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Fiction as Autobiography, Autobiography as Fiction: Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God" and "Dust Tracks on a Road."

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Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston, female Afro-American novelist and folklorist, wrote during the nineteen-thirties and early forties in her attempt to achieve recognition. Her first novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), eased the attempts to publish Mules and Men (1935), Hurston's collection of folklore and tales. After the publication of Mules and Men, Hurston completed three novels before attempting Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), her autobiography: Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Tell My Horse (1938), and Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939).

Unlike Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, Hurston was not primarily concerned with the racial tensions during this time period. Rather than writing about the point others were belaboring, Hurston was interested in "what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color" (Dust Tracks 206). Her career, according to Robert Hemenway in Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, was spent "trying to preserve and celebrate black cultural practices" (7). Although Hurston was highly successful in accurately illustrating the folklore she collected in her extensive travels to Florida and the West Indies, she was not as committed to the truth in her autobiography. Actually her second novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God, serves as a guide to pieces of her life curiously omitted from the autobiography.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is the story of Janie Mae Crawford and her

quest for love. After returning to Eatonville, Florida, Janie narrates the story of her life to her best friend, Pheoby Watson. During the course of the narrative, the reader learns that Janie has been married three times and that she was never really happy until she met and married Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods.

The novel is an effective portrayal of the growth of a woman's identity; however, when Their Eyes Were Watching God is read in connection with Hurston's autobiography, the story takes on deeper meanings. It is not only the story of Janie Crawford; it is also the story of Zora Neale Hurston herself, partly of the way her life was, and partly of the way she wanted her life to be.

At the age of fifty-one, Hurston published her autobiography and presented what Robert Hemenway asserts in his introduction to Dust Tracks on a Road to be an "image of its author that fails to conform with either her public career or her private experience" (ix). Zora Neale Hurston could not write about her life as it really was; instead, she insisted upon recreating her own life. Thus in this autobiographical volume Hurston uses the literary technique of fiction, first to affirm certain events in her life well known to be true, and second to obscure truths that are to some extent now known from other sources.

The significance of the relation of these works to each other is undeniable. Certain events and places appear almost identically in Dust Tracks on a Road as they were first presented in Their Eyes Were Watching God. The setting of Eatonville, Florida, emerges almost exactly in the novel as it does in the autobiography. The town is complete with Joe Clarke's store and all it signifies:

folk tales passed down by word of mouth, local gossip, and the cornerstone for all of Eatonville society. Janie's second husband in the novel, Joe Starks, possesses certain characteristics of Joe Clarke, Eatonville's first mayor, and of Hurston's father. Concrete examples such as these inspire the contention that in the character of Janie Mae Crawford, Zora Neale Hurston has virtually recreated herself to portray the life she wanted. Since the publication of Dust Tracks on a Road, biographers and researchers such as Robert Hemenway, Lillie Howard, Alice Walker, and Mary Helen Washington have discovered relevant facts about Hurston that she deliberately distorted. Once the reader becomes aware of the truths surrounding Hurston's life and compares them to "truths" in Their Eyes Were Watching God, further parallels emerge.

It is important to look at Their Eyes Were Watching God in conjunction with Dust Tracks on a Road not only to see the extraordinary parallels between the protagonist, Janie Crawford, and Zora Neale Hurston, but to discover the "characters" presented in each work. Of course, Janie exists as a fictional character, but in her autobiography Zora Neale Hurston essentially creates another character rather than portraying herself straightforwardly. Both the novel and the autobiography contain such similar characters, images and symbols, and theme that it is easy to conclude that by reading both, one gains greater insight into the character of the author, their creator. A brief look at Hurston's life after the publication of the autobiography provides an interesting perspective for reading the conclusions of the novel and the autobiography.

Chapter 1

The initial basis for concluding that Janie Crawford is a slightly fictionalized version of Zora Neale Hurston rests in the comparison of the two women's appearance and early life events. In both Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road, the women look alike, depend upon the benevolence of white benefactors, and form attitudes based upon the ideals of strong mother figures. In addition, it is a single event that changes the lives of Janie Mae Crawford and Zora Neale Hurston. The physical descriptions and early childhood traumas of Janie Mae Crawford lend clues to what Zora Neale Hurston omits in her autobiography. In the end, Janie emerges as the picture of what Hurston wanted from her life. Both women are strong, independent characters who desire nothing more than finding fulfillment through true love. The course of both the novel and the autobiography becomes an attempt for them to seek the happiness and completeness they have been denied.

The physical descriptions in Their Eyes Were Watching God are meticulous, especially those that concern the appearance of Janie upon her return from burying Tea Cake. Janie is first portrayed as a woman with a round figure, luxurious hair, and ragged clothes:

> The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and

> unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. . . . The women took the faded shirt and muddy overalls and laid them away for remembrance. (Their Eyes 2)

Even though Janie is just over forty, she arouses the lust of the men who watch. The early detail gives the reader an indication of Janie's appearance and an idea of how it reflects her personality. The fact that she is wearing overalls suggests that she does not care what others in the community think of her. She wears what she wants in spite of what she knows the others will think of her, particularly the women. Her faded shirt and dirty overalls suggest that she has worked for her living. This woman has not led an easy life.

Another part of Janie's attractiveness stems from her complexion. Much later in the novel, as Janie's story unfolds, the reader learns that Mrs. Turner, a mulatto woman, seeks Janie's friendship because of her almost white complexion:

> To her [Mrs. Turner's] way of thinking all these things set her aside from Negroes. That was why she sought out Janie to friend with. Janie's coffee-and-cream complexion and her luxurious hair made Mrs. Turner forgive her for wearing overalls like the other women who worked in the fields. (Their Eyes 134)

Mrs. Turner further describes Janie's white characteristics in defense of her relationship with Janie: "She felt honored by Janie's acquaintance and she quickly forgave and forgot snubs in order to keep it. Anyone who looked more white

folkish than herself was better than she was" (Their Eyes 138). Mrs. Turner's disapproval of Janie's marriage to Tea Cake is based entirely on her own prejudices. According to Clenora Hudson-Weems in "The Tripartite Plight of African-American Women," "Mrs. Turner attacks not only Tea Cake's color but dark-skinned Blacks in general. She erroneously believes that the dark-skinned Blacks are the source of the race problem in America and that were it not for them, there would be no racism" (198). The idea of Mrs. Turner's devotion to Janie as a result of her complexion suggests the degree of Caucasian characteristics inherent in Janie. According to Mrs. Turner, Janie is unlike the others. Because of her white blood, she views Janie as better than those around her and attempts to separate her from the rest of society.

The questions raised in relation to Janie's light skin are easily resolved. Nanny, Janie's maternal grandmother, was once a slave; unfortunately, she was also the object of her white master's desire on more than one occasion. Nanny describes an incident with her master when Leafy, Janie's mother, was one week old: "'But pretty soon he let on he forgot somethin' and run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for de last time. He sorta wropped his hand in it, pulled mah big toe, lak he always done, and was gone after the rest lak lightning'" (Their Eyes 16). The reader learns of the baby Leafy's light skin when the mistress checks on Nanny's baby and continually questions her about the white appearance of the baby. Nanny's answer, "'Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave'" (Their Eyes 17),

infuriates the mistress further. Her reaction to the baby's appearance proves to the reader that Janie's grandfather was white. The laws of heredity explain Janie's fair skin; she is a quadroon.

Even though the exact skin color of Janie's father is never revealed, the reader can assume that his complexion was at least fair. Since Janie's father was a schoolteacher in a black community in the late nineteenth century, he was no doubt a member of the elite group of light-skinned blacks. In any case, it is assured that Janie possesses enough white blood to set her apart from the rest of the "all Negro" population.

Another aspect that sets Janie apart from her peers is what Mrs. Turner called "her luxurious hair" (Their Eyes 134). Shortly after Joe Starks' death, Janie removes the head rag Joe made her wear out of jealousy and admires herself as she had not since she was a little girl:

> She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again. (Their Eyes 83)

This example serves as one of the very few times Janie admires her appearance. She relishes the weight and luxury of her most striking feature--her straight, black, heavy hair. This action not only reinforces the picture of Janie as a beautiful

woman, and a woman with white blood, but also a woman who is fully aware of the beauty of her strongest asset.

The descriptions of Janie Crawford when she first returns to Eatonville, Mrs. Turner's dedication to Janie's "Caucasian characteristics," and the overwhelming beauty of Janie's hair give the reader an image of an attractive mulatto woman who does not care what others think of her; she will always live her own life. Janie's physical appearance and dress reflect her personality and separate her from the community.

A comparable picture of Zora Neale Hurston can be drawn, but not from her autobiography. Hurston uses wonderful detail, but when it comes to reporting details of her own life she is less than truthful. She does, however, offer a physical description of herself through the eyes of her grandmother. According to Hurston's grandmother, "All I [Hurston] was good for was to lay up and wet the bed half of the time and tell lies, besides being the spitting image of dat good-for-nothing yaller bastard" (Dust Tracks 72). Apparently Hurston favored her light-skinned father, who was in the grandmother's eyes a "bastard" because of his background. John Hurston, a "tall, heavy-muscled mulatto" (Dust Tracks 12), was born in Notasulga, Alabama, "in an outlying district of landless Negroes, and whites not much better off. It was 'over the creek,' which was just like saying on the wrong side of the railroad tracks" (Dust Tracks 12). John Hurston started attending Macedonia Baptist Church where he "met up with dark-brown Lucy Ann Potts, of the land-owning Richard Potts" (Dust Tracks 12). Lucy Potts found

herself attracted to John Hurston's "gray-green eyes and light skin" (Dust Tracks 14). The idea of John Hurston's questionable heredity is abhorrent to the wealthy Potts family; the mother especially cannot accept her daughter's decision to marry:

> She [Lucy Potts] who was considered the prettiest and the smartest black girl was throwing herself away and disgracing the Pottses by marrying an over-the-creek nigger, and a bastard at that. Folks said he was a certain white man's son. (Dust Tracks 14)

Lucy's family immediately viewed the marriage as a disaster. Lucy Potts was too good for the likes of John Hurston. Since the grandmother persisted in viewing John Hurston as a "yaller bastard," and Zora Neale "looked more like him than any child in the house" (Dust Tracks 28), it seems logical that the grandmother would dislike the female version.

In the physical descriptions of Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God and of Hurston in Dust Tracks on a Road, the proof that both possess a degree of white blood is indisputable. Both have fair complexions as a result of white ancestry--Janie's grandfather and quite possibly Hurston's grandfather. If what Hurston writes in her autobiography about her father is true, the contention that Janie Mae Crawford is a fictional representation of Hurston is strengthened since both women are quadroons.

However, if it is difficult to take Hurston at face value because of the scarcity of descriptions of herself, it is equally as difficult to trust the observations of those who knew her in defining Zora Neale Hurston's physical appearance.

Mary Helen Washington states in her essay "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow" that "whether Zora Neale Hurston was black as coal, light yellow, or light brown seems to have depended a great deal on the imagination and mind set of the observer" (7). Washington goes on to state that "in all of the various personality sketches, full-length literary studies, forewords, and afterwords inspired by Hurston, there is a broad range of contradictory reactions" ("Zora" 7). Washington states Hurston's case accurately in recognizing the contradictions and discrepancies surrounding Hurston, a fact that makes her that much more interesting. Perhaps the most credible physical description of Hurston is that by Fannie Hurst, Hurston's employer and close friend, in The Yale University Library Gazette in July of 1960: "She walked into my study one day by telephone appointment, carelessly, a big-boned, good-boned young woman, handsome and light yellow" (21). The closest one can come to defining Hurston's appearance in connection with that of Janie Crawford is the realization that both are light-skinned mulattos and possess round, full figures.

Not only are Janie Crawford and Zora Neale Hurston similar in the physical sense, but their early experiences are parallel. The early years of Janie's and Hurston's life are strongly compatible in at least one respect; both depend on the beneficence of whites. Janie, as well as her Nanny, depends on the hospitality of the Washburns, a white family who allow the women to live in their backyard. As Janie tells her friend Pheoby,

> "Mah grandma raised me. Mah grandma and de white folks she

> worked wid. She had a house out in de back-yard and dat's where Ah wuz born. They was quality white folks up dere in West Florida. Named Washburn. She had four gran'chillun on de place and all of us played together and dat's how come Ah never called mah Grandma nothin' but Nanny, 'cause dat's what everybody on de place called her." (Their Eyes 8)

Other than this reference to living in the Washburns' backyard, Janie makes no mention of other white benefactors. Yet the case is clear that were it not for the kindness of this family, Janie's and her grandmother's fate would be much different.

Zora Neale Hurston, however, admits depending upon the patronage of whites from the time she was born. Hurston's mother was alone when her labor with Zora Neale started. She was incapable of doing anything for herself or her newborn: "She was so weak, she couldn't even reach down to where I was" (Dust Tracks 29). The lives of the mother and newborn were saved when a middle-aged white man decided to help the family. Hurston goes on to write:

> A white man of many acres and things, who knew the family well, had butchered the day before. Knowing that Papa was not at home, and that consequently there would be no fresh meat in our house, he decided to drive the five miles and bring a half of a shoat, sweet potatoes, and other garden stuff along. He was there a few minutes after I was born. . . . He followed the noise and then he saw how

> things were, and, being the kind of a man he was, he took out his Barlow Knife and cut the navel cord, then he did the best he could about other things. (Dust Tracks 29)

Since the mid-wife was unavailable for several hours, the man used his common sense to rescue others in distress. If he had waited for the mid-wife, the fate of little Zora Neale might have been changed drastically. The unnamed benefactor continued to ask about the little girl until she could walk and talk. This man is in part responsible for the development of Hurston's character.

Once when Hurston had been in a fight with several other children, the white man cautioned her:

> "Now, Snidlits, this calls for talking. Don't you try to fight three kids at one time unlessen you just can't get around it. Do the best you can, if you have to. But learn right now, not to let your head start more than your behind can stand." (Dust Tracks 41)

The man dispensed advice based on common sense: do not fight unless you cannot get out of it; "'Don't you never threaten nobody you don't aim to fight. . . some folks puts dependence in bluffing, but I ain't never seen one that didn't get his bluff called sooner or later'" (Dust Tracks 42); "'Don't change too many words it you aim to fight. Lam hell out of 'em with the first lick and keep on lamming'" (Dust Tracks 43). The words of advice meant a great deal to Hurston. When she thought she was alone in the world, "she had one person who pleased me always. That was the robust, gray-haired white man who had helped me get into the world"

(Dust Tracks 40).

The time and devotion this man dedicated to Hurston's growth as a person become evident in her personality. Very rarely did she allow herself to become a victim. In one case, she very clearly followed the advice of the man. She refused to be dominated by her stepmother:

> I grabbed my stepmother by the collar and dragged her to a hatchet against the wall and managed to get hold of it. . . . I was so mad when I saw my adversary sagging to the floor I didn't know what to do. I began to scream with rage. I had not beaten more than two years out of her yet. I made up my mind to stomp her, but at last Papa came to, and pulled me away. (Dust Tracks 103)

It is obvious from this example that Hurston refused to let others dominate her, a direct reflection of the degree to which she was influenced by her white male benefactor and educator. The concept of the reliance on whites at early ages suggests another link between Janie and Hurston. Mrs. Washburn plays the role of surrogate grandmother to Janie while the unnamed white man in Hurston's life serves as a grandfather. The idea of whites providing strong physical and emotional support for the young Janie and little Hurston is an important parallel in the novel and the autobiography.

Although Mrs. Washburn and the white man influence the behavior of the young girls, the primary control of Janie's and Hurston's lives lies in the mother figures. Nanny and Lucy Potts Hurston make decisions concerning the rearing of

the children that do not always conform to the views of others. Janie's family is virtually nonexistent; it consists of herself and Nanny, her grandmother. Leafy abandons Janie to the care of her mother. Not until Janie is sixteen does Nanny reveal her story. Nanny, a victim of slavery, is forced to serve as an object of her master's sexual desires, and as a result becomes pregnant with Leafy. To avoid "one hundred lashes wid a raw-hide" (Their Eyes 17), Nanny runs away to freedom, thus escaping the wrath of the mistress. She raises and cares for Leafy, at least until Leafy is raped by the schoolteacher: "'De next mornin' she come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day'" (Their Eyes 18).

Janie is born as a result of the rape, and when Leafy abandons her baby, Nanny takes her to raise. Shortly after Nanny tells Janie that she must marry Logan Killicks, she also tells her:

> "Don't think Ah don't feel wid you, Janie, 'cause Ah do. Ah couldn't love yuh no more if Ah had uh felt yo' birth pains mahself. Fact uh de matter, Ah loves yuh a whole heap more'n Ah do yo' mama, de one Ah did birth. . . . You ain't got nobody but me. And mah head is ole and tilted towards de grave. Neither can you stand alone by yo'self. De thought uh you bein' kicked around from pillar tuh post is uh hurtin' thing. Every tear you drop squeezes a cup uh blood outa mah heart. Ah got tuh try and do for you befo' mah head is

cold." (Their Eyes 15)

The feelings Nanny has for Janie are natural. They are also emotional, possessive, and excessively protective. Behind the judgment that Janie must marry Killicks, for Nanny gives Janie no choice, is Nanny's belief that she is protecting Janie from others who would abuse her or take her for granted. Nanny tells Janie that no matter what, she always tried to do her best for her:

> "Ah raked and scraped and bought dis lil piece uh land so you wouldn't have to stay in de white folks' yard and tuck yo' head befo' other chillun at school. Dat was all right when you was little. But when you got big enough to understand things, Ah wanted you to look upon yo'self. Ah don't want yo' feathers always crumpled by folks throwin' up things in yo' face. And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you." (Their Eyes 19)

Because of Nanny's concern for Janie, she protects her in an attempt to help her make her life better than either hers or Leafy's. Nanny feels that all of the decisions are for Janie's benefit. The environment Nanny creates shelters Janie from the real world; it protects her, and it preserves her innocence.

Just as Nanny provides a loving environment for Janie, Lucy Potts Hurston shares the credit with the white man for encouraging Zora Neale to become her own person. As far as one can tell from the selective critical biographies and personal essays available, the first nine years of Zora Neale Hurston's life are

more or less accurately recounted in her autobiography. Lucy Potts Hurston's views on Zora's rearing often conflicted with John Hurston's thoughts on what should be done with her:

> Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to "jump at de sun." We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground. Papa did not feel so hopeful. Let well enough alone. It did not do for Negroes to have too much spirit. He was always threatening to break mine or kill me in the attempt. My mother was always standing between us. She conceded that I was impudent and given to talking back, but she didn't want to "squinch my spirit" too much for fear that I would turn out to be a mealy-mouthed rag doll by the time I got grown. Papa always flew hot when Mama said that. (Dust Tracks 21)

Lucy Potts Hurston's comments almost duplicate Nanny's comments to Janie. Both women try to shape their girls and raise a child who is not afraid to speak her mind or take charge in threatening situations. The women devote their lives to the young girls in an attempt to make them capable of coping with society. Still, both Janie and Hurston lead relatively sheltered lives because of the influences of the women responsible for their growth. Clearly Hurston uses the disciplinary reasoning of the woman charged with her emotional growth to shape the attitudes and behavior she gives to the character of Janie.

The events in Janie's life, although different from Hurston's for purposes of

fiction, are identical in one respect. Both women base later events on one single moment. In other words, the women are content in their lives until one extremely strong episode awakens the women to what they really desire. In her story to Pheoby, Janie decides "that her conscious life had commenced at Nanny's gate. On a late afternoon Nanny had called her to come inside the house because she had spied Janie letting Johnny Taylor kiss her over the gatepost" (Their Eyes 13). Janie marries Killicks against her will under the assumption that two people being married means they love each other: "Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant" (Their Eyes 20).

Janie's innocence concerning areas of love and sex is a direct result of her sheltered life. She naively trusts people to look after her and provide for her. When Janie confronts Nanny about her failure to love Killicks the way she thinks she should, Nanny fusses because she comes "heah wid [her] mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day" (Their Eyes 22). Nanny's hasty comment forces Janie to the realization that changes her entire life: "The familiar people and things had failed her so she hung over the gate and looked up the road towards way off. She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (Their Eyes 24). The kiss at the gate serves as a catalyst for the marked changes in Janie's behavior. She is no longer an idealistic dreamer; she joins the world of reality.

Casting off her idealism releases a side of Janie that Killicks had never experienced. The change first becomes evident in Janie's behavior when Killicks begins to change in his treatment of her. She stands up to Killicks when he refuses to chop wood for her: "'Ah'm just as stiff as you is stout. If you can stand not to chop and tote wood Ah reckon you can stand not to git no dinner. . . . Ah don't mean to chop de first chip'" (Their Eyes 25). Janie's kiss with Johnny Taylor and Nanny's reaction evoke a strong reaction and precipitate a change in Janie's previously passive character. Janie's transition from childhood to womanhood begins; then it progresses as her relationship with Killicks changes.

Zora Neale Hurston in her autobiography also places great emphasis on the twelve different scenes she visualizes as transitions. Hurston felt that the dreams were all true, "a preview of things to come, and my soul writhed in agony and shrunk away" (Dust Tracks 57). Just as Janie sees the kiss at the gatepost as the beginning of her life, Hurston views her childhood as ending "with the coming of the pronouncements" (Dust Tracks 60). In one scene in the autobiography, Hurston remembers the exact time and place when the visions began:

> I saw a big raisin lying on the porch and stopped to eat it. There was some cool shade on the porch, so I sat down, and soon I was asleep in a strange way. Like clearcut stereopticon slides, I saw twelve scenes flash before me, each one held until I had seen it well in every detail, and then be replaced by another. (Dust Tracks 57)

The minute Hurston leaves the porch she knows her fate: "I knew that I would be

an orphan and homeless. I knew that while I was still helpless, that the comforting circle of my family would be broken, and that I would have to wander cold and friendless until I had served my time" (Dust Tracks 57). The fact that Hurston recognizes the visions as the start of her abandoning childhood is reflected in Janie's awareness that her life changes with a kiss and her grandmother's reaction to it.

The actualization of the first vision, her mother's death, is truly Hurston's catalyst. The trauma surrounding this event is two-fold. First, Hurston loses the one parent who truly believed in her and allowed her to be herself. With the death of her mother, Hurston has no one to stand up for her; others will try to "squinch" her spirit, make her conform to society's demands. The second part of the trauma concerns her mother's last requests. Hurston tries her best to perform her mother's dying wishes, but social mores prevail:

> That day, September 18th, she had called me and given me certain instructions. I was not to let them take the pillow from under her head until she was dead. The clock was not to be covered, nor the looking-glass. She trusted me to see to it that these things were not done. I promised her as solemnly as nine years could do, that I would see to it. (Dust Tracks 86)

Hurston's father and social custom prevented the young girl from "outraging the ceremonies established for the dying. If there is any consciousness after death, I hope that Mama knows that I did my best. She must know how I have suffered

for my failure" (Dust Tracks 89). The agony Hurston feels is a direct result of being physically unable to perform her duties toward her mother. This denial serves as Hurston's initiation: "That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as in spirit" (Dust Tracks 89). Hurston mourns the loss of her mother as well as the loss of her comfort and security. She can no longer count on those close to her, just as Janie abandons reliance on her grandmother and begins her own wanderings.

The foundation of the comparison between the fictional representation of Janie Mae Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God and Zora Neale Hurston in Dust Tracks on a Road lies with the physical similarities of Janie and Zora Neale Hurston. Even though Janie is a fictional character, her appearance is comparable to that of Hurston as she describes herself. The influence of the Washburns on Janie and the unnamed white man on Hurston complement the primary influence of Nanny and Lucy Potts Hurston. The parallel effect of the attitudes upon these young girls is unmistakable. These observations lead to the emergence of the catalyst as the means for thrusting the women out of their comfortable, respective societies. In each case it is the catalytic event that prompts the two women, one fictional, the other as seen by herself in her autobiography, on the road to their horizons.

Chapter 2

The personalities of the fictional character of Janie Mae Crawford and her creator, Zora Neale Hurston, are inseparable. The two women look alike, share similar early experiences regarding white benefactors, thrive under the watchful guardianship of mother figures, and arrive at the crossroads of womanhood as the result of a catalytic event. In her autobiography, Zora Neale Hurston creates another character using her own life and idiosyncrasies as the foundation. In both Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston creates characters who possess a tendency for spiritual and physical wandering. The spiritual wanderlust that overwhelms Janie and Zora Neale is the professed desire to love and be loved. The physical wanderlust is evident in the physical movement from geographical place to place; spiritual meanderings pervade the thoughts of each woman. Hurston endows Janie with her own tendencies toward physical and spiritual wanderlust, but she also incorporates the intriguing, but nevertheless distracting, quality of deception. It is those qualities that lend credibility to Hurston's portrayal of Janie as her fictional self.

Janie's spiritual travels begin with her daydreams under the blossoming pear tree. At the tender age of sixteen, Janie revels in the mysteries of the unknown:

> Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal

> from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. (Their Eyes 10)

The bloom leads Janie to questioning nature and its relationship to herself: "She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers. A personal answer for all other creation except herself" (Their Eyes 11). Janie's spiritual search is her quest for love, for a marriage as sweet and unspoiled as that of the bee and the blossom of the pear tree.

Janie's mental revelations reflect the physical:

> She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. (Their Eyes 11)

Even with her imminent marriage to Killicks, Janie continues to wonder about her future. Janie questions her marriage: "There are years that ask no questions and years that answer. Janie had no chance to know things, so she had to ask. Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?" (Their Eyes 20). Each of these references illustrates the beginning of Janie's spiritual meanderings. Each concerns the question of her happiness in marriage. Will she ever find anyone who can end her "cosmic

loneliness"?

Janie's spiritual wanderings eventually lead to her first physical move. Janie stays with Killicks until Joe Starks enters her life. Janie is impressed by Joe's stylish dress and demeanor:

> It was a cityfied, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going. (Their Eyes 26)

Janie is so impressed with Starks and his invitation for her to run away with him that she taunts Killicks with the idea of her leaving. When Joe asks Janie to run off with him, "'Janie, if you think Ah aims to tole you off and make a dog outa you, youse wrong. Ah wants to make a wife outa you'" (Their Eyes 28), she still hangs back. Joe "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (Their Eyes 28); the far horizon is what finally makes Janie abandon Killicks, her legal husband, for the flash and flair of Joe Starks. When Janie finally does change her mind, it is the change she seeks, not Starks: "What was she losing so much time for? A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good" (Their Eyes 31). Finally deciding to elope with Starks is the first physical example of Janie's submitting to the wanderlust within her soul.

With the move to Eatonville, Janie begins a new chapter in her life. Almost from the instant she steps into the wagon with Starks and rides into Eatonville, Janie has misgivings. The first glimpse brings her the view of a "scant dozen of shame-faced houses scattered in the sand and palmetto roots. . . . Why 'tain't nothing but a raw place in de woods" (Their Eyes 32). In Starks' eyes as well as in Janie's, the town does not live up to its reputation.

Not only does Janie encounter a foreign city with rather meager surroundings, but she is immediately cast in the role of outsider because of her sex. With the opening of Starks' store, Janie finds herself in a new location serving another man's desires while hers smoulder. In his attempt to make a lasting impression on the town, Joe Starks organizes community events, ditch-digging and lamplighting ceremonies. After the lamplighting ceremony, Janie acknowledges the strain of trying to be not only a good wife, but the wife of the mayor. Her unhappiness with her physical location creates doubts in her mind. In her conversation with Joe, Janie admits her disillusionment with her current situation:

> "It jus' looks lak it keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother. You'se always off talkin' and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ah'm jus' markin' time. Hope it soon gits over."
>
> "Over, Janie? I god. Ah ain't even started good. Ah told you in de very first beginnin' dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad, 'cause dat makes uh big woman outa you."

> A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely. (Their Eyes 43-44)

In her quest for physical and spiritual happiness, Janie vaguely recognizes the disappointment with Eatonville and Joe Starks.

The happiness Joe Starks promises at the beginning fades. Seven years into her marriage with Starks, Janie realizes that her marriage is not working: "She wasn't petal-open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew. She found that out one day when he slapped her face in the kitchen" (Their Eyes 67). The total effect of this slap forces Janie to accept that Starks and Eatonville are not her final destination:

> She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. (Their Eyes 68)

Not until she is twenty-four does Janie give voice to her thoughts and admit that she is unhappy; she accepts and realizes that something more is waiting for her. There is a man somewhere waiting for her to provide her with the love she seeks. She endures eleven more years, until the age of thirty-five, with these thoughts, never doing anything about them. Her spiritual wanderlust is renewed: "Now and again she thought of a country road at sun-up and considered flight. To where?

To what? Then too she considered thirty-five is twice seventeen and nothing was the same at all" (Their Eyes 72). Janie suffers approximately five more years of agony with Joe Starks. She cannot move physically because there would be no one to look after her. Not once has Janie ever been on her own.

She continues the spiritual quest until Starks dies. After the funeral, Janie works at the store by day and dreams of a new life at night:

> She asked if she wanted to leave and go back where she had come from and try to find her mother. Maybe tend her grandmother's grave. Sort of look over the old stamping ground generally. Digging around inside of herself like that she found that she had no interest in that seldom-seen mother at all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. (Their Eyes 85)

This passage illustrates the progress Janie makes in both her spiritual wanderings and physical movement. She grows restless in anticipation of what the future will bring to her. Janie rejects everything the past means and all it entails. Her grandmother's treatment of her denies that part of Janie she desperately needed. The mother makes no difference to Janie at all; she merely brought her into the world. Her growth is stunted. Geographically, she has come too far to go back. In Zora Neale Hurston, a critical biography, Lillie P. Howard describes Janie as a

wanderer looking for the answer to her prayers: "Janie Crawford . . . strikes out, like Huck Finn, for the territory in search of her dreams and the possibility of a better life beyond the horizon" (93). Since Janie has no desire to return home, her only alternative is to move forward, go where she has not been before. Once she meets Tea Cake this movement forward becomes possible.

Janie's spiritual wanderings end after she meets Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods. She is finally united with the love of her life: "He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps" (Their Eyes 101). Janie recognizes in Tea Cake the missing piece of puzzle in her life. Although Janie's spiritual quest ends with her marriage to Tea Cake, it is the beginning of new geographical adventures. First, Janie moves to Jacksonville to be with Tea Cake: "The train beat on itself and danced on the shiny steel rails mile after mile. . . . And the train shuffled on to Jacksonville, and to a whole lot of things she wanted to see and to know" (Their Eyes 111). The adventures with Tea Cake in Jacksonville are almost entirely based on Tea Cake's gambling. The final episode in Jacksonville is Tea Cake's description of his "lil cuttin' scrape" as the result of a dice game gone awry:

> "So round four o'clock Ah had done cleaned 'em out complete. . . . Then Ah rose tuh bid 'em good bye agin. None of 'em didn't lak it, but dey all realized it wuz fair. Ah had done give 'em a fair chance. All but Double Ugly. He claimed Ah switched de dice. . . . Ah didn't keer what he said long as he didn't try to do nothin'. Ah got mah hat

> on and one arm in mah coat as Ah got to de door. Right dere he jumped at me as Ah turned to see de doorstep outside and cut me twice in de back." (Their Eyes 121)

Once Tea Cake heals, they take off for the Everglades.

There Janie continues her physical meanderings: "To Janie's strange new eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okeechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything" (Their Eyes 123). Janie and Tea Cake find an end to their wandering in the Everglades. They also find an end to their happiness. In a hurricane that rips through the 'Glades, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog, though he does not know at the time. The rabies eventually consumes Tea Cake, and he attacks Janie in his delirium. She is forced to shoot him to end their suffering. Janie is acquitted of his murder that same day; however, she finds the Everglades too painful to stay: "They had begged Janie to stay on with them and she had stayed a few weeks to keep them from feeling bad. But the muck meant Tea Cake and Tea Cake wasn't there. So it was just a great expanse of black mud" (Their Eyes 182). Once Janie decides to return to Eatonville, her physical moves are over, and her spiritual wanderlust is satisfied:

> So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment. (Their Eyes 1)

Janie has found the horizon. Her quest for love is satisfied with her relationship to Tea Cake, and once he is dead, the physical movement ceases. All Janie sought was a marriage like that of the blossom and the bee; having found that, she is content to exist with her new life in an old location.

The similarities between Janie Mae and Zora Neale are inescapable. Janie's spiritual and physical wanderlust is an echo of Hurston's desires. The main difference between Janie and Hurston, however, is that Hurston's wanderlust is most easily seen in her physical travels. Hurston's drive for new and exciting adventures started relatively early as a result of her experience at the tender age of one with a sow who coveted her cornbread:

> Everything was going along all right, until the sow with her litter of pigs in convoy came abreast of the door. She must have smelled the cornbread I was messing with and scattering crumbs about the floor. So, she came right on in, and began to nuzzle around. (Dust Tracks 31)

Similar to Janie's sudden decision to leave her husband for Joe Starks, Hurston begins walking with no hesitation. Hurston writes: "The strangest thing about it was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go. I would wander off in the woods all alone, following some inside urge to go places" (Dust Tracks 32). From an extremely young age, Hurston remembers the desire to keep moving, the desire to experience new and exciting places, much the same as Janie entering the Everglades.

Like Janie's, Hurston's desire for love and knowledge stimulates her physical movement:

> I kept on probing to know. For instance, I had a stifled longing. I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like. (Dust Tracks 36)

Zora Neale Hurston viewed her life as an attempt to discover the end of the world.

In regard to the physical and mental wanderlust each woman faces in her travels, the trees represent the horizon. For Janie, the pear tree equals love; Hurston's chinaberry tree represents the search for knowledge and love. Darwin T. Turner states in In a Minor Chord that "from 1912 until her death in 1960, Zora Neale Hurston wandered, rarely remaining in one locality for longer than three years and often disappearing from public view" (90). This continuous geographical relocation is proof of Hurston's never ending search for the horizon.

Hurston presents her life in the autobiography as a series of twelve visions that attempt to explain the stages and moves of her life. These visions chronicle the journey Hurston takes in trying to reach the end of the world as she views it:

> I would stand beside a dark pool of water and see a huge fish move

> slowly away at a time when I would be somehow in the depth of despair. I would hurry to catch a train, with doubts and fears driving me and seek solace in a place and fail to find it when I arrived, then cross many tracks to board the train again. I knew that a house, a shotgun-built house that needed a new coat of white paint, held torture for me, but I must go. I saw deep love betrayed, but I must feel and know it. There was no turning back. And last of all, I would come to a big house. Two women waited there for me. I could not see their faces, but I knew one to be young and one to be old. One of them was arranging some queer-shaped flowers such as I had never seen. When I had come to these women, then I would be at the end of my pilgrimage, but not the end of my life. Then I would know peace and love and what goes with these things, and not before. (Dust Tracks 57-58)

Hurston's creativity allows her to structure her life in stages. For her, each stage represents a certain phase of her life. With the completion of each vision, the end of her life as she sees it draws nearer.

The proclamation of being an orphan naturally refers to the death of her mother resulting in a loss of love, and the continuous wandering is a result of her father's remarriage. Since no one in the family likes the stepmother, the family falls apart. The enactment of the second vision ends with Hurston leaving John, her brother, for the theatrical group. Hurston recognizes her failure to follow the

course she wishes shortly before the commencement of the third vision:

> I was doing none of the things I wanted to do. I had to do numerous uninteresting things I did not want to do, and it was tearing me to pieces. I wanted family love and peace and a resting place. I wanted books and school. (Dust Tracks 124)

The third vision, that of the dark fish slowly ebbing away, materializes with the ticket to Sanford where Hurston was to stay with her brother Dick. At this point in her life Hurston is confronted with the failure of her father as a man. Without his first wife to guide him, he cannot continue his rule over the house:

> I found my father a changed person. The bounce was gone from the man. The wreck of his home and the public reaction to it was telling on him. In spite of all, I was sorry for him and that added to my resentment towards his wife. (Dust Tracks 125)

Her father moves slowly away from his family to immerse himself in his own misery. John Hurston's withdrawal from his children leaves Zora Neale in the depths of loneliness once more. She resumes her wandering.

Hurston's fifth and sixth vision, hurrying to catch the train and boarding the train again, carry Hurston through the next two years of her life. Once Hurston's father forsakes his children and Zora is left alone in the world, a helping hand emerges in the form of Bob, her oldest brother. Hurston thinks that living with her brother will allow her to return to school; her brother, however, insists that she is needed to help care for his children. Her education is put on hold for several

months while she shares the chores around Bob's home. The actualization of the fifth vision and the beginning of the sixth are united. In forsaking her obligation to Bob, she resumes her original quest. The end of the sixth vision coincides with her termination as lady's maid to the theatrical troupe after one and a half years: "Working with these people I had been sitting by a warm fire for a year and a half and gotten used to the feel of peace. Now, I was to take up my pilgrim's stick and go outside again" (Dust Tracks 143). The only happiness Hurston can gain at the end of the six visions is that she is halfway to the end of her journey. With that in mind, she resumes the voyage.

In Dust Tracks on a Road, after describing the completion of the sixth vision, Hurston abruptly stops mention of her twelve dreams. Her focus shifts from describing the early events of her life to obscuring later ones. Even though she does not specifically relate the remaining visions to different situations in her life, it is possible to distinguish the correlations that she describes in this volume. After leaving the actors, Hurston finally returns to school to continue her education. She struggles through Morgan Academy, Howard Prep School, and Howard University. Hurston is finally accepted at Barnard College where she eventually meets Dr. Franz Boas, anthropology professor and "the king of kings" (Dust Tracks 170). Two weeks after her graduation from Barnard, Boas presents Hurston with a fellowship for field study to collect Negro folklore. During this field work the seventh vision comes to light. When she reaches Memphis, Hurston reconciles with Bob whom she had not seen since joining the actors. The house that needed

a new coat of paint is symbolic of Hurston's reconciliation with Bob: "It was a most happy interval for me. I drove back to New Orleans to my work in a glowing aura. I felt the warm embrace of kin and kind for the first time since the night after my mother's funeral" (Dust Tracks 173). The bittersweet reunion reflects the torture the house holds. Having restored the paint through ending conflict with her family, and having handled the torture, the realization that she must leave again, Hurston moves on with her life.

Hurston's final vision, two women arranging flowers, signifies the end of Hurston's pilgrimage to find love, friendship, and peace. These women are Fannie Hurst and Ethel Waters. Hurston explains the qualities that make each woman valuable. As secretary to Hurst, Zora Neale Hurston has the opportunity to learn intimate details of her life:

> From day to day she amazed me with her moods. Immediately before and after a very serious moment you could just see her playing with her dolls. You never knew where her impishness would break out again. (Dust Tracks 238)

Hurst's "impishness" is what strikes Hurston as the most fascinating element of her personality, that and her ability to dress well:

> While Fannie Hurst brings a very level head to her dressing, she exults in her new things like any debutante. She knows exactly what goes with her very white skin, black hair, and sloe eyes, and she wears it. I doubt if any woman on earth has gotten better effects

> than she has with black, white and red. Not only that, she knows how to parade it when she gets it on. She will never be jailed for uglying up a town. (Dust Tracks 243)

Hurston is equally charmed by Ethel Waters, the complete opposite of Fannie Hurst. Hurston is struck immediately by Waters' personality:

> The color and shape of her personality is never the same twice. She has extraordinary talents which her lack of formal education prevents her from displaying. . . . She is a Catholic, and deeply religious. . . . Her background is most humble. (Dust Tracks 246)

The most important aspect of these two women is the relationship each shares with Hurston and how much she values their friendship. She cherishes the time spent with each:

> But how does one speak of honest gratitude? Who can know the out ranges of friendship? I am tempted to say that no one can live without it. It seems to me that trying to live without friends is like milking a bear to get cream for your morning coffee. It is a whole lot of trouble, and then not worth much after you get it. (Dust Tracks 248)

The point illustrated with these examples is that Hurston viewed her life as a series of stepping stones to overcome her loneliness, to find peace and love at the end of her world.

Although not all twelve visions are distinctly identified, the reader is left with

the impression that Hurston's life was a lengthy series of moves from place to place. Not only did her loneliness encourage her wandering, but her anthropological bent of character equally influenced her travels as seen in her relationship with Dr. Franz Boas, Hurston's inspiration for anthropological studies and travels.

The inherent tendency toward spiritual and physical meanderings is clearly illustrated in both the character of Janie Mae Crawford and the personality of Zora Neale Hurston as she portrays herself in Dust Tracks on a Road. Although the spiritual tendency in Hurston is not so clearly defined as in Janie's character, the correlation between the moves is fascinating. Neither woman can stop moving until she finally finds the pot of friendship and love at the end of her horizon. Janie Mae Crawford's and Zora Neale Hurston's personalities are intertwined in other ways, particularly in the area of deception. Although neither woman is a malicious person, each deliberately lies about her correct age in an attempt to deceive the community. The deception is a small one and relatively harmless, except to the diligent researcher.

It has already been established that the women of Eatonville are jealous of the attention the men lavish on Janie. This jealousy is fueled by Janie's youthful appearance. As the women sit gossiping on Pheoby's front porch, Janie appears. Her appearance and failure to speak to the women spark a flurry of gossip concerning her manners: "'Ah ain't got her to study 'bout. If she ain't got manners enough to stop and let folks know how she been makin' out, let her g'wan!'" (Their

Eyes 3). Pheoby immediately chastises the women because she knows the real reason behind their gossip:

> "You mean, you mad 'cause she didn't stop and tell us all her business. Anyhow, what you ever know her to do so bad as y'all make out? The worst thing Ah ever knowed her to do was taking a few years offa her age and dat ain't never harmed nobody." (Their Eyes 3)

Lying about her age is not a reason for condemnation. According to Pheoby, it is much smaller than the hypocrisy present on her front porch.

Janie's deception regarding her age is relatively minor; Hurston's, however, is quite extensive. She is vague and confusing, as seen in her autobiographical chapter, "I Get Born": "This is all hear-say. Maybe some of the details of my birth as told me might be a little inaccurate, but it is pretty well established that I really did get born" (Dust Tracks 27). To Hurston, this fact is all that really matters. She constantly elicits the help of family and friends in her struggle to prevent public revelation concerning her age.

It is an undisputed fact that Hurston traveled extensively to gather her research, but little is known of her time spent in jobs as a maid. Hurston offers an appraisal of her general physical appearance when she tries to find employment after leaving school at Jacksonville and continuously fails because of what she describes as her youthful appearance:

> For one thing, I really was young for the try. Then my growth was

> retarded somewhat so that I looked younger than I really was. Housewives would open the door at my ring and look me over. No, they wanted someone old enough to be responsible. No, they wanted someone strong enough to do the work, and so on like that. (Dust Tracks 118)

If Hurston tells the truth and she was nine when her mother died, then sent to the school in Jacksonville where she stayed for six years, she would be fifteen at this point. When the fights with her stepmother become too difficult, and John, one of her brothers, leaves home, Hurston strikes out on her own: "So my second vision picture came to be. I had seen myself homeless and uncared for" (Dust Tracks 115). There are, however, discrepancies in Hurston's story. If Hurston is fifteen when she leaves Jacksonville, her reference to the "five years following my leaving the school at Jacksonville" (Dust Tracks 116) would seem to indicate that she is now at least twenty when she decides to try to make it on her own. During the five years between leaving school and finally working for the theatrical touring company, Hurston describes her treatment as something less than human:

> I was shifted from house to house of relatives and friends and found comfort nowhere. . . . I was miserable, and no doubt made others miserable around me, because they could not see what was the matter with me, and I had no part in what interested them. I was in school off and on, which gave me vagrant peeps into the light, but these intervals lacked peace because I had no guarantee that they

> would last. I was growing and the general thought was that I could bring in something. . . . So I was forever shifting. (Dust Tracks 116-117)

From the time she admits that she is "about fourteen" (Dust Tracks 118), Hurston tries to live on her own. She continuously fails because of her insistence upon playing with children rather than completing her housework.

The five intervening years find Hurston working as a maid for various families, never for an extended period of time. She returns briefly to Sanford, home of her brother Dick and her father, but leaves after one month because of the tension between her and her stepmother: "I could not bear the air for miles around. It was too personal and pressing, and humid with memories of what used to be" (Dust Tracks 126-127). Upon leaving her father for the second time, Hurston works for two months filling in for a young woman in a doctor's office. That was such a success that the doctor offered to "see to it that I was trained for a practical nurse when I was a bit older" (Dust Tracks 128), but she receives a letter from Bob.

Bob's letter renews Hurston's interest in actively pursuing her education. With the promise of a roof over her head, a steady supply of food, and the comfort of family, Hurston feels her life is finally flowing smoothly: "Nothing can describe my joy. I was going to have a home again. I was going to school. I was going to be with my brother! He had remembered me at last. My five haunted years were over!" (Dust Tracks 128). Hurston's reference to the "five haunted years"

would seem to indicate that Hurston is now at least twenty. The dissatisfaction she encounters as a substitute mother for Bob's children forces her to search for new employment. Rather than admit her true age, Hurston feels compelled to lie to the female singer when she applies for the job as the lady's maid:

> "You? Why how old are you?"
>
> "Twenty," I said, and tried to look serious as I had been told. But she laughed so hard at that till I forgot and laughed too.
>
> "Oh, no, you are not twenty." She laughed some more, but it was not scornful laughter. Just bubbling fun.
>
> "Well, eighteen, then," I compromised.
>
> "No, not eighteen, either."
>
> "Well, then, how about sixteen?"
>
> She laughed at that. Instead of frowning in a sedate way as I had been told, here I was laughing like a fool myself.
>
> "I don't believe you are sixteen, but I'll let it go at that," she said.
>
> "Next birthday. Honest." (Dust Tracks 133)

This rather lengthy conversation forces the reader to make a decision concerning Hurston's credibility. She can be believed if the reader thinks Hurston is fifteen as she claims with her last statement. This approach becomes incredible when the five year difference is exposed. In this case, Hurston is actually the twenty years she claims at first. She merely distorts the truth for her own advantage.

Even though Hurston states that she appeared younger than she was, and there are others who support this claim, her credibility is questionable. Because Hurston perpetually lied about her age, the honesty surrounding her youthful appearance is questionable. However, it is possible to draw the conclusion that Hurston viewed herself as a fairly attractive, youthful looking woman.

Not once in her autobiography does Hurston mention her birthday. She mentions ages in connection with major events, her mother's death, school in Jacksonville, and five years after. At this point, however, Zora Neale abandons the mention of ages and proceeds to dates of story publications, play performances, and published novels. Hurston makes a concerted effort to obliterate any hints regarding her true age in the autobiography. Robert Hemenway states in Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, that Hurston was purposely inconsistent with her birth dates:

> Depending on the document, and whether she was trying to impress someone with her youth or her age, she claimed to be born in 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, or 1903. One family member says the year might be 1891. Zora was so deceptive about the real date that she once urged her youngest brother to list a birth date on the public record that would have made him older than her. The original deception may have occurred when she self-consciously entered high school at an advanced age, but the willful subterfuge is characteristic of her entire career--Zora Hurston always kept a portion of her life

secret, and she always thought of herself as a young woman. (13) Hemenway's analysis and assumptions pave the way for possible motives for Hurston's secretive character. Her thirst for knowledge was incredible. Her efforts at trying to find financial support to resume her studies are equally creative, but it was not financially possible for Hurston to return to high school until her mid-twenties. Since it is obvious that age is an important aspect of the character of Janie, the case for linking her and her creator becomes stronger.

Janie Mae Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God deceives people in her community primarily to remain as young as possible, and the deception fulfills a need for Hurston as a fictional ploy and also as an attempt to conceal painful events in her own life. Janie's reasons and methods are not malicious or excessively complicated. Hurston, on the other hand, incorporates her family and creative truth-telling in an attempt to hide her embarrassment at entering high school at the age of twenty-six. Hemenway's introduction to Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography states that Hurston may have been born in 1891; it has since been confirmed by Cheryl Wall, "working from the 1900 census records for Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's hometown . . . that Zora Neale Hurston was born on January 7, 1891, rather than the usually cited January 1, 1901" (x-xi). When the correct birth date is imposed upon certain events in Hurston's life, meaningful facts surface. For example, Hurston was twenty-six rather than sixteen when she entered Morgan Academy; Hurston was thirty-four when she entered Barnard College, but "those who arranged for her admission thought her a young, untried

coed" (Hemenway, Introduction xii). If that view is indeed true, then Hurston's claim to a youthful appearance must be believed. Hurston's reasons for the age deception also provide explanations for a novel that attempts to explain what Hurston felt was too traumatic to include in her autobiography.

Though seemingly insignificant, Hurston's avoidance of any mention of a specific age in her autobiography becomes enormously important in the comparison to Janie Crawford. This piece of information binds the women together, suggesting a marked resemblance between the "real" Zora Neale Hurston and the "fictional" Janie Crawford. The physical and spiritual wanderlust that pervades the characters of Janie and Zora Neale serves as a support for the visions both feel contributed to the paths their lives take. The course the visions outline leads the women, particularly Hurston, to adjust their ages. Though the deception is less significant for Janie than for her creator, it is that age difference that enhances the path for the love relationships of both women. As we will see, the discrepancy concerning Janie's age is a fictional device used to enhance the plot, particularly in her relationship with Tea Cake. However, when viewed as an integral part of Hurston's personality the effect is much stronger, especially concerning Hurston's relationship with Albert W. Price, III.

Chapter 3

Aside from the obvious similarities of physical appearance, early experiences, and catalytic events, the personalities of Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God and the character Zora Neale Hurston creates from her actual experience in Dust Tracks on a Road are strikingly similar. Details of Hurston's relationship with Albert W. Price, III, appear in the guise of Janie's relationship with Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods. It appears that Their Eyes Were Watching God is Zora Neale Hurston's attempt to present not only the character of Janie Mae Crawford, but the positive emotional relationship with Tea Cake that Zora Neale found missing in her early relationship with Albert Price. When the characters of the men, the patterns of the relationships, and Janie's and Hurston's attitudes and outlook toward them are compared, a striking similarity emerges.

Six months after the death of Joe Starks, Janie's second husband, Tea Cake walks into her store. When Janie first relates to Tea Cake on the proprietor/customer level, she is immediately taken with his readiness to laugh and joke. Her pleasure with his company only increases when he invites her to play a game of checkers. When he discovers she does not know how to play, he teaches her. His good looks and intelligence command her attention. A new perspective enters her life:

He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing

> inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, over-padded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice! (Their Eyes 91-92).

Janie receives a thrill just thinking that someone is interested in her and what she can do and learn. Tea Cake excites her as no other man has yet been able to. Janie spends some of the afternoon laughing and joking with Tea Cake until people start coming into the store after the ball game. He stays for a while, then helps Janie close the little store. On her way home that night Janie reflects: "Tea Cake wasn't strange. Seemed as if she had known him all her life. Look how she had been able to talk with him right off!" (Their Eyes 91). The reader learns that Janie is immediately fascinated with the man because of his looks and later the way he makes her feel. She is excited that someone thinks her capable of learning something previously designated as a male-only activity.

When Janie realizes she likes Tea Cake, she wishes she could ask Hezekiah, her clerk, what he thinks. Janie thinks Tea Cake is too young for her, "Must be around twenty-five and here she was around forty" (Their eyes 96), but that age difference does not prevent her from continuing their relationship to the point where she smuggles him out of her backyard after an all-night fishing trip. Hezekiah, concerned about Tea Cake's designs on Janie's virtue, voices his

opinion:

> "And nobody wouldn't marry Tea Cake tuh starve tuh death lessen it's somebody jes lak him--ain't used to nothin'. 'Course he always keep hisself in changin' clothes. Dat long-legged Tea Cake ain't got doodly squat. He ain't got no business makin' hisself familiar wid nobody lak you." (Their Eyes 98)

Hezekiah tells Janie exactly what the townspeople believe Tea Cake to be, a fortune hunter after only her money. However, Janie finds herself drawn to Tea Cake's physical appearance first, then later, after spending time with him, likes him for who he is.

Despite what Janie learns about Tea Cake's wandering personality, she is still attracted to him. She forgets what is right in the eyes of the community, as she did when she left Logan Killicks, and decides to follow her heart:

> All next day in the house and store she thought resisting thoughts about Tea Cake. She even ridiculed him in her mind and was a little ashamed of the association. But every hour or two the battle had to be fought all over again. She couldn't make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring. (Their Eyes 101-102)

Janie, although she does not yet realize it, has found her perfect match in the vagabond Tea Cake. He eases the burden of her loneliness and she fills an

empty space in his heart. Once Janie forgets society's attitude and constraints she allows herself to enjoy Tea Cake's company fully: "They went inside and their laughter ran out first from the kitchen and all over the house" (Their Eyes 102-103). Janie commits herself fully to Tea Cake at that moment. In her heart they are married.

Janie is involved with two men before she marries Tea Cake, Logan Killicks and Joe Starks. Neither relationship is satisfying for Janie because the emotional element necessary is severely lacking. The same may be true of Zora Hurston's first marriage to Herbert Sheen at the age of thirty-eight, when she says Sheen was the first man when she "first got excited, really" (Dust Tracks 250). The feeling does not last, however. In Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston describes her feelings when she marries Sheen, what should have been one of the happiest days of her life:

> But, it was not my happiest day. I was assailed by doubts. For the first time since I met him, I asked myself if I really were in love, or if this had been a habit. I had an uncomfortable feeling of unreality. The day and the occasion did not underscore any features of nature or circumstance, and I wondered why. Who had canceled the well-advertised tour of the moon? Somebody had turned a hose on the sun. What I had taken for eternity turned out to be a moment walking in its sleep. (Dust Tracks 250-251)

The disillusion Hurston voices in regard to her first marriage is an echo of the

emotional loss Janie feels in her two failed relationships. Janie abandons Killicks, Joe Starks dies, and Hurston divorces Herbert Sheen after four years of marriage; none of the "marriages" endures or fulfills the desires of the characters.

Six months after the final divorce decree from Sheen in 1931, Hurston meets Albert W. Price, III, while staging The Great Day, a play written and directed by Hurston. For the parallel in these relationships to be complete, it is equally necessary to describe the similarities between Tea Cake and Albert Price that provide such autobiographical significance. In an analysis of the relationship between Tea Cake and Albert Price, Robert E. Hemenway describes the mold for Tea Cake:

> The prototype for the man, Tea Cake, was not a laborer, but a college student of twenty-three who had been a member of the cast for The Great Day. Handsome, lithe, muscular, he owned a smile that brightened rooms. But he was not a gambler and vagabond like Tea Cake; in fact, he was studying to be a minister, and the two of them held long conversations about religious issues. His quick intelligence and considerable learning no doubt attracted her as much as anything else. (Hurston 231)

Just as Janie is first attracted to Tea Cake's physical charm, Hurston indicates in her autobiography that she first notices Albert Price's muscular frame: "He was tall, dark brown, magnificently built, with a beautifully modeled back head. His profile was strong and good. The nose and lip were especially good front and

side" (Dust Tracks 252). Although Hurston acknowledges noticing Price's looks first, she admits that she was immediately drawn to his intelligence and demeanor. Just like Janie, Hurston is first attracted to Price's physical charms. But also comparable to Janie's is Hurston's need for the man to possess a degree of intelligence. Since Hurston viewed herself as a woman with quick intelligence and wit, she would want no less in her man. Hurston, in a rare moment of illumination, acknowledges the attraction she feels for Price. Not only is it physical, but intellectual as well:

> We fitted each other like a glove. His intellect got me first for I am the kind of a woman that likes to move on mentally from point to point, and I like for my man to be there way ahead of me. Then if he is strong and honest, it goes on from there. Good looks are not essential, just extra added attraction. He had all of those things and more. (Dust Tracks 252)

The foundation for the relationship is established for both women. Although appearance does not hold much weight in the attraction, it is what first draws the women to the men. The appearance opens the door for Tea Cake's and Price's intelligence and charming personalities to carry them into the hearts of Janie and Hurston.

Just as Janie fears becoming involved with someone of Tea Cake's character, Hurston questions the nature of her relationship with Albert Price. Her doubts and conflicts expressed in Dust Tracks on a Road are similar to those she

portrays in the character of Janie:

> I was interested in him nearly two years before he knew it. A great deal had happened between the time we met and the time we had any serious talk. As I said, I loved, but I did not say so, because nobody asked me. I made up my mind to keep my feelings to myself since that they did not seem to matter to anyone else but me. . . . He began to make shy overtures to me. I pretended not to notice for a while so that I could be sure and not be hurt. (Dust Tracks 254)

The main reason for Janie's and Hurston's denial of their early feelings for the men is the overwhelming fear of rejection. But stronger than the fear of rejection is the need for each woman to fill the emptiness in her heart.

The similarities are obvious. Both men are roughly the same age. Their Eyes Were Watching God is a love story of an older woman and a much younger man, not only the story of Janie and Tea Cake, but of Hurston and Price. While Janie openly admits that Tea Cake is significantly younger than she is, and the difference in ages causes problems initially, once Janie becomes secure in the knowledge that Tea Cake loves her, the difference diminishes significantly, except as it relates to Hurston and Price. Zora Neale Hurston acknowledges no ages in her recounting of her relationship with Albert Price. Her only comment on insecurities is her "terrible fear lest women camp on his doorstep in droves and take him away from me" (Dust Tracks 255-256). The fifteen years age difference between Janie and Tea Cake roughly corresponds to the eighteen years difference

between Hurston and Price. These facts help persuade the reader to accept the view that Janie is Zora Neale Hurston's fictional self. The physical resemblance of the men is unmistakable, and both women acknowledge the intellectual superiority of the man, supporting this theory.

With the knowledge that Tea Cake is based on Hurston's real life love, the contention that Janie is a fictional portrait of Hurston becomes stronger. The personalities of the two men are nearly identical, further strengthening the argument. Both Tea Cake and Price are independent, physical men. Neither wants the woman's money, and when threatened, each erupts into violent physical outbursts.

Tea Cake's independence is precious to him. He likes the idea of coming and going as he pleases. But meeting Janie changes all of that for him. When Tea Cake sends for Janie to join him in Jacksonville, she decides to take an extra two hundred dollars with her, just in case. She does not tell Tea Cake about her extra money. When she wakes up one morning and discovers her money missing, she is flooded with doubts. Will Tea Cake come back? Is he gone forever? Tea Cake returns the next day and accurately guesses why she is upset:

> "You doubted me 'bout de money. Thought Ah had done took it and gone. Ah don't blame yuh but it wasn't lak you think. De girl baby ain't born and her mama is dead, dat can git me tuh spend our money on her. Ah told yo' before dat you got de keys tuh de kingdom." (Their Eyes 115-116)

Tea Cake reassures Janie that he will never leave her for another woman. She is his life. He goes on to say later that with the twelve dollars left over he is going to win back the two hundred dollars and more; he does, for a total of three hundred twenty-two dollars. Once the money is counted, Tea Cake tells Janie:

> "Put dat two hundred back wid de rest, Janie. Mah dice. Ah no need no assistance tuh help me feed mah woman. From now on, you gointuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same. When Ah ain't got nothin' you don't git nothin'." (Their Eyes 122)

Once Tea Cake has determined that he can provide for Janie, he refuses to let her use any of her own money for their support. Whatever they need, he will provide; what he cannot provide for, they will do without.

Price's feelings about Hurston's money are identical to those of Tea Cake. Tea Cake refuses to rely on Janie's money, or even to allow her to spend any on herself. Hurston says that Price "stood on his own feet so firmly that he reared back" (Dust Tracks 252), all because of one quarter. She describes the time Price came to visit her and did not have a quarter for his return fare. She immediately tried to give him one, but he refused:

> He had spent the only nickel he had that night to come to see me. That upset me, and I ran to get a quarter to loan him until his pay day. What did I do that for? He flew hot. . . . Why did I insult him like that? The responsibility was all his. He had

> known that he did not have his return fare when he left home, but he had wanted to come, and so he had come. Let him take the consequences for his own acts. What kind of a coward did I take him for? How could he deserve my respect if he behaved like a cream puff? He was a man! No woman on earth could either lend him or give him a cent. If a man could not do for a woman, what good was he on earth? His great desire was to do for me. . . . He wanted to do all the doing, and keep me on the receiving end. (Dust Tracks 253)

In this passage Hurston outlines the stubborn male pride inherent in Price's character, the same pride that she creates in Tea Cake, almost in the same words. The idea that neither man wants to take the money is curious considering both women had money in their own right. Clearly the idea that the man provides for the women is a strong one neither man is willing to relinquish.

Both Janie and Hurston are first drawn to the men by physical appearance, then progress to intelligence and wit; both voice doubts and fears about the obviously masculine need for domination before they allow the relationship to progress naturally. The similarity of the characters of Tea Cake and Albert Price, III, helps establish the credibility of Janie as Hurston's initial representation of herself. Both Tea Cake and Price attempt to make their relationships exclusive. In other words, each man possesses a highly jealous personality in keeping with the stereotyped image of the male provider already established. The

overwhelming jealousy in all characters involved, Janie/Tea Cake and Hurston/Price, creates a tendency towards physical violence.

Shortly after Janie starts working with Tea Cake in the fields, Nunkie, a young girl, flirts heavily with Tea Cake. In retaliation Janie tries to fight Nunkie but is unable to catch her. Instead Janie turns towards the cabin:

> She walked slowly and thoughtfully to the quarters. It wasn't long before Tea Cake found her there and tried to talk. She cut him short with a blow and they fought from one room to the other, Janie trying to bat him, and Tea Cake kept holding her wrists and wherever he could to keep her from going too far. (Their Eyes 131)

In the fight, most of their clothes are torn away, and suddenly, anger turns to passion:

> He hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible; kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion. (Their Eyes 132)

The argument over, and jealousy temporarily quelled, the couple is able to return to their previously established routine, at least until another person who does not quite understand the situation tries to interfere.

Mrs. Turner's abhorrence at Janie's marriage to Tea Cake based on her feelings about the color of their complexions has already been established. In fact,

she makes several attempts to separate the couple. Tea Cake's anger at this woman's meddling is understandable in relation to the previous example. Tea Cake's patience with her many failed attempts to separate him from Janie abruptly ends when Mrs. Turner tries to arrange a match between Janie and her brother. Tea Cake decides on a show of strength to remind everyone of his position:

> Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (Their Eyes 140)

Janie's jealousy is manifested in the form of physical violence, as is Tea Cake's. But behind the violence is tenderness for the other. No one is really hurt, and the compassion and respect for the other are still present: "The way he petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her made the women see visions and the helpless way she hung on him made men dream dreams" (Their Eyes 140). In spite of the destructiveness of jealousy, Janie and Tea Cake survive. The passion of anger quickly melts to the passion of love. All is forgiven; the previous relationship can be resumed.

As long as Janie is the type of wife Tea Cake wants, all is well. At one point after the beating he states: "'Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be. Dat's de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it'" (Their Eyes 141). In this relationship the place Janie wants to be is beside her husband; no lasting problems result.

The jealousy as seen in the relationship between Hurston and Price is more explosive in its violence, intensity, and jealousy. Through the emotion inherent in her relationship with Price, Hurston views the novel as a safe way to express the way she wishes her life would be. Given the negative and often destructive nature of Hurston's life with Price in comparison to the generally positive relationship between Janie and Tea Cake, this view gains credibility.

Most of Hurston's problem with Price's charm is the profound age difference separating the two. Hurston, although rarely insecure about anything, is extremely aware of the differences between herself and Price. They cannot be together, and yet they cannot live apart. In the autobiography, Hurston accurately describes the relationship between herself and Price:

> The terrible thing was that we could neither leave each other alone, nor compromise. Let me seem too cordial with any male and something was going to happen. Just let him smile too broad at any woman, and no sooner did we get inside my door than the war was on! (Dust Tracks 257)

The passion abounds in every aspect of this relationship. No feeling is safe. Tea Cake uses his fists to prove that Janie is his; Price uses fists as an outlet for anger. When he is hit, he strikes back, hard. After one party, something erupts in Hurston, forcing her to the realization that she is no longer herself:

> One night (I didn't decide this) something primitive inside me tore past the barriers and before I realized it I had slapped his face.

> That was a mistake. . . . So I had unknowingly given him an opening he had been praying for. He paid me off then and there with interest. No broken bones, you understand, and no black eyes. I realized afterwards that my hot head could tell me to beat him, but it would cost me something. (Dust Tracks 257)

Just as Janie discovers that hitting Tea Cake forces him to hit her, Hurston realizes she cannot evade a beating from Price if she instigates the battle.

The similarity between the outbursts between the two couples is astounding. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie and Tea Cake abandon themselves to passion after the physical attacks; in Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston and Price react identically:

> I didn't hate him at all. We sat down on the floor and each one of us tried to take all the blame. He went out and bought some pie and I made a pot of hot chocolate and we were more affectionate than ever. The next day he made me a bookcase that I needed and you couldn't get a pin between us. (Dust Tracks 257-258)

Hurston loses herself in all physical aspects of the relationship. She almost loses her identity in her attempts to hold on to the love Price offers.

The characters and personalities of Tea Cake and Albert Price are very nearly identical. The type of relationship apparent in the novel is a fictionalized version of Hurston's experiences with Price; Janie's love for Tea Cake is based on

Hurston's love for Price. Almost from the beginning Hurston sensed the impossibility of the relationship with Price. The novel is her means of escape, her attempt to put the relationship into perspective. Since that is the case, it becomes necessary to examine the significance of the end of the relationships.

Janie and Tea Cake enjoy each other's company for roughly two years before the tragedy strikes, the hurricane in the Everglades. If the cliche, "all good things must end," is true, Janie's relationship with Tea Cake is just such an example. In the mad scramble to save their lives in the midst of the flood brought on by the hurricane, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog. Rather than seek medical attention for the bite on his cheek, Tea Cake is pressed into gathering the bodies of hurricane victims. Eventually Tea Cake's personality changes as a result of the disease:

> About the middle of the fourth week Tea Cake came home early one afternoon complaining of his head. Sick headache that made him lie down for a while. He woke up hungry. Janie had his supper ready, but by the time he walked from the bedroom to the table, he said he didn't b'lieve he wanted a thing. (Their Eyes 165)

Thus begins the tragedy. Janie finds a doctor to diagnose Tea Cake's illness, but he is too late. The medicine will not help Tea Cake; the illness is too far along in his body: "Janie saw a changing look come in his face. Tea Cake was gone. Something else was looking out of his face. She made up her mind to be off after

the doctor with the first glow of day" (Their Eyes 172).

Even though Janie is terrified of "this strange thing in Tea Cake's body" (173), she refuses to stop caring for him. In his delirium, Tea Cake aims the pistol at Janie; just as she sees him raise the gun, she grabs for the rifle. Praying that Tea Cake will drop the pistol, Janie raises the rifle and aims at Tea Cake:

> The pistol and the rifle rang out almost together. The pistol just enough after the rifle to seem its echo. Tea Cake crumpled as his bullet buried itself in the joist over Janie's head. Janie saw the look on his face and leaped forward as he crashed forward in her arms. She was trying to hover him as he closed his teeth in the flesh of her forearm. They came down heavily like that. Janie struggled to a sitting position and pried the dead Tea Cake's teeth from her arm. . . . Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service. (Their Eyes 175)

So ends the story of Janie and Tea Cake, but only after Janie is tried and acquitted of Tea Cake's murder: "'We find the death of Vergible Woods to be entirely accidental and justifiable, and that no blame should rest upon the defendant Janie Woods'" (Their Eyes 179). The impossibility of the success of the relationship after Tea Cake's illness is evident. However, once the initial period of shock and despair is over, Janie returns to Eatonville.

Janie ends her story to Pheoby by telling her that there are two things every

person must do: "'They got tuh go to God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves'" (Their Eyes 183). With this final statement in mind, the reader realizes that Janie accepts Tea Cake's death. The final image in the novel is that of Janie's memories of Tea Cake:

> Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (Their Eyes 183-184)

Janie realizes that she has finally experienced the love she so desperately sought. Having found and kept her love for two years, she can go on with the rest of her life and live quietly knowing that she has seen beyond the horizon. She no longer needs to chase it in hopes of finding her happiness.

Zora Neale Hurston comes to the same basic conclusion during the course of her affair with Price. As stated earlier, Hurston admired Price for two years before anything resulted from the attraction. Once the relationship is begun, however, it becomes an on-off type of commitment. Hurston describes Price and herself as "alternately the happiest people in the world, and the most miserable.

I suddenly decided to go away to see if I could live without him" (Dust Tracks 258). Six weeks later, Hurston returns from her collecting trip with Alan Lomax, a young folklorist, to Price and the two are together again.

In her autobiography Hurston views her trip to Jamaica in 1936 on the Guggenheim Fellowship as her last opportunity to free herself from Price. She refused to write him, and plunged head first into her career. As a result of this attempt to "smother" her feelings, Hurston wrote what critics consider her greatest work: "The plot was far from the circumstances, but I tried to embalm all the tenderness of my passion for him in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'" (Dust Tracks 260). At the time she completed her story of the love of Janie and Tea Cake, Hurston did not know what would happen to her and Albert Price. In the novel she portrays a brief but enduring love of the kind she desired to have with a man like Tea Cake; when she published Dust Tracks on a Road in 1942, readers learned only part of what actually happened.

In his biography of Hurston, Hemenway writes that the collecting trip with Alan Lomax in 1935 and the trip to Jamaica in 1937 were nothing more than attempts to end the relationship that was

> doomed from the first. He could not abide her career, but she could not break away. Her collecting trip with Lomax and her Guggenheim Fellowship were both intended to sever the relationship, to "smother" her feelings; both times her return brought them back together. (231)

When Hurston returned from her trip to Jamaica in September 1937, several days

before the publication of Their Eyes Were Watching God, she found Price's phone number at her publisher's. Although she did not call for several months, she eventually relented. They met once more and Hurston discovered the same man she had left:

> We both were stunned by the revelation that all along we had both thought and acted desperately in exile, and all to no purpose. We were still in the toils and after all my agony, I found out that he was a sucker for me, and he found out that I was in his bag. (Dust Tracks 260-261)

According to the chronology published in the 1990 edition of Their Eyes Were Watching God, June 27, 1939, a little less than two years after the publication of her novel, Hurston married Price; February 1940, Hurston filed for a divorce, although it was not granted until November 1943 (204-205).

Thus, in one sense, Their Eyes Were Watching God is prophetic. The idea of enduring love evident in the novel is what Hurston wanted for herself. Janie's love for Tea Cake reaches beyond the grave and continues to fulfill her heart. In writing Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston foresaw the eventual end of her own relationship. In an attempt to explain her failure and unhappiness in her relationship with Albert Price, she writes in her autobiography, published in 1942:

> What will be the end? That is not for me to know. Life poses questions and that two-headed spirit that rules the beginning and end of things called Death, has all the answers. And even if I did

> know all, I am supposed to have some private business to myself. Whatever I do know, I have no intentions of putting but so much in the public ears. (Dust Tracks 261)

Not once in her autobiography does Hurston ever mention her divorce from Price. True to her words, she had "no intentions of putting but so much in the public ears" (261). She did, however, privately reveal her suffering within the context of Their Eyes Were Watching God:

> What Zora took from this relationship [with Price] was the quality of its emotion: its tenderness, its intensity, and perhaps its sense of ultimate impossibility. Sooner or later it had to end, and when she left for the West Indies, she did so with a stoic toughness. The man she was leaving remembers that outwardly she was calm and that he was left hurt and confused, wondering if she was "crying on the inside." She gave him her answer in Their Eyes Were Watching God. (Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston 231)

Zora Neale Hurston attempted to come to terms with the failure of her marriage twice, once in her second novel before it was even a marriage, and again in Dust Tracks on a Road, completed in July 1941, seventeen months after Hurston filed for divorce. She had no intention of ever allowing the public to see the failed attempt of her second marriage to her true love.

After the death of her mother, Hurston never makes reference to her age, and she avoids mentioning dates if at all possible. Likewise, Hurston's impressive

efforts to retain the private anguish over two failed marriages distort the possible truths that can be discovered in her autobiography. In her foreword, "Zora Neale Hurston--A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View," Alice Walker states,

> For me, the most unfortunate thing Zora ever wrote is her autobiography. After the first several chapters, it rings false. One begins to hear the voice of someone whose life required the assistance of too many transitory "friends." A Taoist proverb states that to act sincerely with the insincere is dangerous (a mistake blacks as a group have tended to make in America). And so we have Zora sincerely offering gratitude and kind words to people one knows she could not have respected. But this unctuousness, so out of character for Zora, is also a result of dependency, a sign of her powerlessness, her inability to pay back her debts with anything but words. They must have been bitter ones for her. (xvii)

Not only is Hurston struggling to conceal the truth about her love affairs, she is also earnestly attempting not to exhibit the anguish of any of the distasteful aspects of her life. Having to be so dependent on others for her existence for so much of her life created in Zora a need to appear independent, thus creating a reticence to reveal the truth about anything in her life.

The two lovers were completely incompatible, but rather than admit that they made a mistake, they succumbed to the passion and intensity. They struggled to make the relationship successful, always failing miserably. This discord is mirrored

in Janie and Tea Cake, who strove to make their relationship work even after he had been bitten by the rabid dog. Both attempts could meet nothing but failure. Yet the characters involved are powerless to attempt anything else. There is no other option.

With the comparison between Tea Cake and Albert Price in relation to Janie and Hurston, the parallels between fiction and reality become extraordinary. By the time she writes Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston is striving to overcome the pain of knowing a lasting relationship with Albert Price is not possible. In trying to cope with that pain, she creates a character in the guise of Janie Mae Crawford, instilling her own characteristics, attitudes, and feelings. Through this attempt, Hurston recreates her own life through fictional means, perhaps unintentionally revealing obscured facts about her own life that emerge with the publication of Dust Tracks on a Road. By the completion of the novel, Zora Neale Hurston has created through the telling of the story of Janie and Tea Cake a loving memory she will be unable to gain for herself, as we learn from sources outside her autobiography rather than from this non-fictional source. Unable to "think kindly of the world," she imagines a situation in which to instill all of the positive feelings she wishes for.

Chapter 4

The parallels in the characters, personalities, and overall life experiences of Janie Mae Crawford and Zora Neale Hurston become overwhelmingly obvious when Their Eyes Were Watching God is read in conjunction with Dust Tracks on a Road. However, once the physical details and autobiographical connections have been established, the similarities apparent in the technique of symbol in fiction and in autobiography raise a deeper issue--the serious consideration of Their Eyes Were Watching God as Hurston's first attempt at her autobiography. The symbols become vital to the interpretation and understanding of Hurston's life after her mother's death. Joe Starks'/Joe Clarke's store porch, trees, the gatepost, the horizon, and the final episodes in the novel and autobiography hold relatively similar meanings in the separate contexts. Just as she transforms autobiography into fiction in Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston uses fictional techniques to relate the story of her life in Dust Tracks on a Road.

Although the store porch is one of the less important symbols in both the novel and the autobiography, for both it represents the sacred world of man--no women allowed. According to Robert Hemenway in Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, "When Hurston writes of Eatonville, the store porch is all-important. It is the center of the community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it is where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior"

(239). The store porch is the center of the community; everyone waits there to hear the "lying sessions," do the grocery shopping, and simply socialize on hot summer afternoons. The store further serves as a means of denying females a voice in the patriarchal society.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Joe Starks' first priority is getting land in what he wants to be known as "his town." His second priority is building a store. Once the store is built, Starks enlists Janie's services as a helper. By working at the store, Janie becomes a silent party to everything that goes on around her. Even though she would much rather sit and listen, or even tell stories of her own, she remains an outsider:

> The store itself was a pleasant place if only she didn't have to sell things. When the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see, it was nice. The fact that the thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to. (Their Eyes 48)

Although Starks forbids Janie's participation in the story-telling sessions, she is not able to close her ears. The stories fascinate Janie, especially the stories of Matt Bonner's yellow mule:

> Everybody indulged in mule talk. He was next to the mayor in prominence, and made better talking. Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge. He didn't want her talking after such trashy

people. (Their Eyes 50)

The restrictions Starks imposes on Janie's speaking in public reinforce the male domination Janie finds in her world. In her essay, "Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words," Cheryl Wall states that Joe's forbidding Janie to speak "is a severe penalty in an oral culture. It short-circuits Janie's attempt to claim an identity of her own, robs her of the opportunity to negotiate respect from her peers. Barred from speaking to anyone but Joe, she loses the desire to say anything at all" (386). Janie resigns herself to the position foisted upon her by a male-oriented society. Mary Helen Washington supports Cheryl Wall in her essay, "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands," by stating that "when the voice of the black oral tradition is summoned in Their Eyes, it is not used to represent the collective black community, but to invoke and valorize the voice of the black male community" (238). In the novel, women submit themselves to oppression by their men; they succumb to male pressure, as we have seen in Janie's relationships.

Hurston's characterization of Clarke's store in Dust Tracks on a Road is extremely similar to that of the fictional portrayal through Janie's story. In describing how she learned some of the truths of society, Hurston holds two types of institutions responsible, the Methodist and Baptist churches and Joe Clarke's store, "the heart and spring of the town" (Dust Tracks 61), an attitude that reflects Janie's view of the social activity. According to Hurston in Dust Tracks on a Road,

> Men sat around the store on boxes and benches and passed this world and the next one through their mouths. The right and the

> wrong, the who, when and why was passed on, and nobody doubted the conclusions. Women stood around there on Saturday nights and had it proven to the community that their husbands were good providers, put all of their money in their wives' hands and generally glorified them. . . . There were no discreet nuances of life on Joe Clarke's porch. There was open kindness, anger, hate, love, envy and its kinfolks, but all emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at. It was a case of "make it and take it." (Dust Tracks 61-62)

Hurston learned as much as possible about life, adult double talk, and gossip from the conversations held on the store porch. Along with Hurston's mother's advice, it was the best source of education.

Zora Neale Hurston in Dust Tracks on a Road conveys relatively the same view as Janie in regard to the store porch. Although Hurston is not working at the store, the attitude is similar:

> For me, the store porch was the most interesting place I could think of. I was not allowed to sit around there, naturally. But, I could and did drag my feet going in and out, whenever I was sent there for something, to allow whatever was being said to hang in my ear. I would hear an occasional scrap of gossip in what to me was adult double talk, but which I understood at times. There would be, for instance, sly references to the physical condition of women, irregular love affairs, brags on male potency by the parties of the first part,

> and the like. It did not take me long to know what was meant when a girl was spoken of as "ruint" or "bigged." (Dust Tracks 62)

By illicitly listening to the stories and conversations on Joe Clarke's porch, Hurston learned about the different elements in her society.

She not only learned about sexual innuendo; she also discovered folk tales, the stories of Brer Bear, Brer Rabbit, and Brer Fox, "why Sis Snail quit her husband" (Dust Tracks 64); and she learned the explanation for different races, why some people were black. According to the folk tale she repeats in her autobiography, the last day that God was distributing color, groups of people converged:

> "Give us our color! We want our color! We got just as much right to color as anybody else." So when the first ones got to the throne, they tried to stop and be polite. But the ones coming on behind got to pushing and shoving so till the first ones got shoved all up against the throne so till the throne was careening all over to one side. So God said, "Here! Here! Git back! Git back!" But they was keeping up such a racket that they misunderstood Him, and thought He said, "Git Black!" So they just got black, and kept the thing a-going. (Dust Tracks 69-69)

Joe Clarke's porch was much more than a site for community entertainment. It served to reinforce the ideas of male dominance and female subservience. Hurston was spellbound as long as the conversations lasted, and they always

revealed something new to her. Although she was not allowed to participate because of her age and sex, she still managed to listen long enough to attain an education in real life.

Janie's view of the store as a positive environment for relaxation is reinforced by Hurston's identical attitude. Hurston endows Janie with her value system and judgments as a direct result of her being denied the opportunity to tell her stories on the porch. The porch also serves as an instrument for maintaining female subservience. Janie is not allowed to speak, and when customers enter the store, she is not allowed to listen to the rest of the story. She dutifully obeys her husband, reinforcing the threat of male dominance. Because of her youth, Hurston is denied her chance of speaking before a captive audience. She is not even allowed to listen to the conversations because of their sexually suggestive content. She does, however, manage to glean some knowledge of the relationship between men and women.

The portrayal of the patriarchal society through the symbolism of the store porch is important in both the novel and the autobiography. The pear tree in the novel and the pine tree and chinaberry tree in the autobiography, however, are even more vital than the store porch. At some point each represents the key to knowledge and provides a form of escape from the outside world of the female protagonists.

Part of Janie's unhappiness lies in her inability to discover the answers to her questions about love and marriage. At the age of sixteen, she actively

questions the power of spring and of sex in her quest for love: "Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches" (Their Eyes 8). Janie's identification with the pear tree becomes clearer when she observes the pollination of the blossom. The juxtaposition of Janie viewing her life as a pear tree and the pollination joins Janie and the tree definitively:

> Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. . . . She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun, the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! (Their Eyes 10-11)

Janie awakens to physical as well as spiritual desires. Having seen the miracle of the pollination of the pear blossoms, Janie wants no less for herself and her own marriage. She wants the marriage she witnesses.

In her attempts to make sense out of her relationship with Logan Killicks,

Janie flees to the pear tree to learn the meaning of love: "In the few days to live before she went to Logan Killicks and his often-mentioned sixty acres, Janie asked inside of her self and out. She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking" (Their Eyes 20). When the pear tree fails to give Janie the consolation she needs regarding her imminent marriage to Killicks, she accepts Nanny's will; three months later, not having the satisfaction of the pear tree marriage, Janie realizes that she seeks that kind of relationship and tells Nanny: "'Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think'" (Their Eyes 23). Having finally accepted the idea that she will settle for nothing less than the wonder of the marriage of the pear tree, Janie spends many years of her life searching for her "bee," Tea Cake, whose name suggests sweetness.

In the intervening years until the end of the novel and subsequently the end of her relationship with Tea Cake, the symbolism of Janie's trees takes on a new meaning. In the final scene of the novel, the pine tree appears: "Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees" (Their Eyes 183). The presence of the song in the tree elevates the symbol to a new status--a love that endures eternal separation. The song creates a sense of peace and tranquility with the realization of Janie's dream that is not present in the marriage of the pear tree and the bee.

Hurston's tree symbol in Dust Tracks on a Road is not as sexually suggestive or open as Janie's blossoming pear tree, but her "loving pine" is just

as significant. The evergreen knows no seasons; it is forever green, reflecting the endurance of love. The pear tree, however, blooms only in the spring, signifying a love with limits. While Janie's pear and pine trees serve as a mirror into the way relationships between men and women should be, Hurston's pine tree is also the beginning of her imagination. The tree becomes Hurston's truest friend:

> The wind would sough through the tops of the tall long-leaf pines and say things to me. I put in the words that the sounds put into me. Like "Woo, woo, you wooo!" The tree was talking and telling me things. I have mentioned the tree near our house that got so friendly I named it "the loving pine." . . . I used to take a seat at the foot of that tree and play for hours without any toys. We talked about everything in my world. Sometimes we just took it out in singing songs. That tree had a mighty fine bass voice when it really took a notion to let it out. (Dust Tracks 69-70)

Hurston's active imagination allows her to express the thoughts of the trees as wind rustles the leaves. In her mind Hurston communicates with nature. Rather than play ordinary games with other children, Hurston often had her friends play in her yard sharing the secrets of the "loving pine."

While the pine tree is a product of Hurston's immense youthful imagination, the chinaberry tree affords Hurston the luxury of a bird's eye view of her surroundings. The tree becomes the means to discover the end of the world:

> I kept on probing to know. For instance, I had a stifled longing. I

> used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. (Dust Tracks 36)

Hurston's friends are the trees. Their height opens the door to a new world she yearns to understand. The rest of her life is spent on that quest.

The similarities in the description of Janie's sitting under the blossoming pear tree and the song in the pine at the end of the novel to Hurston's playing under the pine and climbing the chinaberry tree are striking. Each woman sees the tree as a link to something she does not quite understand. The trees provide a means of explanation. For Janie, the pear tree illustrates a full, complete, and true marriage. Janie's pine tree with the song echoes the fulfillment she finds in the memory of Tea Cake. Hurston uses the pine and her own imagination to give voice to the wind and the tree, and the chinaberry shows her the ends of the world.

Like the tree symbolism, the gatepost, or the front gate, in both the novel and the autobiography, serves a key function in the development of the work and a supporting role in the concept that Janie is a fictionalized Hurston. The gatepost and the front gate are the thresholds each woman passes on her way to the end of the horizon.

Although the gatepost appears infrequently in both the novel and the autobiography, it is the key for Janie and Zora Neale. The trees suggest a larger world; the front gate allows the women to journey into that world. It has already

been established that Janie is keenly aware of the sexual implication of spring with the pollination of the pear tree; this awareness becomes important in her meeting with Joe Starks. Were it not for her inability to concentrate on peeling potatoes because of the distraction of springtime, she would not have sought the view of the road which represents an escape from nature:

> When Janie had finished indoors she sat down in the barn with the potatoes. But springtime reached her in there so she moved everything to a place in the yard where she could see the road. The noon sun filtered through the leaves of the fine oak tree where she sat and made lacy patterns on the ground. She had been there a long time when she heard whistling coming down the road. (Their Eyes 26)

Sitting in full view of the road, Janie notices Joe Starks. Janie's desire to sit in full view of the road and watch exactly who comes and goes suggests her own longing to be one of the travelers. She is dissatisfied with her present life and watching others pass fulfills her longings, at least temporarily.

Once Janie meets Joe Starks, the temptation of the front gate is no longer denied. She forsakes her commitment to Killicks and searches for her new life: "What was she losing so much time for? A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good" (Their Eyes 31). It is this same longing in Janie Crawford as she sits near the front gate

that the reader discovers Hurston possesses in Dust Tracks on a Road.

Hurston mentions the gatepost immediately after she tells of the death of the white man who befriended her. Just as Janie uses the front gate to watch travelers pass by her house, a young Zora Neale would sit on the gatepost:

> I used to take a seat on top of the gate-post and watch the world go by. One way to Orlando ran past my house, so the carriages and cars would pass before me. The movement made me glad to see it. Often the white travelers would hail me, but more often I hailed them, and asked, "Don't you want me to go a piece of the way with you?" (Dust Tracks 45)

The gatepost is used to illustrate the world beyond Eatonville, Florida, the world Hurston longs to explore. She does in fact discover a part of it in walking with the white travelers. She momentarily escapes the bonds of her own limited location.

Janie's view from the front gate is limitless; Hurston's conception of the world beyond her gatepost is limitless as well. For both Janie and Hurston, the gatepost is the key to the world previously locked to them. When Janie decides to abandon Killicks for Starks, and Hurston walks part way with the travelers, each forsakes her own society for the new and unknown experiences travel brings. Once the women cross the threshold, they begin a parallel journey to the end of the horizon.

The gatepost in both Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road serves as an introduction to the image and symbolism of the horizon.

Were it not for the trees and gatepost, the women would not have first seen the horizon. The view from the front gate or the top of the gatepost allows the protagonists to search the horizon for love and friendship, for an inner peace.

From the gatepost, Janie believes she sees her horizon and thinks it approachable. She is able to embark on the journey with the horizon as her final destination. Janie has the dream of the pear tree and actively seeks to fulfill her desire. Because of Nanny, she is not able to begin her quest with Johnny Taylor. Logan Killicks is too old and ugly to satisfy Janie, so she walks out of the gate and joins Joe Starks. Even though Janie knows unconsciously that Starks is not the bee for her blossom, he represents a new life: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (Their Eyes 28).

The change is the deciding factor in Janie's decision to leave with Starks. For a woman who insists on identifying herself with the blossoming pear tree and watches the road outside the front gate, it is inevitable that she finally look for excitement. Mary Helen Washington suggests in her essay, "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow," that the horizon in Their Eyes Were Watching God "is an individual quest" (15). This point is indisputable. Even though Janie leaves first her hometown and later Eatonville with a new man, it is her personal decision that results in her striking out to find the end of her rainbow. Janie refers to the horizon once more after Joe's funeral. During the long nights when Janie unsuccessfully tries to make some sense of her life, she recognizes the

obstructions in her individual quest as well as deep-rooted hatred for those who have stood in her way:

> She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. . . . Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon--for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you--and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. (Their Eyes 85)

Janie is still in search of the "far horizon," only now she is aware of forces instrumental in the quenching of the quest--Nanny, Killicks, Starks. She is determined never to fall into the trap of the destroyers again: "She liked being lonesome for a change. This freedom feeling was fine" (Their Eyes 86).

Six months later, however, Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods enters the picture, and Janie learns the real meaning of searching for the horizon. As a direct result of her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie travels first to Jacksonville, then to the Everglades, and finally returns to Eatonville. As long as Janie is with Tea Cake, there is no mention of the search for the horizon; it has been reached. In her final

comments to Pheoby, Janie says: "'Now, dat's how everything wuz, Pheoby, jus' lak Ah told yuh. So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparison'" (Their Eyes 182). At the conclusion of the novel, Janie pulls "in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes!" (Their Eyes 184). In returning to Eatonville, Janie acknowledges the end of her journey. She has reached the end of her quest and has her precious memories of her beloved Tea Cake, just as Jason gains his Golden Fleece. Her search is over.

Evidence further linking Their Eyes Were Watching God with Hurston's autobiography is the repetition of the image of the horizon in Dust Tracks on a Road. Washington's definition of the horizon as a representation of the individual quest is equally applicable to Hurston's continuous travels. She constantly seeks harmony in her life. Hurston states in Dust Tracks on a Road:

> I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like. (36)

Through certain events in her life already mentioned, Zora Neale Hurston is forced to walk into the horizon to seek the end of the world. Hurston's horizon and her

search for happiness coincide with the realization of each of her visions. Even though she becomes increasingly aware of the obstacles in her life--a lack of education, no family she is willing to claim for any substantial length of time, and no money--Hurston is fully aware of the implications of her desire to reach the end of her horizon. As Hurston writes in her autobiography,

> There was an end to my journey and it had happiness in it for me. It was certain and sure. But the way! Its agony was equally certain. It was before me, and no one could spare me my pilgrimage. The rod of compelment was laid to my back. (115)

Hurston's individual quest, although sometimes the result of events beyond her control, is activated as a direct result of her wanderlust. If she had not wanted to experience new worlds, she would never have abandoned her father or brothers. So, Hurston's search is linked to Janie's; both women must fulfill their dreams by chasing the horizon.

As with the fate of so many written works, Hurston's editor suggested that "Seeing the World as It Is," what was originally the last chapter of the autobiography, be completely revised because of the "controversial statements about both race and politics" (Dust Tracks, Appendix 288). The final passage of the autobiography, however, makes specific reference to how Hurston views the end of her life at age fifty and what she desires from the rest of her life:

> I don't know any more about the future than you do. I hope that it will be full of work, because I have come to know by experience that

> work is the nearest thing to happiness that I can find. No matter what else I have among the things that humans want, I go to pieces in a short while if I do not work. What all my work shall be, I don't know that either, every hour being a stranger to you until you live it. I want a busy life, a just mind and a timely death. (Dust Tracks 285)

Hurston relates the events in her life to her search for the horizon. Even though she has yet to reach her final destination in the journey, death, she has technically reached the end of her quest. Her twelve visions have become fact; her life has been lived.

In the final episodes of Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road, the two protagonists, Janie Mae Crawford and Zora Neale Hurston, discover the ends of their worlds. The paths their lives have taken lead them to the final attitudes present as far as the end of the work. The feelings each expresses represent Hurston's final attitude as a result of her relationship with Albert Price; Hurston's realizations were already inherent in the fictionalized self she portrayed in Janie.

With the end of the novel comes the end of Janie's story to Pheoby. After relating what amounts to her entire life, Janie offers her final words of wisdom about knowledge and love:

> "Now, Pheoby, don't feel too mean wid de rest of 'em 'cause dey's parched up from not knowin' things. Dem meatskins is got tuh rattle tuh make out they's alive. Let 'em consolate theyselves wid talk.

> 'Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuh dat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mouth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go tuh know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves." (Their Eyes 183)

Janie's final words of wisdom are what Janie struggled to discover through love and marriage. Only upon the death of Tea Cake and with the knowledge that she will only have his memory, is she content. She manages to find God, and through her wanderings with the different men in her life she discovers the truth about living for herself. Janie refuses to mourn for Tea Cake because she will always have his memory:

> The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (Their Eyes 183-184)

The peace Janie finds becomes the peace Hurston makes with the rest of the world.

In her final comments about her life to the point where she concludes the autobiography, Hurston appears to reach the same conclusion as Janie. In the

last chapter of the originally published version of the autobiography, "Looking Things Over," Hurston writes to her readers in general:

> So I give you all my right hand of fellowship and love, and hope for the same from you. In my eyesight, you lose nothing by not looking just like me. I will remember you all in my good thoughts, and I ask you kindly to do the same for me. Not only just me. You, who play the zig-zag lightning of power over the world, with the grumbling thunder in your wake, think kindly of those who walk in the dust. And you who walk in humble places, think kindly too, of others. There has been no proof in the world so far that you would be less arrogant if you held the lever of power in your hands. Let us all be kissing-friends. Consider that with tolerance and patience, we godly demons may breed a noble world in a few hundred generations or so. Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet, or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbecue. (Dust Tracks 286)

Although Zora Neale Hurston struggles to emphasize the positive outcome of the different experiences in her life, especially that of her relationship with Albert Price, the negative attitude emerges slightly. The bitterness she feels toward those in power is difficult to overcome. While Janie triumphs over the antagonizing women on Pheoby's porch, Zora Neale Hurston barely succeeds in tempering her comments about the past. Still, Hurston has fulfilled her quest; she has gained the education she sought, the love she desired, and a career that made her happy for

a short while.

The symbolism present in the final episodes of the novel and the autobiography promotes one aspect of the themes: it is impossible to gain any benefit from living in the past. There is a constant push forward, either for knowledge or love. The lives of both characters have been a representation of the satisfaction of living for the moment. Even though disappointments appear to discourage progress, the individual must move forward. Peace will eventually come.

The four symbols presented--the store porch, the trees, the gatepost, and the horizon--help solidify the correlation between Janie's fictional character and Hurston's personality. Hurston's descriptions of Joe Clarke's store porch, attitudes and views of her "loving pine," watching and following white travelers who pass by the front gatepost, and searching for the end of her horizon are imbued in Janie's character as she relates her story to Pheoby Watson. Although minor changes are made, the results are mirror images. The store porch is consistently viewed as the center of the community and a major force in upholding traditional values and societal structure; the trees are silent friends who answer questions; and the front gate leads to a recognition of a larger world and instigates the search for the "far horizon."

The final scene of each work reinforces each of the four symbols. The pronounced emphasis on sexuality, change, movement, and individuality serves to illustrate Janie Mae Crawford's and Zora Neale Hurston's progression to the

point of stability apparent at the end of Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road.

Conclusion

Their Eyes Were Watching God opens with ships in the distance and focuses on the horizon. The early introduction of the image of the horizon stresses its importance:

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Their Eyes 1)

This beginning immediately activates the reader's mind: if "the dream is the truth," is Hurston "dreaming" her life in Their Eyes Were Watching God? Yes. The novel develops a character strikingly parallel to Hurston, but takes her beyond the point of her experiences up to its publication in 1937. Is she "dreaming" her life as well in her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, published in 1942? Yes, again. The descriptions, geographical locations, characters, experiences, personalities, and symbols in both works are so strongly parallel that the combined effort becomes Hurston's self-analysis. However, the puzzle of her life can only be

completed, the discrepancies resolved, by consulting critics and scholars who have studied her life and work.

In the final chapter of her autobiography, "Looking Things Over," Hurston makes several statements that encourage the reader to believe that at age fifty she is ultimately satisfied with the course of her life. She has experienced highs and lows and is grateful for each:

> I can look back and see sharp shadows, high lights, and smudgy inbetweens. I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and a sword in my hands. What I had to swallow in the kitchen has not made me less glad to have lived, nor made me want to low-rate the human race, nor any whole sections of it. I take no refuge from myself in bitterness. (Dust Tracks 280)

Hurston accepts the events in her life, the good and the bad, with a sense of justness. She appears to blame no one. The final ideas in the autobiography reflect a peace of mind acquired only after extreme trials. It reflects her understanding that nothing in the past can be changed, so one must accept what has happened.

In the summary of her slightly less than positive outlook, Hurston writes in her autobiography:

> Then when the sleeplessness of old age attacks me, I can have a likker bottle snug in my pantry and sip away and sleep. Get mellow

> and think kindly of the world. I think I can be like that because I have known the joy and pain of deep friendship. I have served and been served. I have made some good enemies for which I am not a bit sorry. I have loved unselfishly, and I have fondled hatred with the red-hot tongs of Hell. That's living! (Dust Tracks 285)

Hurston's statements surrounding the past and the way events resolve themselves are obvious. The parallel between Janie's final thoughts in Their Eyes Were Watching God and Hurston's philosophy in the conclusion of Dust Tracks on a Road, her peaceful acceptance of life, is equally obvious.

In a discussion of the credibility of Hurston's autobiography, Mary Helen Washington states:

> The autobiography provides a fairly clear view of Hurston as a child, and it is especially useful for detailing her relationships with her mother, father, and Eatonville, but the rest of it rambles on from one pose to another, sometimes boasting about her achievements and at all times deftly avoiding self-revelation. She was later to admit that she did not want to write the book at all because "it is too hard to reveal one's inner self." ("Zora Neale Hurston" 20)

The attitude Hurston expresses is in keeping with her personality. The fact that Their Eyes Were Watching God was published five years earlier than the autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, supports the theory that the novel is her first attempt at describing the inner self that she was so leery of revealing to

readers. Recreating her life and frustration in the form of fiction helps Hurston cope not only with the possible end of her relationship with Albert Price, but also with her early life as well. The novel includes as many of Hurston's personal qualities that it is possible for the novel to serve as her first "fictional autobiography."

The sense of finality at the end of the autobiography prophesies the end of Hurston's productive life as a novelist. After Dust Tracks on a Road was published in 1942, Hurston wrote only one other novel, Seraph on the Sewanee (1948). Her first and only novel with whites as the protagonists, as Darwin Turner states in In a Minor Chord,

> reveals her conscious adjustment to the tastes of a new generation of readers. Although Seraph is Hurston's most ambitious novel and her most artistically competent, its prolonged somberness causes many readers to yearn for the alleviating farce and carefree gaiety of the earlier works. (111)

Having turned away from what was her true inspiration, her culture and its folklore, Hurston was unable to move her audience emotionally.

Zora Neale Hurston lived on from the publication of this novel in 1948 until 1960. From scholars who have traced the facts of her life, especially Alice Walker, we learn a sad story. As Lillie Howard relates in Zora Neale Hurston, "On September 13, 1948, Zora, living at 140 W. 112th Street, was arrested by New York police and charged with committing an immoral act with a ten-year-old boy"

(47). Hurston's ex-landlady, the mother of the ten-year-old, failed to believe Hurston was innocent, even though she produced her passport proving that she was in Honduras during the time the boy claimed the incidents occurred. Her innocence was proven when Lewis Waldman, Hurston's lawyer, presented his evidence to Frank Hogan, the district attorney, who decided to pursue a complete investigation: "He found the child to be mentally disturbed and that Zora had not only told the mother as much two years before but had also suggested that the mother take the child to Bellevue for psychiatric testing" (Howard 47). Lillie Howard quotes Hurston's letter to Carl Van Vechten on October 30, 1948:

> All that I have ever tried to do has proved useless. All that I have believed in has failed me. I have resolved to die. It will take a few days for me to set my affairs in order, and then I will go . . . no acquittal will persuade some people that I am innocent. I feel hurled down a filthy privy hole. (Howard 48)

Shortly after that, Hurston disappeared from public view. She was occasionally seen working as a maid or doing some type of menial task.

However, Hurston continued to submit articles for publication, and some were accepted, but none of her later manuscripts contained her earlier promise. When one of her articles, "Conscience of the Court," appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, the Miami Herald sent a reporter to investigate:

> Zora had told the reporter that three short stories and her eighth book were in the hands of her agent; that's as far as they got. Most of her

> fictional works during this period were unpublishable; her talent seems to have taken up residence elsewhere. She became preoccupied with unusual subjects. Her eighth book, The Lives of Barney Turk, was "the story of a white youth who grew to manhood on a Florida truck farm, sought adventure in Central America, and ended up in Hollywood. The three short stories were about a Florida religious colony, a turpentine worker at a political meeting, and a mythological hunt for the reasons Swiss cheese has holes." (Howard 49)

Although several of her later articles were published, "What White Publishers Won't Print," in the April 1950 Saturday Evening Post; "I Saw Negro Votes Peddled," in the November 1950 American Legion magazine; and "Why the Negro Won't Buy Communism," in the June 1951 American Legion, she was eventually forced to accept jobs outside the literary field. Robert Hemenway reveals that "after 1957 she survived on unemployment benefits, substitute teaching, and welfare assistance. In her very last days Zora lived a difficult life--alone, proud, ill, obsessed with a final book she could not complete" (Hurston 322).

Early in 1959, Zora Neale Hurston suffered a stroke, and in October 1959 she was forced to enter the St. Lucie County Welfare Home. January 28, 1960, Zora Neale Hurston died in the St. Lucie County Welfare Home of "hypertensive heart disease" and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Garden of Heavenly Rest in Fort Pierce, Florida. That unmarked grave prompts Alice Walker's search.

In her search for Zora in the late summer and early fall of 1973, Alice Walker lies to Eatonville citizens by claiming to be an illegitimate niece. Her experiences, outlined in her essay, "Looking for Zora," provide further clues into Hurston's eccentric personality. From Mrs. Patterson, the daughter of the funeral director, Walker learns that Zora is buried in "'the old cemetery, the Garden of the Heavenly Rest, on Seventeenth Street. Just when you go in the gate there's a circle and she's buried right in the middle of it. Hers is the only grave in that circle--because people don't bury in that cemetery any more'" (Walker, Afterword 303). On the spot of what she believes to be Hurston's final resting place, Walker places a marker, realizing she

> must honor the dead, but between the dead great and the living starving, there is no choice. "I have a lot of letters to be engraved," I say, standing by the plain gray marker I have chosen. It is pale and ordinary, not at all like Zora, and makes me momentarily angry that I am not rich." (Walker, Afterword 307)

The stone reads:

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

"A GENIUS OF THE SOUTH"

NOVELIST FOLKLORIST

ANTHROPOLOGIST

1901 1960

Walker's interest and that of other scholars resulted in the reissuing of Their

Eyes Were Watching God, only in print continuously since 1978, and Dust Tracks on a Road by the University of Illinois Press, and eventually in an attractive edition of Their Eyes Were Watching God by Harper & Row in 1990 and Dust Tracks on a Road in 1991, making both works available to a wider audience. New generations will continue to discover the positive story of Janie Crawford, a fictionalized version of Zora Neale Hurston, and Hurston's attempt to portray her life symbolically and optimistically in her autobiography. Although Hurston would no doubt revel in this attention, she would probably have preferred that the facts of her later life remain lost, leaving readers with the symbolically positive conclusions of her autobiographical novel and her fictionalized autobiography.

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