In this novel, a high class and educational divide separates the Egyptian prince Moses from a mostly illiterate, often obstreperous body of Hebrews, and much of the narration recounts his checked continuously efforts to impose both personal authority, and an impersonal notion of social and spiritual progress, on people who neither respect him nor particularly want to change. At the point when the novel finishes up, Moses devoted himself, and his leadership dedication leads him to success. The enslavement of Israelites got freedom from Pharaoh towards the development of people's

freedom because of his fruitful leadership quality. Initially, Moses was treated like a useless, he obeyed god's words in the mountain called Sinai and started his journey with self-confident. The protagonist of this book made due because of the instruction capability. Through training, he discovered their particular personality, opportunity and liberation.

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