Black Culture and Black Identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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ABSTRACT

Dilek ÖNDER **September, 2009**

Black Culture and Black Identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

This thesis is aiming at explaining how Zora Neale Hurston uses her cultural values to represent African American people and how she criticizes her contemporaries alienated themselves from their culture. It consists of three parts that explicate how she embellishes the main character's story with African American folk tales, rhetoric of Signifying and black vernacular language to represent African American identity. The first chapter focuses on black woman and black feminist theory, the second chapter expresses how the silenced woman gains her voice with her African American cultural values, and the last chapter emphasizes the importance of black cultural values in representing African American identity.

In this study, I will claim that in her semi- autobiographical novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, while Zora Neale Hurston depicts a quest for identity of a black woman in her three marriages, she criticizes her contemporaries obsessed with racial issues.

Key Words:

Rhetoric of Signifying, black vernacular language, black feminism, black folk tales, black culture, black identity.

KISA ÖZET

Dilek ÖNDER **Eylül, 2009**

Tanrı'ya Bakıyorlardı Adlı Eserde Siyahî Kültürü ve Kimliği

Bu tez Zora Neale Hurston'ın Afrika asıllı Amerikalıları temsil ederken ve dönemin kendi kültürüne yabancılaşmış siyahî yazarlarını eleştirirken kültürel değerlerini nasıl kullandığını açıklamayı hedeflemiştir. Tez Zora Neale Hurston'ın Afrikalı Amerikalı kimliğini temsil ederken ana karakterin hikâyesini siyahî hikâyeler, konuşma sanatı ve dili ile nasıl süslediğini irdeleyen üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölüm siyahî kadın ve siyahî feminizmi, ikinci bölüm susturulan siyah kadının sesini geri kazanması ve son bölüm Afrikalı Amerikan kültürel değerlerin önemini işler.

Bu çalışmadaki savım Zora Neale Hurston'ın yarı otobiyografik olan *Tanrı'ya Bakıyorlardı* adlı eserinde, bir siyahî kadının üç evliliği boyunca kimlik arayışını anlatırken, aynı zamanda da ırkçı meselelere saplantılı olan siyahî erkek yazarları eleştirmesi olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Afro-Amerikan Retorik Stratejileri, siyahî diyalekti, siyahî feminizmi, siyahî halk hikâyeleri, siyahî kültür, siyahî kimlik.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, black intellectuals were in vogue and encouraged to produce their own works representing black identity; however, they were in conflict about how to depict themselves. While some intellectuals like Alan Locke assumed they could "raise the culture of folk to the level of art" (cit. in Carby 74) and insisted on focusing on their cultural values, others assumed their African American cultural authenticity was an obstacle holding them back from getting respect as an intellectual. Prominent figures in the Harlem Renaissance like Zora Neale Hurston, whose primary focus was the rural South, and Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, whose primary focus was the urban North, resisted the "urge within the black race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (Hughes, "The Negro Artist"). They believed the best way to represent black people was by highlighting the values that differentiated them from other peoples. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston deals with the problems of female individuals of Eatonville, and criticizes the patriarchal society, while signifying upon and criticizing her male contemporaries whose works are heavy with racial issues but lacking African American motifs.

Zora Neale Hurston explored her African Heritage under the supervision of Franz Boas, and used her findings as her narrative style to create an African American Literature. She had the talent to create art from her folklore expeditions (Hemenway, *Zora Neale* 21); however, while the works of male Afro-American intellectuals like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer were appreciated, the sophisticated themes of Hurston were overlooked, misread and bitterly criticized. Since black intellectuals only supported protest writing, her works did not receive the appreciation they deserved. She was

supposed to depict hostile and antagonistic black characters significantly protesting white American racism. Moreover, the gender polarity, which made her remain obscure, was another barrier in her career.

Richard Wright plainly manifests the gender polarity between himself and Hurston in his interpretation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. He fails to see that Hurston's novel perfectly depicts female matters, patriarchal power and Negro life in the South. He claims the novel does not possess a proper theme or message, and it degrades the black identity. According to him, the blacks are portrayed as piteous folks:

> Miss Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill: they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears...The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought…She exploits the phase of Negro life which is 'quaint,' the phrase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race (cit. in Guttman 93).

When he read the novel, he must have missed the hidden ironic smile on the lips of the so called inferior Janie in her trial. Wright as a New Negro doesn't see the contrast between Janie sitting in her overalls against the white women in nice pinks dresses. In my opinion, the overalls indicate that she passes the boundary of the gender before white women, which makes her superior to the white women in the court.

As Hurston's response proves, Wright confuses her art with her anthropological expeditions; moreover, he fails to see the message she conveys: "Negro novelists make their mistakes ... when they confuse art with sociology ... I'm not interested in the race

problem, but I'm interested in the problems of the *individuals,* white ones and black ones" (cit. in Wald 96).

When he claimed that the novel did not carry a theme, he was unable to recognize that while Hurston held a spyglass in her one hand to look through the life and cultural values of Afro-American people as an anthropologist, she held her pen in her other hand to narrate what she saw through as an author. Thus, the body of her works provides the reader with a sense of black culture. In her own letter to Countee Cullen, Hurston explains why her works are heavy with folkloric themes rather than racial issues. She wanted to furnish her people with the beautiful black culture that whites would hold a high regard for. The overemphasis of the experience that blacks went through would not assist them in getting the respect they deserved, or ease the pain. According to her, whining was definitely no remedy:

> Just point out that we are suffering injustices and denied our rights, as if the white people did not know already! Why don't I put something about lynching in my books? As if all the world did not know about Negroes being lynched! My stand is this: either we must do something about it that the white man will understand and respect, or shut up. No whiner ever got any respect or relief (Edwards and Hurston 90).

Moreover she was not in favor of a Northern elitist culture that overlooked the values of the black South. In her works she focused on the Southern woman left in the "dustbin of the history" (Krasner 535). She brings her into existence with the help of her own folklore. As David Krasner emphasizes, the urbanized and masculinized mentality of the New Negro was unable "to represent the 'new woman,' fully self-sufficient and modern" (535). She wanted to represent the rural woman whose culture differs from the urban in her 'rural' way.

Another black intellectual Carl Milton Hughes praised *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but his interpretation of the character Tea Cake suggests that he did not read the novel closely: "*In Their Eyes Were Watching God,* she made a significant contribution to the field of American literature, by using Negro themes. Her character, Tea Cake introduced to literature a particular type which remains unique […] Even though the cause of Tea Cake's madness could be attributed to snake bite, the force with which this madness comes to the reader makes Tea Cake a memorable character" (Hughes M. 172). His noteworthy mistake here is the cause of madness, since Tea Cake is not bitten by a snake but by a rabid dog. Furthermore, it is not the madness that makes him a memorable character, but the way he treats Janie. Another well-known black intellectual Langston Hughes agrees that she has a significant contribution to American literature, but he does not take her seriously as a literary talent. He asserts that "Of this 'niggerati', Zora Neale Hurston was certainly the most amusing. Only to reach a wider audience, need she ever write books- because she is perfect book of entertainment in herself" (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 185). For Hughes, Hurston was a "perfect darkie" who perceived scholarships from white patrons just to "sit around and represent Negro race for them, she did in such a racy fashion" (185).

When Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937, Black Feminist Theory was not a concept, yet. She is a pioneer of the black feminist thought, and deals with black woman's matters in her book. The novel stands out from all the rest of the Harlem Renaissance works, for the black patriarchal society is depicted very skillfully from the black female perspective adorned with authentic African American narrative features. In the novel she denotes the folks living in Eatonville, an all-black community where "black pride nothing new" (Walker 100). The novel reflects her folklore studies and

knowledge along with experiences from her real life. This makes the book a semi-biographical novel.

After the death of Hurston's mother, a new phase in her life started. She always had a deep urge to go and see different places: "I just took to walking and kept the things a' going. The strangest thing about it was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go […] following some inside urge to go places" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 22). That she left her town and received her education outside Eatonville enabled her to experience the life different from the one in her town; likewise, Janie's experience in the Everglades. For her folklore expeditions, she traveled back home to Florida and the Caribbean: "She was interested in African, Haitian and Jamaican folklore […] This is because she grew up in a community of black people who had enormous respect for themselves and for their ability to govern themselves" (Walker 85).

In the course of her folklore expedition in Haiti, Hurston met A.W. Price, who was several years younger than she was, and fell in love with him. Her unsuccessful relationship with A.W. Price forms the basis for the plot of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She fell deeply in love and excused his physical abuse, and wanted to conform to his rules in the beginning of her relationship:

> That very manliness, sweet as it was, made us both suffer. My career balked the completeness of his ideal. I really wanted to conform, but it was impossible. To me there was no conflict. My work was one thing, and he was all of the rest. But I could not make him see that. Nothing must be in my life but himself (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 206).

She realized then how much she had to compromise herself by fulfilling his expectations: "Then I knew I was too deeply in love to be my old self" (257). She left A.W. Price, because he expected her to give up her career, but she preferred to give him up instead. She

did not allow her love to hamper her career and her anthropological researches. Similarly, in the novel, Janie does not let Tea Cake bite her, and chooses life. In real life, Hurston leaves her lover, while Janie in the end of the novel kills Tea Cake to protect herself. Both actions provide them with an opportunity to be independent black women and to control their lives: "It is not until Janie has killed Tea Cake and all of her lovers are out of novel that she is able to find real peace and independence" (Marks 152)**.**

Robert E. Hemenway states that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is autobiographical "only in the sense that she managed to capture the emotional essence of a love affair between an older woman and a younger man" (Hemenway, *Zora Neale* 240**).** As Hemenway claims, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not entirely overlaid with her life. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston reveals that: "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*" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 210-11). Although Hurston was abused severely by A.W. Price, she protects him in the novel. She uses "poetic embalmment" (Davies 148) as a strategy when she depicts oppressive black men. For instance, she mitigates the inner bruises in her soul: "No brutal beating at all" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 218). Furthermore, she portions her relationship with him in two of her marriages, and covers A.W. P's oppression with another character, Jody. On the other hand, when she created her male oppressive characters, she was not only inspired by A.W. Price, but also her father. Her father was a Baptist preacher and the mayor of Eatonville, as Jody is. When he heard that black people in Florida were building a town of colored people, he went there and became first the preacher, then the mayor. He wrote the local laws that had an important place in Eatonville's growth and development:

> Frank Otey speaks of John Hurston's standing as a 'vocal and knowledgeable politician' and of his efforts to codify Eatonville's first

> municipal laws, codes that not only helped to facilitate the conduct of town's business but also 'made possible the punishment of those who broke the law or committed crimes'(cit. in Bordelon 11-12).

Briefly, as Hemenway claims, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not just simply a romantic story of two people, but the story of the "Genius of South" (Walker 107), conveying not only sexual and emotional needs of black women, but also their social needs as black individuals. She creates her own version of folktales partially based on her real life. She embellishes them with the significant African American narrative elements, and becomes a pioneer of African American Women writers.

CHAPTER I

MARRIAGE, IDENTITY AND AFRO-AMERICAN WOMAN

1.1. Black Woman and Black Feminist Theory

When Hurston wrote the novel, the black woman did not have a voice in the black community, and there was no feminist theory referring to the experience of black women; thus, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a pioneering work of black feminist thought. In the novel, while she denotes racism subtly, she not only expressly criticizes the position of the black woman, but also offers suggestions. She claims that blacks must hold on their African heritage so that black women can have a voice as she used to have in Africa.

In the middle of the nineteenth century women's magazines characterized the true woman as "gentle, innocent, pure, pious, domestic, submissive, and somewhat helpless. The stories and sermons of this period stress the duties of obedient, submissive wives and mothers" (Johnson 18). This characterization, however, defined only upper and middle class white women. The black woman was excluded from public representations of true womanhood. While the word of 'woman' used to refer only the 'white woman', 'black' was synonymous with 'black men'. Black women were living in a society where they discursively did not exist:

> Black woman had been asked to fade into the background- to allow the spotlight to shine solely on black men. That the black woman was victimized by sexist and racist oppression was seen as insignificant, for woman's suffering, however, great could not take precedence over male pain (hooks, *Ain't I* 6).

Therefore, studying either race or gender will not be sufficient to understand the issues in being a woman of color. The analysis of a female black character requires dealing with her race along with her gender. To focus on only feminism and the feminist voice in

this novel would remove the main character, Janie, from the black female issues. As bell hooks asserts, when a black woman gives a birth, the skin color of the child determines the child's future. The black woman is first identified with her complexion, then her gender:

> When the child of two black parents is coming out of the womb the factor that is considered first is skin color, then gender, because race and gender will determine that child's fate. Looking at the interlocking nature of gender, race, and class was the perspective that changed the direction of feminist thought (hooks, *Ain't I* xi-xii).

Thus, the black women had to overcome both racism and sexism whereas black men only had to deal with racism. The double positioning of black women made claiming their rights much more arduous in comparison to white women, since they had to fight racism first.

During the years of institutionalized slavery and the Reconstruction era, both black men and women fought for their individual rights; however, black male political leaders embraced patriarchal values. Black men modeled whites' patriarchal values, and did not question patriarchy. They created a black society where women were encouraged to adopt a subservient role, which resulted in the voice of women gradually being quelled. Moreover, in the South, the threat of rape and other physical brutalization, one of which is whipping, left deep impacts on black women's psyches. While slave holders lynched black men for raping a woman, they themselves committed the same crime to subdue recalcitrant black women. It was a crime for black men, but a right for the slave owners. The continuity of these threats resulted in a moral stigma for black women which could be interpreted as 'God created black woman for work and sexual intercourse.' For white men, black women were sexual objects, and for white women they were a threat to their marriages:

> As we come to understand their fears and pain we are implicitly made aware of a legion of Black women who have marched through American history

> with little control over their own lives as slaves, maids, mistresses, whores, nannies, for white children, mothers struggling to raise their own offspring, light-skinned beauties hoping to pass or be outcast by the community, and so on (Matza 44).

Although the black women received educations and decent jobs, they could not get the respect they deserved. They became authors, lawyers, doctors, or teachers, all regarded as respectful occupations; still, they were not able to get rid of the label of inferiority. While black male leaders were welcomed in white's social circles, black women were not considered company by white women activists. They were thought as a threat to their social standing. Also the hardworking and talented black woman was a threat for their careers, hence their financial security. Hurston also experienced the racial humiliation despite being a published author. When she was invited by Marjorie Kinnan Rawling, the winner of the 1936 Pulitzer Prize, she was treated equal all day long, but when it was time to sleep she was accommodated in servant's quarters, despite the empty two rooms in the house (Bordelon 19). Briefly, the emancipated black woman was still discriminated against due to the color of her skin:

> We appeared to have been unanimously elected to take up where white women were leaving off. They got books discussing the negative impact of sexism on their lives; we got books arguing that black women had nothing to gain by women's liberation. Black women were told that we should find our dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt and cope (hooks, *Ain't I* 6-7).

The manipulation of black men by whites made the black women shadowy figures in the society; thus, their sufferings became invisible in the eyes of their men. The patriarchal values they adopted made them too ignorant to see how black females suffered

inside. As Nellie McKay claims about Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the sexist treatment of black men became as soul-destroying as racism: "...by the time she reaches the first blush of womanhood she discovers the restrictive bonds of woman's place in man's world, qualitatively as soul-destroying as the experiences of racism"(McKay 59). Furthermore, more soul-destroying was the black women eventually internalizing the idea that they were nothing but the mules of the world supposed to work to death: "White man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 29).They were overwhelmed with work both on the inside and the outside of the house. Thus, after emancipation, they went on living as the domestic slaves of their men. They became subjects of the black men for whom they satisfy their longing for being a master, and tried to get the revenge on their women for the mistreatment of their masters. Eventually, they started to act as surrogate masters for the black women. Gradually the black woman's nonexistence was confirmed by many black women.

On the other hand, black women were strong enough to endure the abuse of both husband and the white master, to meet the demands of their children, and to cope with the housework at the same time:

> Historically, African American writers have assumed that strength was the unassailable characteristics they could apply in representing black woman. If black woman could be attacked for being promiscuous, they certainly could not be attacked for being strong[…]Unquestionably, strength was frequently the only virtue available to black women (Harris 11).

That black women were very strong is undeniable; however, as hooks claims "when people talk about the 'strength' of the black women, they are referring to the way in which they

perceive black women coping with oppression" (hooks, *Ain't I* 6). It is true that they tried to avoid the harmful consequences of oppression with their strength, but people "ignore the reality that to be strong in the face of oppression is not the same as overcoming oppression, that the endurance is not to be confused with transformation" (hooks, *Ain't I* 6). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* however, Nanny and Janie, clearly reveal the difference. Throughout her life, Nanny has had to endure many difficulties. Her master rapes her, and the master's wife threatens her and her baby's life. Not only has she dealt with her own problems, but also with her daughter's. When she witnesses the first kiss of Janie, she gets furious and forces her to marry Logan Killicks. She feels a need to assure a secure marriage for her before she dies. She does not want her granddaughter to be abused by both white and black men: "Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is making a spit cup outa you" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 37). On the other hand, while she sees marriage as a protection, strangely she does not consider securing both her life and her daughter's with a marriage. After her flight from the master's house, she manages to find a job and brings up Janie on her own; however she is not strong enough to confront her master's wife, and dreams of a fifteen-year-old granddaughter, or to deal with a black husband. Nanny is just a "cracked plate" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 37) that tries to find a way out, rather than facing the problem. Janie, however, is really a strong woman. She has enough strength to leave a husband, to be engaged in 'the battle of dozens' with the most oppressive husband, and to marry a man quite younger then she is despite the prejudice of the town. She is strong enough to raise her voice, but still she cannot cease the male oppression. She has to endure Jody until he dies.

1.2. The Identity Search of Black Woman

When black people were taken from Africa, they were forced to abandon not only their homeland but also their African identities. When they arrived in the New World, a new identity was imposed on blacks; they were identified as slaves. They were subject to heavy physical and psychological brutalization by whites the slave markets destroyed their dignity, their native language was forbidden, and they were not allowed to sing their songs. Their African Heritage was removed and they were de-humanized. Therefore, the appearance of white slave ships constitutes a fateful step in African American History (hooks, *Ain't I* 18-19). Now that the blacks were asked to abandon their background, in order to have the new slave identity imposed, Hurston goes back to her roots with a poem on ships of whites in the very beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to claim back their heritage. She goes back to the roots of African American people to create new ones in the present.

As Diana Matza claims and vindicates her claim with Alice Walker's quote, in order to know who they are, they need to understand who they were in the past. They must hold on the values helping them survive: "We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. If they do, it is our duty as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children. If necessary, bone by bone" (cit. in Matza 53). Hurston starts to build Janie's lost identity in the novel with recognition of her skin color. The picture taken with her playmates makes her to realize that she is different from the other children. Moreover, she is called "Alphabet" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 21), since people identify her with a different name. Janie's lost identity becomes clearer with the background information of Janie's parents. That Hurston gives the historical background of Janie's family and all blacks in the novel makes her a very skilled bone collector.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the tree image is used to denote the ways the characters identify themselves. In the beginning of the novel, disheartened Nanny starts her own story by comparing her folks to a tree without roots: "You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born due in slavery so it wasn't for me to feel my dreams of what a woman ought to be and to do" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 31). She already accepts being a lost identity without roots. She also had dreams, one of which is "to preach a great sermon about colored women sitting' on high", but "there wasn't any pulpit for her" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 32). It is true that during the slavery era, blacks were discouraged from identifying themselves as an individual. As hooks claims, she suffers from the imposition of submitting and accepting being an inferior: "Black women were taught to submit, to accept sexual inferiority, and to be silent" (hooks, *Ain't I* 2). She has had dreams about being a big voice and preaching to her colored women, but her being raped by her master prevents her from chasing her dreams. She can challenge neither her master, nor the master's wife. She does not even think a black woman could be in power. "Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in the ocean where the black man is in power" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 29). No matter how hard she tries, she cannot help suffering from the profound effects of slavery. She becomes a broken branch of a tree driven away. Thus, she cannot lead Janie in the correct way, and it takes Janie many years to find out that Nanny's guiding principles do not fit her, because a tree needs roots to grow and blossom.

When Nanny witnesses Janie's first kiss, she gets mad and calls her inside the house. The first impression of Janie is her grandmother's face and hair that she compares to a tree destroyed by a storm:

> Nanny's head and face look like standing roots of the some old tree that had been torn away by the storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered. The cooling Palma Christi leaves that Janie had bound about her grandma's head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 26).

It seems Nanny is destroyed by the storm of slavery, and the slavery has taken her dreams away and turned her into a ruin after a storm; however, Nanny just takes refuge in slavery. Hurston believes that people are responsible for their sufferings, but not race (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 248). In my opinion, Hurston criticizes Nanny for losing faith in her beliefs, and while she conveys her message, she consults her knowledge on Vodou. In the yards of Haitian Vodou temples, there is often a huge tree whose branches are heavy with leaves. The trunk of the tree is tied with a white cord, which calls to mind the description of Nanny's face and head. The yard of the temple with a large sumptuous tree is the residence of 'Iroko,' a divinity and a "shielding spirit whose roots and branches represent the link between the spirituals and material worlds, as well as the connections between living human beings and their ancestors" (Harding).The Africans taken to the New World did not give up their past, and their values; on the contrary, they adopted them into the new life they have in America; therefore, they recognize a sacred tree as the residence of a protective divinity and a "symbol of their own relationship to spirit and to lineage" (Harding). That Nanny is depicted as a destroyed tree indicates that her connection to protecting divinity is destroyed. If Nanny held tightly to her beliefs, she would not have had all those bad incidents. According to Charles H. Long, the meaning of Black religion in America "emerges from the process of 'wrestling' with the question of how to stay human in fundamentally inhumane situations: blackness as an essentially religious task" (cit. in Harding). The enslaved blacks in America had to cling to African values to be able

to survive in the New World. In other words, they found a way to resist the slavery in the resources from their homelands. In my opinion, with Nanny, Hurston criticizes black individuals, like Frederick Douglass, whose works ground on slavery sufferings.

It is certain that Nanny cannot make her big dreams real due to the heavy condition of slavery, but in the novel Hurston does not let her obtain a pulpit because Nanny is a misleading figure. She is already a lost individual herself, so she should not preach to the black women. She already submits herself to patriarchal society rules and admits to her place as a mule. If she were given a pulpit, she would pinch the horizon of every woman into a little thing to tie around the neck of them as she does to Janie. Maya Angelou in the foreword of *Dust Tracks on a Road* stresses the music of Black American Speech in Hurston's works. Hurston, in a letter to a friend, states that she wanted to "show a Negro preacher who is neither funny nor an imitation puritan ramrod in his pants. Just the human being and poet he must be to succeed in a Negro pulpit" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* viii-ix). The Negro preaching and leading a group should not be an imitator, but a black person having the tone of an African American. Therefore, Hurston does not obtain a pulpit for Nanny.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching,* Hurston's primary objective is not racism; she partially deals with it just outside Eatontown. She focuses on black folklore, from which the main character's strength originated. She refuses the roles imposed by the white patriarchal society, and while she struggles against male oppression, she draws sustenance from her black heritage. Barbara Christian considers Janie "a new black woman character. For the first time in black literature we feel the growing up of a black girl, not from without but from within" (Christian 57). Her identity, however, has always been in herself, and she discovers her Self. She becomes an independent woman inside, and releases herself when her husband Jody dies: "She had found a jewel down inside herself and she

had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138).

In a cultural sense, she discovers black values precious as jewels, and appreciates them. The jewel inside is her African Heritage. When blacks lived in Africa, they had a shining culture; however, as Hurston emphasizes, when blacks were taken to America they were forced to abandon all their beliefs and cultural values behind, because they were to take up a new life formed by the white master. Their African side had to be destroyed so that there would be enough room for the new slave identity. They knew that it was too hard to beat an individual having strong beliefs and fate in self. Sadly, the white master tore the soul inside out, and placed it with subservient souls. In the course of slavery, African American people forgot who they had been in the past, and always remembered they were slaves. That they were emancipated did not help to get free of the identity of inferiority. Indeed, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* at the deathbed of Jody, Janie denotes the destruction of African identity of blacks while she expresses the destruction of her marriage to her: "But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 133). Janie, or Hurston as a Niggerati, has the courage to raise her voice and claim her identity back as a black woman:

> When God made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark has a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks make them hunt for one another, but mud is deaf and dumb. Like all

> other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried to show her shine (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 139).

She does not want to let others hunt her forever and rejects the identity and life imposed by them. She tries to let her true Self shine out. As Sigrid King argues, Janie rejects being like her folks, and wants her cultural values grounding her black identity to shine: "Janie finds a jewel within herself and opposes the image to tumbling mud-balls. Janie has a new sense of strength and identity which comes from within herself rather than from her association with someone else" (King 692).

In his autobiographical novel *The Ex-Colored Man,* James W. Johnson depicts the profound effects of slavery and racism left on blacks' psyche: "I did indeed pass into another world. From that time I looked out through other eyes, my thoughts were colored, my words dictated, my actions limited by one dominating, all-pervading idea which constantly increased in force and weight until I finally realized it a great, tangible fact" (cit. in Wald 85). Similarly, Janie goes through the same experience. In contrast to Johnson's experience she is colored by her own race. Jody, who imitates whites, treats Janie exactly the way blacks were treated in slavery, and tries to make her subservient. Moreover, in the novel, through Jody, Hurston criticizes her black contemporaries adopting, or imitating the mainstream discourse and claiming that their black aspirations are a barrier when they represent the black identity. While they claim equality, they believe the values create a gap and leave them behind; however, Hurston believes that they are as talented as whites, and without black motifs they are just author, not black. Therefore, Hurston proudly makes the coloredness deeper, when she depicts the life in Eatonville in vernacular black language. Briefly, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Hurston blanches the colored ideas with her 'black culture.' In other words, as Priscilla Wald emphasizes "Hurston challenges rather

than succumbs to the binary opposition of the color line by embracing rather than mitigating her difference" (Wald 85).

The trial of Janie is one of the important scenes of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in terms of Janie's identity. Even if Janie is both black and woman, in the court she is able to justify her murder of Tea Cake. She can express herself completely. As Hemenway asserts the trial scene exemplifies her independence as a woman: "a complete woman, no longer divided between an inner and outer self" (Hemenway, *Zora Neale* 240) She no longer has inside and outside not to mix. Indeed, what makes her complete is her voice that she gained in her cultural values. The conversational marriage with Tea Cake and the life outside Eatonville allow her to use her voice and tell her own story. That she is released on the day of the trial, even if she is charged with a murder, indicates that she is not a muted black woman any longer, but a black woman who can express herself thoroughly:

> The fact that women are doubly-negated, first for being black and second for being women, confines them to a very narrow space that is domestic space of the kitchen, the bedroom, and the nursery. The fact that a few of them can actually tell stories in the community dominated by black males begins to challenge male monopoly of the use of language and expands what I have called the "mother empire" (Twagilimana 146).

When the verdict is made the white women stand around Janie like a protecting wall. They support their gender, no matter what her race is. "These women as women identify with the woman's story of romantic tragedy, no matter the race and class of the protagonists, but identify with their race interests against the African-American males", DuPlessis claims (104). Jennifer Jordan also agrees those white women serve to shield her: "Janie as a source of power recognizes them as her next protectors" (Jordan 112). It is certain that they serve to shield her, but I argue that Janie does not see them as her next

protectors. She is a complete woman who does not require any help from anyone. That Janie is in her overalls is a victory over the white women in pretty pink dresses. Although she is a black woman, she has already passed the boundary of the gender. She is not the one who needs the protection, but them. When Janie states "It would be nice if she could make *them* know how it was instead of those menfolks" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 275), and wishes they knew how it felt to have an egalitarian relationship. She sets an example for them instead of being in need of their help.

Mrs. Turner, who runs a restaurant in the muck, differs from the other Afro-American women in the novel in the way she rejects her racial identity rather than accepting it. Not only has she strongly rejected to be a black person, but also she does not tolerate them. She criticizes the way blacks act and the old nigger songs, which are part of their culture, they sing:

> And dey makes me tired. Always laughin'! Dey laughs too much and dey laughs too loud. Always singin' al' nigger songs! Always cuttin' the monkey for white folks. If it wuzn't for so many black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin' us back (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 210).

She is so alienated from her own culture that she cannot see the significance of those songs. Moreover, Turner judges Booker T. Washington and accuses him of 'cutting the monkey' for whites, but she is the one that cuts the 'signifying monkey' of her own, kills it, or abandons her heritage and adopts a new one. She is so alienated from her own culture that she cannot see the significance of those songs. According to Hurston, the virtues of the individual make him/her superior than another, not the color of skin. She claims that nothing can hold back a virtuous person, even if he/she is black:

> I'm conscious of the fact that mere connection with what is known as a superior race will not permanently carry and individual forward unless he has individual worth, and mere connection with what is regarded as inferior race will not finally hold an individual back if he possesses intrinsic, individual merit (cit in Plant 39).

Although it is different today, in the past many black people who had individual worth suffered from racial prejudice. It took many years to acknowledge the priority of individual merit.

1.3. Janie's Search for Her Identity in Her Three Marriages

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the three marriages of Janie take part as the three stages of her quest for her conscious life. Hurston chooses husbands from different classes in each marriage to show that the satisfaction of woman has nothing to do with the husband's class, but rather his personality. Janie agrees to the first two marriages believing that 'marriage can make love', but her third marriage reveals that it is just the reverse.

> Janie's desire to be an individual and explore herself is awakened under the pear tree. Therefore, the image of tree is very important, and throughout the novel it is used as a metaphor of dreams. The orgasm she experiences under a pear tree, initiated her desire for a perfect union that is supposed to create love: "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 43).

Logan Killicks

Janie's quest for the perfect union starts with kissing Johnny Taylor in front of Nanny's gate: "She […] decided that her conscious life had commenced at Nanny's gate" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 23). Unluckily her quest is misdirected at the very beginning, when

Nanny forces her to marry Logan Killicks, who constitutes the first phase of her quest. Before she dies, she wants to make sure that Janie will not be a spit cup of any men, either white or black. She wants her to be a secured mule. Nanny, who has a black male mind in a black woman's body, sees the marriage as financial security and protection, which equates her with the black men of Eatonville claiming that women need protection and assistance: "Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have baby, it is protection" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 30) Likewise, after Jody dies her black folks tell her over and over that she needs a husband: "Uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing. Dey need aid and assistance. God never meant 'tuh try tuh stand by theirselves" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 139).

Janie agrees to marry Killicks with the hope that marriage can make love, but it cannot. Old Killicks can offer property, food and protection, but cannot offer what Janie married for: love. In the course of time, his treatment of her becomes a boss-like manner when he asks her assistance on the farm:

> If Ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuh yuh, look lak you oughta be able tuh tote it inside. Mah fust wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow. She'd grab dat ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 45).

Killicks needs a work mate rather than a wife on his farm. Jeanie agrees to be a wife, but definitely rejects the role of the mule: "You don't need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo' place and Ah'm in mine" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 52) He informs her that he will buy another mule that even a woman can handle; thus not only Nanny but also Logan identifies woman with a mule, because the patriarchal society places the women in the position of 'the mule' that is worked to death. When Logan tells about the second mule he will get, he studies Janie's face to find out her opinion. She says nothing, because she thinks Nanny was right. Thus, her place in the society is confirmed. She accepts the label

without uttering a word; moreover, in her second marriage, she does not wait for Jody's affirmation. She readily identifies herself with Matt Bonner's mule:

> Nanny's naming of all black women, including Janie, as "mules" will haunt Janie for the next twenty years. She will be identified with the work animal first by the Logan Killicks and then by Joe Starks when he buys a mule many years later in Eatonville. Janie will not be free of the mule name until Joe's mule finally dies (King 687).

Certainly, Logan does not promise the horizon for Janie, but hard work on the farm. That he accuses her with her family background, becomes the last thing she can tolerate in her marriage: "Ah'm too honest and hard-workin' for anybody in yo' family,dat's de reason you don't want me!...Ah guess some low-lifed nigger grinnin' in yo' face and lyin' tuh yuh" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 53). Janie knows that Logan is an obstacle for her self-actualization. Therefore, she deserts him, and puts an end to her mismatched marriage.

Jody Starks

Only after Janie leaves Killicks, does she move in Eatonville with Jody Starks, whom Hurston distinctly denotes as the imitator of whites. She is not attracted to Jody but she agrees to run off with him since "he speaks for horizon" (Hurston, *Their Eyes*_50). He is a man who knows and can express what he wants. Unhappily, Jody does not differ from Killicks in terms of meeting his own expectations and fulfilling his own needs. While Killicks keeps her as domestic servant, Jody keeps her as an ornament at his white-like designed home, both of which are not what she expected from marriage. Even though, Jody can meet her needs and financial protection, he cannot offer the love she has been seeking for, and the price she pays for her protection is twenty-year-imprisonment in her white house. Consequently, Janie's physical prison is replaced with her emotional imprisonment.

Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* uses the figure of the mule not only to depict a tale in African American style, but also to denote how Janie suffers inside. While she gives an example of "crayon enlargement of life" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 81), she expresses how Janie identifies herself with Matt Bonner's mule. The mule of Matt Bonner appears in the novel when Jody's ambition for power becomes severe. Since she is used to be identified with that beast of burden, she readily compares her psychological mistreatment with the mule's mistreatment. They enjoy the resistance of the mule, and make fun of Matt Bonner: "The mule is any and all 'underclasses': deprived, overworked, starved; it is the butt of jokes; it is stubborn and ornery to its master, with ways of resistance that are deeply appreciated by the talker" (DuPlessis 112). Thus, in her stream of consciousness, she deliberately wants them to stop abusing black women. "They ought to be shamed uh theyselves! Teasing dat poor brute la they is.!Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuyh death. Wisht Ah had mah way wid 'em all" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 89). When Jody overhears her, he pays for the mule and emancipates him, which makes her realize how she is dissatisfied with Jody, and initiates a strong desire for freedom. Janie becomes an independent woman in the mind, and the emancipation of the mule initiates her desire for physical liberation. She ironically criticizes him for behaving as if he did something as great as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Jody would be a great person in her eye provided that he ceased his sexist attitudes:

> Jody, dat wuz a mighty fine thing fuh you tuh it. 'Tain't everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought. Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh

> have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 92).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, while the black women identify themselves with a mule, the males in town identify them with chickens and children. As hooks claims, the males in the novel try to impose on their woman the idea that black women are inferior to black men; therefore, Jody and his friends persistently equate women with children. which is they consider women as creatures who do not have the ability to think and understand. Jody states "They just think they's thinkin'. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 111). According to them, women are helpless creatures like chickens, always in need of aid and assistance; however, Janie rejects being a helpless chicken, and for the first time she thrusts herself into a speech to prove how clever a woman is. She criticizes them for being too cruel to women and walking around proud as God Almighty. She rejects inferiority, and claims men are less clever than they think they are:

> Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' you different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 117).

Jody's ambition for power and control over Janie drags her out of the porch, where she is not allowed in conversations with males, and puts her in a noble high place, where she hardly ever finds an accompanying friend apart from Phoeby. Her husband insists on Janie's obedience, and constantly tries to keep her out of the canvas, on which the townsfolk draw the black life. In other words, she is completely deprived of the beauties of

her black culture. Whenever Janie wants to join the mule's baiting, she is hustled off in the store, where she kills the time: "When Walter Lige and Sam or some of the other big picture talkers were using a side of the world as a canvas, Joe would hustle her off inside the store to sell something. Look like he took pleasure in doing it" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85). The more Jody asks for submission, the less faith Janie has in her marriage. Eventually her faith gradually fades away: "The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 111).

The womenfolk are envious of her life, whereas she is discontent with it. She just wastes her time in the store alone. It does not keep her busy, instead gives her "a sick headache" (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 86). She now knows that marriage does not make love. She makes a bash at changing her life, but proves unavailing, and has to endure him until he dies; however, in the course of her marriage with Jody, she masters dealing with her predicaments. She learns "how to talk some and how to leave some" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 118). No matter what Jody says, she does not talk back, but grows a strong woman going silent rebellions inside: "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. She had an inside and outside now and suddenly she knew how not to fix them" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112-113). She discovers that while her shadow prostrates itself before Jody, she sits under a tree's shade enjoying her lonesomeness:

> Then one day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and clothes. Somebody near about making summertime out of lonesomeness (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 119).

She creates her own way to deal with her oppressor: “She didn’t change her mind but she agreed with her mouth.”Her heart said, “Even so, you don’t have to cry about it.” (Hurston, Their Eyes, 99) As Shawn E. Miller posits “Janie as an internally static feminist hero seeks liberation from masculine oppression as a necessary prerequisite to self-actualization” (Miller, 75).

The battle of dozens is the turning point of Janie and Jody’s marriage. “She starts to use words to fight back at him. Janie finally defeats Joe with her words, during their fight in the store, and the big voice is silenced” (King 690). Janie, who has been silent for a long time, arms herself with her African American heritage and defeats him with her black linguistic trope of Signifyin(g). In Janie’s story the dozens represent the battle between a male and a female. It is the time when a black woman is powerful enough to claim her identity: “Janie’s growing awareness of her chatteldom causes her to become less subservient and more resistant to Joe’s domination” (Johnson 70). Her rising voice indicates her desire, which is to be accepted as an individual in her black society; however, although Janie is able to obtain her voice, she will not be able use it for a quite long time. Moreover, she gets brave enough to humiliate him in front of his friends: “But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 123). “When she faces her oppressor she reverses the seat of power” (King 691); however, her reversing the seat of power results in getting the mighty slap of Jody.

When the whole book is taken into consideration, the battle represents the intellectual fight between the “Niggerati” (Hughes, *The Big Sea* 185). In this battle the ones claiming that they need to enrich their works with their African America Heritage, like Hurston, versus the ones claiming that their racial aspirations hold them back. Thus, in the fight, the rising of very black voice is Hurston’s claim, that the best way to denote a black is to use the black values. She rightly criticizes the works of her contemporaries, but

unfortunately she is rewarded with the bitter criticism-as mighty as Jody's slap- of her black contemporaries. On the other hand, Hurston's getting praises for her works takes quite longer than Janie's. Only after her works were discovered in 1970s, the "Genius of South" (Walker 107) became widely known and respected.

Janie does not mourn after Jody dies; on the contrary, she enjoys the freedom she has: "Tain't dat Ah worries over Joe's death, Pheoby. Ah jus' loves dis freedom" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 143). When she looks herself in the mirror, she sees her youth is replaced with a beautiful brave woman. She tears off her head kerchief from her head and says: "Come heah people! Jody is dead. Mah husband is gone from me" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 135). She expresses the relief of getting rid of such a disease. Furthermore, that Hazekiah models Jody indicates that the men don't hesitate to carry on the patriarchal values and are likely to widen the disease.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* it is quite obvious that Janie suffers a lot in her marriage because of Jody; however, she does not get divorced and endures him till he dies. With today's feministic approach, the reader might ask why she does not leave Jody. The reason is that Hurston's parents are the basis of Janie's second marriage, and in spite of the quarrels they had his father was loyal to his marriage until Hurston's mother died. Moreover, in order to stay loyal to moral values, she does not let Tea Cake enter the novel until Jody dies:

> They didn't have these zippers on pants in those days, guaranteed to stay locked no matter what the strain. From what I can learn, those button-up flies were mighty tricky and betraying. Maybe if I ask around, somebody will tell me what modern invention has done for a lot of morals (Hurston, *Dust Track* 11).

Hurston's mother was a strong woman like Janie, and was able to criticize her husband, but only at home: "[…] he would start to put up an argument that would have been terrific on the store porch, but Mama would pitch in with a single word or a sentence and mess it all up" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 69). In the novel, Hurston carries them to her fictional porch, and enjoys the victory of her mother, as she imagines in her autobiography.

After Jody dies Janie takes a great step, and decides to live in her own way rather than Nanny's. She judges Nanny's doctrines and realizes how she has been misled by her: "Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon and pinched it into a little thing to tie around the neck of her granddaughter" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138). Therefore, she leaves her behind and opens a new page in her life, and then she discovers her womanhood down inside her: "She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 138).

Tea cake

Tea Cake, differing from both Logan and Jody in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* constitutes the last phase of Janie's quest for her horizon. While money and land meant power and protection for Logan and Starks, Tea Cake earns it to survive. He has neither ambitions for property and power, nor does he expect her to act in a specific manner. Contrary to Nanny's conventional qualifications for a man to marry, he is a reckless gambling musician. Janie's egalitarian marriage with Tea Cake breaks down the sex roles; they go fishing, go shooting, play chess together. Thus, Janie goes beyond the boundaries of male dominant Eatonville, which Janie denotes as horizon.

When Tea Cake arrives in Eatonville and meets Janie, he treats her very unconventionally. Now that she has been dreaming about him since her awakening under the pear tree, he seems to her very familiar: "Tea Cake wasn't strange. Seemed as if she

had known him all her life" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 151). He removes the borders of gender and offers to play her in checkers. It was quite unorthodox for Janie to be asked to participate in the game. Not only does he teach her the game, but also he encourages her: "How about playin' some checkers? You look hard tuh beat." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 146). On the other hand, Jody never lets her play the game. Moreover, he claims that she is not clever enough to learn it: "You reckon so? Jody useter tell me Ah never would learn. It wuz too heavy fuh mah brains" (Hurston, *Their Eyes*_147). Jody tries to destroy her soul, exactly the way whites did, to make her believe and feel inferior. Contrary to Jody, Tea Cake is very kind to her, and very adept at how to treat a woman: "He struggled gallantly to free himself. That is he struggled, but not hard enough to wrench a lady's fingers" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 147). When Hurston depicts what she feels about him, she starts how Janie is amazed with the treatment she gets, and then expresses her being attracted by the physical traits. The way he treats is much more important than his appearance, and both attractions make herself start glowing inside:

> 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. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. This lean, over-padded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice!" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 146)

The game of checkers is not the only thing that he encourages her to do. Likewise, he teaches her how to shoot a gun, which will be the way of Janie's self-defense in the end of the novel, and he takes her fishing late at night, which makes her feel like a child breaking the rules. Indeed, both Tea Cake and Janie breaking the rules of the male dominant black society of Eatonville results in Tea Cake's being a threat for the other black men, because his unconventional treatment to Janie is likely to raise new demands

and expectations of black women of the town. The egalitarian relationship of Janie with Tea Cake sets a very bad example for them: “Dat’s jealousy and malice. Some uh dem very mans wants tuh do whut dey claim deys skeered Tea Cake is doin”(Hurston, *Their Eyes* 168).Moreover, Tea Cake takes Janie to the Everglades where her development is completed and she is able to self-actualize. She finds the egalitarian relationship, or the perfect union, she has been anticipating for a long time. If it were not for Tea Cake, Janie would not find out the difference between a mink and a coon hide: “Unless you see de fur, a mink ain’t no difference from a coon hide.” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 19) Janie has to be isolated from Eatonville to see the different world outside and experience how it feels to partake in every activity. Briefly, Tea Cake makes Janie discover that love is made when both woman and man feel, think and act in the same way.

On the other hand, in the course of their marriage, the way he treats her gradually changes. Tea Cake, the ideal husband, starts to show the similar masculine behaviors, and uses violence to make his women subservient. The dreamlike husband image becomes tainted when he whips her because he gets jealous. Mrs. Turner, who hates blacks although she is mingled, brings her brother over to meet Janie. Tea Cake whips her to make her sure that she just belongs to him: “Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her assured him possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 218). A black man should be the last person to whip a black woman, since he already knows that the inner scars of whipping are more profound than the ones on the skin; however, Janie is too deeply in love to see the scars inside.

In the novel, before the storm the natives, who know the region more than anyone, leave the Everglades, but Tea Cake decides to stay where they are, because "De white folks ain't gone nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 231). He

ignores the warnings of the natives and values more what white men do. He, like other black males, believes that whites are always accurate in their deeds. Consequently, he is punished by a rabid dog bite for his misjudgment: “This implicit trust in white people's authority proves their downfall and results in the deaths of scores of people. Tea Cake's possession by the rabid dog that bites him is the most graphic example of the consequences suffered by black folks who blindly worship whiteness” (Lamothe 165). Tea Cake is killed by Janie in the position of biting her. Even though she loves him too much, she shoots him, and chooses life rather than death.

When Zora Neale Hurston decides on the death of Tea Cake, she bases the reason why she kills him on real events. In the novel, the cause of death is a big flood, which is almost synonymous with Florida. When we look at the news about the hurricanes issued in *The Evening Independent* on September 21,1928*,* why she kills him becomes clearer. As Indians warn the people in Everglades in the novel, the Seminole Indians warned the people for the West Indian Hurricane in 1928. According to Indians the saw-grass bloom was a sign for a danger, and they left the area for their safety. The hurricane raged in Palm Beach and razed the Okeechobee Lake area. Many people lost their lives except for the Indians. Thus, the Indians, who were loyal to the customs of their tribe, were able to survive the flood:

> To those familiar with the customs of the tribe, however, this possibility of great loss of life seems somewhat remote.[…] So far no villages of the Seminoles have been reported as even seen since the last hurricane It is confidently believed by those who know their habits and traditions, and legendary, that the Indians again sought shelter when they saw the saw grass bloom” (“Sawgrass Bloom” 1).

Two days before the West Indian Hurricane destroyed the Okeechobee Lake area, the last issue of *The Everglades News*, on September 14 in 1928, reported on the second memorial ceremony for those who lost their lives in the flood disaster in Moore Haven on September 18 in 1926. The news reports that the residents "had decided it was better to forget and go on anew, putting their sorrows behind them" ("Issue of 'Everglades News,'" 1); however, the West Indian Hurricane did not let them bury their past memories, because the storm was more disastrous, and took more lives than the previous one.

In a news report in *The Evening Independent* issued on August 15, 1935, it stated that Walter J. Bennett, senior meteorologist in charge of the United States weather bureau, did not take the Indians seriously and referred them as 'old timers'. He claimed there was no relation between blooming saw grass and hurricanes, and it was not possible to forecast a hurricane until its center is formed ("Saw Grass Bloom Held" 12) The Labor Day Hurricane struck Florida Keys two weeks after Bennett's explanation, and it was said that the reason of great loss of lives was lack of precautions: "Officials are expressing fears that loss of life may be the highest ever exacted by a Key's hurricane. Prime reason for this conclusion is the almost complete lack of preparations which were taken in this area" (Bamford 4). If they had trusted the Indians, who trust their beliefs, more people would have been able to survive the natural disaster: "When the saw grass blooms, in the minds of the Indians, danger is impending. They wait not for word from the white man to tell them, because Manitou has forewarned them" ("Sawgrass Bloom" 1).

Briefly, I argue that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Hurston lets Janie kill Tea Cake, since he fails to hold on his cultural values. Tea Cake, 'The son of the Evening Sun,' representing south and black culture starts to change and shows act of aggression that Hurston strongly objects. His physical abuse to show who is boss signals his perfect image of black individual being tainted: "Dat would like she had some influence when she ain't.

Ah jus' let her see dat Ah got control" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 212). If he had self-confidence, what Mrs. Turner says would not bother her.

After Tea Cake's death, Janie returns back to her town. In her previous marriages she was removed from the society by her two husbands, but her life on the muck with Tea Cake makes her a member of a society. Jennifer Jordan claims that "Janie returns to Eatonville because she cannot continue her quest for excitement without Tea Cake and has demonstrated no ability to survive alone" (Jordan 114). Janie is much stronger than Jordan claims, and she is strong enough to live without him. With Tea Cake, Janie's quest is already over. She has already been to horizon, and she has found what she has been looking for. Obviously Jordon reads Janie's quest as her quest for a romantic love. She does not need to continue her quest, because it is already over in the Everglades, where women have equal rights with men, and the mutual understanding and respect creating the real love. Later she comes back to Eatonville, or back to her culture that makes her. It is the place where she belongs to, and it is her menfolk who she wants to change. She still has the hope that one day the women may fall to the level of men. Jordan also claims that "Janie never perceives herself as an independent, intrinsically fulfilled human being. Nor does she form the strong female and racial bonds that black feminists have deemed necessary in their definition of an ideological correct literature. The novel fails to meet several of the criteria defined by black feminist criticism" (Jordan 115). She is also complete enough to live with her wisdom in the old white-like minded black men. Briefly, Jordan falls prey to Hurston's Afro American signifyin(g) tactics:

> The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writings but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize

it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 4-5).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the death and the physical abuse of Tea Cake do not reduce what she feels for him; on the contrary, her love for him becomes immortal: "He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking." She chooses to remember the passion and the good times rather than the violence and abuse. She does not hate him, since he is the one taking her to the horizon, or offering an egalitarian relationship she has never experienced before: "Tea Cake got me into wearing 'em-following behind him. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 18) The townsfolk, however, jump into the conclusion that Tea Cake has taken all her money and deserted her when Janie comes back Eatonville in her overalls. On the contrary, the overalls she wears signify the equal life she experience owing to Tea Cake. She tells Phoeby that in his funeral "She went on in her overalls. She was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief"(Hurston, *Their Eyes* 281). Phoeby is the only person who can understand the grief she feels for the Tea Cake's death, because Janie has provided her with the difference between "the coon hide and mink fur." Even though she has never been outside Eatonville, Janie's story enables her to understand the significant role he had in Janie's identity search.

Gordon E. Thompson in his article on gender projection claims that after Tea Cake dies, Janie replaces him as the male personification: "By the text end, with Tea Cake gone, Janie begins to impersonate (or personify) the image of the independent male" (Thompson 746). That Thompson reads Janie's being an image of independent male, however, clashes with the aim of the novel. Janie, who has been to her horizon, has a transformation, but within her gender. She does not need to impersonate anyone. Her experience with Tea Cake in the Everglades gives her the chance to gain her voice, and she uses it when she arrives in her hometown to tell her story. Hurston does not wrap her up with a different

identity and Janie as a woman does not need it, either. Moreover, as he claims that "she is relative to the other members of her community, independently wealthy, and she wears overalls, knows how to fish, but more important, how to shoot a rifle- all gifts (except the wealth) she inherits from living with Tea Cake" (Thompson 746). Thompson fails to notice that Janie puts her overalls away for remembrance. She can wear them outside of Eatonville, but not in her town, since they are still a weapon against men. If Hurston impersonated her as an image of independent male, she would not take off them in Eatonville. Hurston does not mask her character with, as he claims, "the socially determined requisite gender of that story teller" (Thompson 749). Thompson's article "Projecting Gender: Personification in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston" published in 1994 clearly shows that even in late 20th century, her talent unfortunately was not approved and appreciated by male intellectuals. Just like Richard Wright, he fails to see her breakthrough in literature.

In conclusion, to make Phoeby comprehend Janie's evaluation from being a mule to being a female African American individual, she needs to hear Janie's whole story, especially her three marriages so that she can differentiate Tea Cake, who is the last and the most important man in her quest. In the last phase of her quest, she undertakes a journey to the horizon, where she is able to give life to her soul, which has been destroyed by the mentality of slavery. She finally finds out that "If people thinks de same they can make it all right" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 173). With *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Hurston expresses her notion that black intellectuals will be able to succeed in representing blacks when they all agree on how to depict them. Also the agreement will provide them with the unity of blacks as the African American ethnicity. In the end of the novel the horizon turns into fish-net with "so much life in its meshes" (286), In other words, Janie puts on her life experience furnished with her African America identity over her shoulders:

> What waits for me in the future? I do not know. I cannot imagine, and I'm glad for that. But already, I have touched the four corners of the horizon, for from hard searching it seems to me that tears and laughter, love and hate, make up sum of life (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 265).

1.4. The Identity Politics of Hurston

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Zora Neale Hurston's aim is to depict the black individuals, so she focuses on self-pride rather than racial pride. She avoids racial matters, because she believes that the black individuals will make no progress with propaganda writing on the way of representing black people in literature. According to her, the Harlem Literati must leave the memories of slavery and racial prejudice behind, and use their cultural values as the tool; otherwise, being color struck will always stay as an insurmountable barrier on the way of their advancement. In other words as Deborah Plant claims: "African American people were not so much responsible for their conditions and situations, but they were responsible for changing them" (33).

The mule baiting in the novel is very important in terms of Janie's becoming conscious about her desire to be a free woman in a patriarchal society. Similarly, in her real life, Hurston experiences the same sort of conscious. Since she is not in favor of dealing with racial issues, she uses her experience to depict the consciousness of a woman in a man and woman relationship. When Hurston was quite young, a white old man she calls Old Man Bronner in *Dust Tracks on a Road* was beaten up by a group of white people. Hurston's father and some other black folks in the town thought the man being beaten up was black and ran for help. The women waiting for their men tell old memories of hanging and lynching. Hurston, who live in all-black town and does not experience any racial discrimination, does not get any connection between 'the incident' and 'race,' but later the

paper on black and whites presented in a program at Methodist Church makes her aware of the racial tension between the blacks and whites: "But in me, the affair stirred up more confusion. Why bring the subject up? Something was moving around me which I had no hooks to grasp. What was this about white and black people that was being talked about?" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 189)

That Hurston grew up in all-black town is not the only factor that helps her to resist succumbing to despair. Booker T. Washington is an important figure who infused Hurston with optimism. He founded Tuskegee Institute, which helped a lot in blacks' advancement. After the Civil War the slaves were emancipated, but the illiterate and unskilled black men were not taught how to live as a free man. Therefore, immediately training schools were founded, the most important of which was Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee Institute was designed to teach its students a work ethic, self-pride, and individual merit. The Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School, where Hurston developed her ideas about black identity, modeled Tuskegee and instilled its students the same virtues. At Hungerford, Hurston learned to judge the people with the virtues they have, but not with their skin color (Plant 39). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Hurston refers to Booker T. Washington when she criticizes Mrs. Turner:

> They drew color lines within the race. The Spirituals, the Blues, any definitely Negroid thing was just not done. They went to the trouble at times to protest the use of them by Negro artist. Booker T. Washington was absolutely vile for advocating industrial education. There was no analysis, no seeking for merits. […] They were attempting a flight away from Negrodom because they felt that there was so much scorn for black skin in the nation that their only security was in flight (Hurston, *Dust Tracks*

Hurston neither sees anything wrong with being a Negro, nor glories in being one. Racial pride is as she expresses is "a luxury she cannot afford" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 249) According to her, personal strength and courage are more important virtues than an individual's complexion. The skin color does not decide whether to praise or criticize Negro art. She celebrates the art of the Negro, since it deserves the praise, but not because it is done by a Negro artist. She believes that if she were to praise a good deed by a Negro just because of the race, she would have to feel embarrassed when a Negro did something execrable. She has rather an individualistic approach to race prejudice, and against generalization. According to her, it is not correct to judge an ethnic group based on one member of it. Therefore, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Janie does not take Mrs. Turner seriously, because Janie, who reflects Hurston's views in the fictional world, has the self-pride, which avoids her falling into the traps of racial prejudice.

> I found that I had no need of either class or race prejudice, those scourges of humanity. The solace of easy generalization was taken from me, but I received the richer gift of individualism. When I have been made to suffer or when I have been made happy by others, I have known that individuals were responsible for that, and not races (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 248).

As for Hurston black people must overcome the 'color struck' mentality of that lighter skin is better. She stresses that skin color is not a decisive factor regarding the character of a person when the dead bodies are buried after the flood in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The crops covered with mud cannot tell whether the dead person is white or black: "Nobody can't tell nothin' 'bout some uh dese bodies, de shape dey's in. Can't tell whether dey's white or black" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 253). The skin color does not tell what inside of an individual, and who s/he is, but her/his cultural values do tell a lot about the person.

According to her, the cultural values must be the distinguishing factor between two people, but not the complexion.

In her essay "What White Publishers Won't Print," Hurston uses the terms Anglo-Saxon and non-Anglo Saxon, and refers to their ethical background when she discusses blacks and whites. She prefers not to deal with racism and complexion if she cannot do anything about it. She finds the strength she needs to represent herself as a black woman in her cultural values: "I must tell the tales, sing the songs, do the dances, and repeat the raucous sayings and doings of the Negro farthest down" (Hurston, *Dusts Tracks* 145). According to Hurston the lack of interest between Anglo-Saxon and non-Anglo Saxon peoples was much more important than it seemed. Lacking knowledge about the internal emotions and behaviors of the minorities will prevent understanding each other in a multicultural nation like America. Like animals, man is afraid of what he does not understand, and likely to "connote something malign" (Hurston, "What White"). The gap between the racial groups within a nation caused by lack of understanding "is not filled by the fiction built around upper class Negroes exploiting the race problem. Rather, it tends to point up. A college-bred Negro still is not a person like other folks, but an interesting problem, more or less" (Hurston, "What White"). According to her, dealing with racial problems alone does not differentiate an educated black from any other uneducated person having the same problem.

Briefly, Hurston has a positive approach to representing a black individual, and with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* criticizes her male literary peers. She advises the black female intellectuals to focus on their cultural values. In my opinion, the only problem with the identity politics of Hurston is that instead of belonging to be a specific ethnical group, she wants to be considered as an individual whose values distinguish her from the others; however, what she overlooks is that an individual gains her/his values from the

ethnical group she belongs to; in other words, what shape an individual's personality is depends on her/his family and the society s/he lives in.

CHAPTER II

THE MUT/LE VERSUS THE VOICE

2.1. The "Big White Voice" of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

After emancipation, black men embraced the norms of whites and became the imitators of whites. Instead of holding on to their racial heritage, they held the values of whites: "Without public recognition of a racial past, African Americans became vulnerable to age-old charge that they were merely good imitators, interlopers in a tradition not their own" (Joseph 461). Unfortunately, they believed in the whites from the very beginning, and then they suffered from the consequences. Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, criticizes the patriarchal black society that silences the black women.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Janie's second husband constitutes the main character that she focuses her criticism on. After Jody and Janie get married, they start a new life in Eatonville. Jody voluntarily becomes the mayor, and builds a town in center of which he places himself both physically and psychologically. He builds his store in the center of the town and his store becomes the spot where "the big picture talkers" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85) hold their conversations. Also his ambition to be the 'sole voice' puts him in a situation so that he treats everyone as if he were not a mayor but a master of the town. Some of the townspeople seem to appreciate and admire his competence of organizing the life in Eatonville. They acknowledge that there should be someone to rule their community; however, they all are not content the way they are ruled. He bosses them around and acts as a 'white master' rather than a 'black mayor': "Speakin' of winds, he's de wind and we'se de grass. We bend which ever way he blows […] Sam, you know dat all he do is big belly round and tell other folks what tuh do. He loves obedience out of everybody under de sound of his voice" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 78). The white house he builds in the middle of the town clearly shows his envy for white people. He offers

townspeople a life that is quite reminiscent of the slavery years. He adopts the oppressive system of whites, and behaves as if he were different from the rest of the town. His money and his ambition to be the 'big voice' give him the right to class himself off in the society he belongs to. Donald Marks states that "Hurston clearly considers the kind of social system Starks establishes to be as oppressive and economically unbalanced as that imposed by white society" (Marks 153). What Hurston emphasizes here is that following the road whites marched down does not advance black people; on the contrary, they regress back to, not exactly but almost, the slavery years.

Even though people in Eatonville acknowledge "colored folks shouldn't be so hard on one another", they keep their obedience for the reason that they need a mayor in town. They continue to bow to Jody and in return their town is kept in order. Thus, this mutual involvement makes what they endure now different from the endurance of blacks in slavery years. As Hurston stresses the 'big voice' would mean nothing, if he did not have people around listening and obeying: "They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and again he was all of these things because the town bowed down" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 80) Moreover, he also acts like a master at home. Janie also bows to him, but unwillingly. He does not let her get involved in any conversations with "trashy people" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85). While Jody calls porch talkers trashy people, Hurston denotes them as "the big picture talkers" (85). They are not trashy people; on the contrary, crucially important characters in the novel, since they use "the other side of the world for a canvas" and depict their stories on them. All those stories carried on the porch constitute the African American folktales, whose rhetorical practice of signifyin(g) enable only the blacks to see the art created on the other side of the canvas. "On the other side of the world" refers to the tradition of signifyin(g), and the absence of 'g' in black vernacular language allows the word to have a black meaning along with a white one. Therefore,

townspeople talking on the porch are not trashy people; on the contrary the story tellers create African American Art. Hurston also criticizes the patriarchal society, which does not let her participate in the porch talks, and deprives her of this artistic endeavor.

While Hurston criticizes the fact that Janie is not allowed in mule baiting, she embalms her male folks by giving jealousy as an excuse. In the novel, jealousy is a motive that will cause first Jody, later Tea Cake to physically attack Janie. Hurston gives her an excuse right after one of the crucial scenes, when she is hustled off inside the store and is not allowed to share her opinion about Matt Bonner's mule. Indeed, since Jody is jealous of Janie, he tries to keep her away from the porch talkers. That's why he forbids her to indulge in the porch conversations with them. One night, he catches Walter touching the back of her hair and enjoying the feeling without Janie noticing: "Joe never told Janie how jealous he was. He never told her how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it as she went about things in the store" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 86).

The opening night of Jody's store is critically important in the novel, since Hurston expresses how black women are silenced in patriarchal black society. After the announcement that Jody Starks's is the mayor, Tony asks Janie to make a speech of her own, but Jody abruptly cuts off the suggestion claiming that she is unable to make a speech. He stresses that she is a woman and all she needs do is to take care of her home and domestic works: "Thank you fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothing' 'bout no speech-making'. Ah never married her for nothin' like that. She is a woman and her place is in de home" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 69). She never had any intention of a making speech before, but the way Jody prevents her from talking raises an awakening and "takes the bloom off of things"(69). For the first time in her life she feels cold for her husband. On the other hand, just a few minutes ago Tony Taylor feels like making a speech and he

does. Although people hardly bare his nonsense talk, he finishes his speech, but Janie is not even allowed to start hers.

The Big Voice becomes so strong that Janie eventually learns to keep quiet. Whenever she feels like defending herself and fighting about the matter, she despairingly prefers to keep quiet for the sake of her peace and marriage: "She wanted to fight about it. 'But Ah hates disagreement and confusion, so Ah better not talk. It makes it hard tuh git along'" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 90). She does actually attempts to raise her voice over Jody's, but it just makes him more furious and he treats more master-like: "Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good. It just made Joe do more. He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 111). She is forbidden to express her personal opinions, and her desires are reduced to none. Thus, in the course of time Janie turns into an enviable ornament in the house that shows off the superiority of the Big Voice: "Jody reduces Janie to an enviable possession advertising his superior status to less fortunate men. As a possession she is denied any self-defined goals and even the expression of her own opinions" (Jordan 109). As time goes by, the home turns into a prison for her. While she wastes her time and life in the store, her love for him falls away:

> The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took the living bedroom in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever a company came to visit...The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 111).

Jody unconsciously adopts the white-like oppression and carries it out at his white house in the middle of the all-black Eatonville. The authority he has over Janie seems to elicit order at home, but causes a rising inside of her. Her submission is just "a bow to the

outside of things." Thus, she develops a surviving strategy, which is similar to Hurston's strategy for whites she used in her writings: "He can read my writings but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song" (Hurston, *Mules and Men* 4-5). She behaves as Jody asks, and starts hating him inside; however, she never let him know what she feels for him: "Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She had an inside and outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 112- 13). Therefore, her obedience does not make her a weak person; on the contrary, she grows a woman inside strong enough to challenge the 'big voice'. As time progresses, Janie trains herself to suffer in silence: "So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 111). Thus, she becomes capable of enduring her monologue-like marriage. She stays stone silence and turns her torture into a weapon, or "a surviving strategy", in her resistance. As Sally Kitch states "'For most of the twenty years of her marriage to Jody Janie adopts silence as a survival strategy" (Johnson 50).

The mule baiting of porch talkers makes her so furious that she cannot help protesting, but through silent rebellions in the back of the porch, where Jody is not supposed to hear her. As she hates "disagreement and confusion", instead of protesting aloud, she just mutters herself. She thinks nobody can hear her yell out, but Jody can: "They ought to be shamed uh theyselves! Teasing dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuh death. Whist Ah had mah way wid 'em all" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 89). That her Nanny compares women to mules makes her identify herself with Matt Bonner's mule. She speaks for the mule, but actually she gives utterance to her sufferings. While she signifies her sufferings, white-like minded Jody cannot comprehend what she

really wants. He takes her utterance literary and emancipates the mule. Only after Jody emancipates the mule, does Janie make a speech heavy with irony. She compares Jody to Abraham Lincoln. Davies claims that "Somewhat similar to the trickster figure of the Signifying Monkey, the mule is also a symbol of defiance and stubbornness in the face of the oppression; but much like the mule's and Janie's are 'silent rebellions'" (Davies 151). To some extend Janie is a silent rebellion, since the inner voice keeps on rising and becomes audible, even if it is said under her breath. What she says is not comprehended, yet she is heard.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we do not have detailed background information on Jody, but we know that he comes from Georgia, not an all-black place like Eatonville. When we look at Langston Hughes's article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", his elucidation of why the black poet has a desire to write like a 'white poet' helps us to comprehend the way Jody treats people. The middle class blacks living with whites and going to mixed schools have lower life standards compared to whites. The parents of those middle class children work and serve for whites for a living. Children are preached not to behave like 'niggers,' but the way whites behave. As a result, they fail to see the beauty of being black. Subconsciously, they believe 'white is best,' and feel ashamed of being black:

> And the mother often says, 'Don't be like niggers' when children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, 'Look how well a white man does things." And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all the virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality, and money. The whisper of 'I want to be white' runs silently through their minds" (Hughes, "The Negro Artist").

According to Hughes, the better life, though less wealthy compared to whites, does not offer a better solution for the educated upper class black. They imitate Nordic manners and life. The father takes the lightest woman he can find as his wife. In the North they prefer to attend white theatres and movies, in the South they have a car and a house like white people. For Hughes it is "a very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people" (Hughes, "The Negro Artist"). Similarly, Jody marries Janie who has a light complexion, builds a big 'white house' in the center of the house, and classes himself off, which results in his failing to understand the expectations of his wife. Therefore, I believe Hurston, who shares Hughes' opinion about representing the Negro artist, criticizes her black contemporaries, or as Hughes calls "Nordicized Negro intelligentsia", who overlook the black values and conform to the canon's standardization.

2.2. The Dozens between the Mule and the Big Voice

Even though Janie is capable of dealing with her oppressor, she cannot help having controversial speeches with Jody, especially when she is insulted about her age and looks. In the store he criticizes her about the way she cuts a plug of tobacco and unnecessarily refers to her age and appearance:

> I god amighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don't stand dere rollin' yo' pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin' nearly to yo' knees! (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 121)

Janie gets t offended and finds the courage to initiate the most serious 'the dozen' game between. They bilaterally insult each other. The verbal sparring reaches the crisis when Janie rejects Jody's claim about her age and appearance:

> "Stop mixin' up mah doings wid mah looks, Jody. When you git through tellin' me how tuh cut uh plug uh tobacco, then you kin tell me whether mah behind is on straight or not"
>
> "Wha- whut's dat you say, Janie? You must be outa yo' head."
>
> "Naw, Ah ain't outa mah head neither."
>
> You must be. Talking' any such language as dat."
>
> "You de one started talkin' under people's clothes. Not me."
>
> "Whut's the matter wid you, nohow? You ain't no young girl to be getting' all insulted 'bout yo' looks. You ain't no young courtin' gal. You'se uh ole woman, nearly forty[...]Nobody in heah ain't lookin' for no wife outa yuh. Old as you is" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 122).

This is the first time that she gets involved in an argument and leaves the effect of the talking mule in Hurston's mule story. Both comparing a mule and a black woman is unexpected. As Johnson emphasizes, "Janie metaphorically runs both Jody and the porch talkers out of country. The mule is the Other and Hurston's voice, through Janie, speaks in defense of this Other, as mule, as black, and as a woman. " (Johnson 57) Furthermore, Hurston emphasizes the battle between with the italic pronouns that are "*you*" and "*me*":

> "Ah reckon Ah looks like mah age too. But Ah'm a woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talking' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 122-123).

She gets "too moufy", or "too full of metaphor." The stronger her discourse becomes, the weaker Jody's authority gets. As Gates and many other critics claim her discourse becomes so powerful against his it kills Jody: "Janie kills her husband,

rhetorically, by publicly naming his impotence (with her voice) in a public ritual of Signifyin(g). His image fatally wounded, he soon succumbs to a placed "kidney" failure" (Gates 193). Ironically, Janie gains her voice in the store, where she is not allowed in conversations, by engaging the battle of "the dozens". Both Janie and Jody exchange their figurative insults, and set a very good example of trope of signifyin(g).

The game of "the dozens" is an element of Signifyin(g) in African American oral tradition. The rhetorical strategy of Signifyin(g) was originated from the African Signifying Monkey folktales, which a large number of blacks are familiar with. The tradition of signifyin(g) is generally practiced by children in games, and as Gates affirms by male poets in literary works: "The Monkey tales generally have been recorded from male poets, in predominantly male settings such as barrooms, pool halls, and street corners. Accordingly, given their nature as rituals of insult and naming, recorded versions have a phallocentric bias" (Gates 54). In other words, the tradition of Signifyin(g) was practiced only by black males. In the battle of 'dozens', Hurston uses metaphors to make the scene more authentic, and more African American, and lets Janie practice the ritual of Signifyin(g), which is strictly forbidden to her. She dares to announce the impotency of her husband so loudly that the other practitioners of the Signifyin(g) hear her, which degrades his manhood and leads him to death. Therefore, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* "the dozens" constitutes a male tradition that she turns into a lethal weapon. Hurston lets Janie defeat Jody with his own tradition. She arms herself with a male discourse in a traditional male battle game and gets the victory in the long run.

Twenty years later, for the second time Janie dares to express exactly how she feels about Jody at his deathbed. This time she won't hush, makes him listen, and tells everything she wants:

> Ah knowed you wasn't gointuh lissen tuh me. You changes everything but nothin' don't change you-not even death. But Ah ain't going outa here and Ah ain't goingtuh hush. Naw, you goingtuh listen tuh me one time befo' you die....Listen Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down the road wid. You'se what's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crawded out tuh make room for yours in me" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 133).

In her speech, she claims that she has been deprived of her freedom and right to talk, and she claims that it is 'new Jody' who is responsible for that. She claims that he has changed a lot and has not kept the promises he has made; however, the problem here is it is not old Jody that is dying but old Janie. And it is Janie who is not satisfied with the way Jody is. Janie's mind has changed so much that it lacks room for the thoughts imposed. Furthermore, both have had horizons to reach in opposite directions; one directs to whites' and the other to blacks'. Jody has always wanted to be 'a big voice' and he becomes. That Janie challenges his voice and her voice gets as big as his raises big problems for Jody, who wants to be the sole voice. When he talks about his plans for the future, she perceives those plans as her horizon she wants to reach. It takes years for her to comprehend that a horizon is like a personal shawl of fishnet, whose meshes are filled with one's own life expectations and experiences. It may not fit everyone.

When we look at this issue from Jody's point of view, it seems unfair to Jody to be accused of being too selfish: "Ah know it. And now you got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo'self if you wants any love and sympathy in dis world. You ain't tried tuh pacify nobody but yo'self. Too busy listening tuh yo' own big voice" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 133). He keeps his promises; he makes his change and changes a

piece of land into a town, and makes her a lady just 'sitting,' but not enjoying the talks carried on the porch. In the very beginning, he actually defines her place and pictures the lonely and isolated image of her. Also when the position of Janie's in her first marriage and the life that Jody offers for her are compared, it is quite clear that he has carried out his promises:

> You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 50).

Janie, however, already knew that he was not the one for the 'perfect union.' She runs off with him, only because he spoke of a horizon: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for horizon. He spoke for a change and chance" (Hurston, Their Eyes 50). Also, she has already experienced that marriage does not create passion, or the love she is looking for: Her being misled by Nanny makes her fail to understand that the horizon that she wants to reach is just her freewill, which could enable her to decide who to marry. On the other hand, it would be also unfair to Janie to say that because Jody has made his horizon clear at the very beginning it justifies the crime he commits. She misinterprets the future he draws for her, and thinks he is the one taking her to the horizon. Thus, she depends on him to make her own dream true: "It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over" (Hurston, Their Eyes 112).

2.3. Janie's Acquisition of Her Voice

It is a fact that in a male-dominant society women are muted and obliged to suffer in silence as are Janie's mother, grandmother, and other black women in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; however, after two failed marriages, Janie is unlikely to conform to the patriarchal society's codes dictated by Nanny. Thus, she decides to continue her life with her own codes, and luckily she finds the man who will take her to the Everglades, or into the world of conversations. In contrast to her monologue-like marriage with Jody, Tea Cake enables her to participate in every conversation. He lets her use her maiden language again, then she regains her voice and right to speak as a woman: "He done taught me de maiden language all over" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 173). He is the only one that makes her feel as both a woman and an individual who has the right to love, have desires, and express herself. In other words, he is the only one who holds his African heritage tightly, and offers Janie an egalitarian relationship rooted back in Africa.

When Janie goes to the Everglades, she finds the life she has been searching for. She is not a woman, but an individual who can talk and tell her stories to the others. She feels sorry for her friends in Eatonville, because here she can play games only men are allowed to play in Eatonville, engage in conversations and dress in the way she likes. The blue denim overalls and heavy shoes are indication of that Janie is able to rise to the level of men in the Everglades. When she goes back to Eatonville after Tea Cake's death, she puts them away, since the town is not ready for this big change. Furthermore, in the Everglades, she has a voice and listeners around her. Her third marriage and the Everglades offer her a porch of her own where she can laugh, talk and tell stories: "The man held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories from listening to the rest" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 200).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Tea Cake is a crucial character, because he obtains the emancipation of Janie, but Hurston dos not write the novel just to tell a romantic story. Her aim is to create a black woman who is able to tell her own story. That's why in the end of the novel Tea Cake must die for Janie to establish her voice and a fictional life. Otherwise, Tea Cake who gradually turns to a common oppressive black man would not permit her keep it. He helps her to discover and rejoice her voice, then tries to limit her because of his growing jealousy, which makes him crueler than the other two husbands. Janie kills Tea Cake not from the fear that she might me muted again - she already knows that she will be somehow muted again when she goes back her hometown - she does not want to lose the consciousness that she has just discovered. Although Hurston embalms Tea Cake's physical attack with rabies, it symbolically denotes the attack on Janie's identity. Both verbal attacks (by Jody) to her 'voice' and physical attack to her 'body' (by both Jody and Tea Cake) are attacks on her identity, since 'the body' and 'the voice' are crucial constituents of an individual that bring him/her into existence in a society: "Having a voice means owning one's self and living as an independent person who makes her own decisions and determines her own life" (Racine 290). Thus the two husbands are punished for their attacks with death. Janie kills Jody by her discourse. The inner voice she started to grow when Jody tries to silence her becomes a weapon that kills him. Tea Cake teaches Janie how to shoot a gun, and she unintentionally kills him with the skill he teaches her. Briefly, two men's cruel assaults result in her killing them with their own weapons. Hurston probably directs her narration accordingly to depict her rage against the oppressive black society as Molly Hite asserts: "Hurston has motivated her narrative, perhaps unconsciously, to act out her rage against male domination and to free Janie, a figure for herself, from all men" (Hite 259).

Even though both husbands are unintentionally killed by Janie, the fatal attack of Tea Cake does not change what she feels for him. After his death, she will not let his memory go, since he is the one who encouraged her to let the woman inside come out and walk proudly in her overalls in the public: "Tea Cake got me into wearin 'em-following behind him." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 18) He does not expect her to act according to the codes of the society. Therefore, until she dies, she will keep his memory alive:

> 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 (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 286).

Hurston closes the book with the accomplishment of Janie in storytelling. Her quest for her voice is over now. She has been to her horizon and got the wisdom that will enable her to live in comparisons. She has become strong enough to live in her hometown where she is not seen as a female individual yet. Even if Tea Cake is absent in her life, her life is not as empty as it is when she is married to Jody: "Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin sit heah in mah house and live by comparisons. Dis house. ain't so absent of things lak it used to be befo' Tea Cake came along. It is full uh thoughts, specially dat bedroom" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 284). Still she will be subject to sexual discrimination, but now she is strong enough to deal with it, as Hurston deals with it in her own life.

2.4. The Voice that Tells Tales

Their Eyes Were Watching God opens with the end of Janie's quest. She finds the Mouth-Almighty sitting in their usual place, which makes her arrival perfectly timed. It is a time when "words walk without master. […] like harmony in a song" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 10). In other words, it is time to talk on the porch and tell lies, or create black art. Now she is a strong black woman who has a great story to tell; however, she cannot have Mouth-Almighty as her audience yet, because her male dominant society is not ready to hear. As Hurston was not authorized to the conversation on her father's porch, Janie cannot cherish to share her story with males on the porch. Even though her experience through three marriages has changed her a lot, nothing has changed the Mouth-Almighty. They are too curious, and they raise questions whose responses are already judged. They pass around the pictures of their version of Janie's story on the porch. Therefore, she tells her great story to her female kissing friend Phoeby, who prefers to listen to her story rather than to judge her right off as other women and men in the town: "Phoeby will understand because she is the one person in the town who wants hear Janie's story rather than imagine it"(Matza 46). Moreover, she is a woman who has experienced how it feels to be mute and can comprehend what she has been through: "Janie's privileged listener is her best friend Phoeby, whose as audience are her empathy and equality with the narrator" (Hite 269).

Some critics, like Molly Hite, read Janie's arrival in overalls as the indication of gaining her voice. She asserts that "the protagonist, Janie, discovers her voice and uses it to assert her own authority in a world of full of speechmakers and taletellers" (Hite 267). Although she has a voice to tell a great story, she is not able to share her story with males, the only authorized taletellers in the town. The males in the town do not differ from Jody; and she has already practiced to keep quite when it is necessary: "Ah hates disagreement and confusion, so Ah better not talk. It makes it hard to get along." (Hurston, *Their Eyes*

90). Thus, when she arrives in, she lays her overalls away for remembrance. Even though she becomes a very strong woman, she will not wear them, because the males in Eatonville are not ready for this challenge yet. She will keep them as remembrance that will remind the world outside of the town where she was an individual who can talk and listen. She is aware that she cannot be a porch talker, unless the overalls stop signifying masculinity. Yet, she does not give up hoping to fall males' level someday and be able to be engaged in conversations with them: "The women took the faded shirt and muddy overalls and laid them away for remembrance. It was a weapon against her strength and if it turned out of no significance, still it was a hope that she might fall their level someday" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 11). Jane becomes such a successful story teller that she succeeds in helping a friend to get conscious. After she finishes her story, Pheoby, who judges Janie by her overalls in the beginning of the novel, is encouraged to get her husband to go fishing: "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah mean tuh make Sam take me fishin'wid him after this" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 284).

On the other hand Roberto Stepto claims that Janie does not really win her voice: "Hurston's curious insistence on having Janie's tale- her personal history in and as a literary form - told by an omniscient third person, rather than by a first-person narrator, implies that Janie has not really won her voice and self after all. The author, (who is, quite likely, the omniscient narrating voice) cannot see her way clear to giving Janie her voice outright" (cit. in Thompson 737). That Hurston uses an omniscient third person does not indicate that she cannot see her way clear to giving Janie her voice outright. The reader has already overheard the story of her; thus Hurston does not need to retell it. The aim of Hurston in the novel is to make obvious how black vernacular language differs from the canon's. In the novel Hurston is an outsider who expresses the talk between two black women sitting on the porch. Moreover, that Hurston uses third person narrating enables her

not only to merge the mule's tale within the Janie's tale but also to give voice to such characters as buzzards. Briefly she knows where to let Janie speak.

In Janie's trial chapter, the furious and disgruntled friends of Tea Cake claim that "White man and uh nigger woman is the freest thing on earth. Dey do as dey please." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 280) Even though they both belong the same race, the gender difference does not let them unify. As traditional black males, they judged on the spot without listening Janie. They come to the trail "with their tongues cocked and loaded": The loaded tongues are the only weapon they can use. They are quite oppressive to their womenfolk, but they are too weak against to white people. The only weapons they can use to hurt Janie are their loaded tongues: "They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only weapon left to those weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 275). While Hurston denotes how furious the black men are, she emphasizes the strong language of blacks. They may seem to be weak against white people, but they are able to fight against them with their strong language, exactly the way Hurston uses her vernacular black language as a weapon in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

> An incredibly affirmative novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also portrays a black woman's poignant yearning to merge her quest for liberation with that of the black man, while maintaining her right to live without his abuse. It illustrates how the double voice of one black woman provided a way for her to speak, to write- to create art- and, thus, to survive. (Davies 157)

CHAPTER III

FOLKTALES AND BLACK VERNACULAR LANGUAGE

3.1. The Significance of Folktales in Hurston's Works

Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological records form a basis for her fiction. The folklore, tales, trickster, and verbal competitions became the tools for Huston to establish black culture. Her anthropological expeditions provided her with the primary source of imagination to be a prolific writer. She blended the anthropological elements into fiction so skillfully and subtly that the reader reads a story, but not just a piece of anthropological work: "More specifically, we have a subtle transfer of anthropological elements into the fictional world, in which the two, in fact, coexist" (Twagilimana 139). Her experience along with her anthropological researches blossomed into very successful literary works. These literary works became precursors for other African American woman writers, the most prominent of whom is Alice Walker:

> Zora, who had collected all the black folklore I could ever use...What I had discovered, of course, was a model, who, as it happened, provided more than voodoo for my story, more than one of the greatest novels America had produced- though, being America, it did not realize this. She had provided, as if she knew someday I would come along wandering in the wilderness, a nearly complete record of her life (Walker 12).

Hurston had never been an ivory-tower scholar. She was always among the people, and did her researches in the sources of the folklore. Furthermore, as Langston Hurston described, when she needed an answer, she would not mind where she was and what other people would think of her. She would self-confidently carry out what she needed to.

> […] she was such a fine folklore collector, able to go among the people and never act as if she had been to school at all. Almost nobody else could stop

> the average Harlemite on Lenox Avenue and measure his head with a strange-looking, anthropological device and not get bawled out of for the attempt, except Zora, who used to stop anyone whose head looked interesting, and measure it (Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* 186).

Since her childhood Hurston had been keen on tales told on the store porch of Joe Clark, the founder of first all-black town Eatonville. It was the most interesting place for her, because menfolk in town used to hold 'lying sessions' on the porch: "The store porch was the most interesting place where I could think of[…] menfolk holding a lying session about God, the Devil, animals and natural elements" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 48), many of which "stirred up fancies in men. It did not surprise me at all to hear that the animals talked" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 52). These lies and exaggerations constituted the raw materials she would use in her works. As she states in the very beginning of her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she reinterprets the gleaming stories she heard on the porches in her own perspective to convey her message: "I picked up glints and gleams out of what I heard and stored it away to turn it to my own uses[…] Life took on a bigger parameter" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 52). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a very good example of colorful exaggerations of life experiences sprung up on the porches out of facts. Life in the book takes a bigger parameter, and enables Janie to go beyond the boundaries where she gains her black female identity, which is quite rare in such a male dominant society of Eatonville.

On the other hand, Hurston was not authorized to listen to porch talks in her childhood. Her father would prohibit her from the conversations hold on the porch; moreover, her grandmother never appreciated her talent for making up stories, and would blame her for telling lies:

> "Oh, she is just playing," Mama said indulgently.

> "Playing! Why dat' lil heifer is lying just as fast as a horse can trot. Stop her! Wear her back-side out. I bet if I lay my hand on her she'll stop it. I vominates (abominate) a lying tongue" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 54).

Hurston was very enthusiastic about personifying her surroundings and creating her own tales, but her personifications were considered simply as lies. For Hurston those lies carried on the porch constituted folktales, and entertained the townspeople as folktales did. Despite the criticism of her grandmother, she never lost her enthusiasm for porch talks that are closely associated with her own tales and personifications in her works. "Without a doubt, for Hurston, these animal fables, with their anthropomorphic, personified creatures, continued to hold deep cultural implications; she would naturally find it supremely unjust that anyone would want to prevent her from indulging in these fantasies" (Thompson 748). It is quite certain that all the tales, personified creatures and animal fables told on the porch left a profound effect on Hurston, and eventually, with her personal additions, she expanded them into African American novels representing her race.

Hurston opens *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with a poem-like prelude conveying her message to black females, which is to forget about the suffering of slavery and to focus on ethnical vales. According to Hurston, African heritage is an asset that completes 'African American people'; therefore, it must not be overlooked. To express only the experiences of slavery will not help them to get rid of the 'slave identity': "I see no reason to keep my eyes fixed on the dark years of slavery and Reconstruction" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 254). In contrast to her male contemporaries, her works are heavy with a great body of African American folklore representing her ethnicity, but not racial sufferings. Therefore, in her studies Hurston focuses on African American folklore; furthermore she practices her findings in her works:

> Ships at distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in come in with tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in the 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 accordingly"(Hurston*, Their Eyes* 9).

In the novel, while she depicts Janie's search for horizon, she signifies the Negro artist's search for the best way to represent blacks.

The opening of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a reaction to Frederick Douglass, and she stresses the gender difference in representing the black identity. The "Watcher" signifies upon Douglass who depicts himself in *Bondage and Freedom* as a black man enslaved in his thoughts. According to Hurston, black men need to be free in their minds and to get rid of slavery's sufferings. Thus, Hurston advises or suggests women not to follow men, and to leave the slavery years behind. They have to abandon all old memories leaving profound effects in their lives. They should not allow pessimism to kill their dreams. They must have dreams to help them stand and have strength to struggle in life. Most important of all is that to remember the things men don't want to forget, that is their African Heritage. This is the "Truth" that will free them in mind. That's why Hurston focuses on her cultural values rather than racial issues as Frederick Douglass does:

> In his work the ships with white sails are so delightful for the free white man, since their dreams have become real, but it is a mental torture and a ghost hunting for him. According to Hurston, blacks need to focus on their values rather than the white vessels that torment them.

> Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with the thoughts of my wretched condition […] My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:
>
> "You are loosed from your moorings, and free; I'm fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in bands of iron! Oh that I were free!" (Douglass 220)

The pessimistic attitude of black men is also stressed by Hurston in her work, *Dust Tracks on a Road.* She states that: "If he has no memory of yesterday, nor no concept of tomorrow, then he is My People, There is no tomorrow in the man. He mentions the word plentiful and often. But there is no real belief in a day that is not here and present. For him to believe in a tomorrow would mean an obligation to consequences. There is no sense of consequences. Else he is not My People" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 240). The black men neither seem to be enthusiastic about their future, nor have any intention to dream about it. Tomorrow means only the new racial obstacles they will have to deal with. They cannot draw a better picture of their lives, in which they are joyful and hopeful. That's because they are too busy being pessimistic. They cannot prevent old memories from haunting themselves in the rest of their lives. Eventually, they stop dreaming.

Indeed, Frederick Douglass's apostrophe is not the only black mentality that Hurston criticizes in the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. When she talks

about the "Truth" she refers to the speech W.E.B Du Bois made for Carter Godwin Woodson, the recipient of the Twelfth Spingarn Medal. The speech was published in *The Crisis* in October 1926 as article called "Criteria of Negro Art." Du Bois, in the article, strongly advices the Negro artists to use the tool of "Truth," which he actually refers to "propaganda" as writing style, when they create the beauty of black art in their works. According to him, the way the black man perceives America is quite different from the white man, and it is the bounden duty of the black artist to express the 'beauty of the being black' to white America that fails to see it. Du Bois claims that they must use propaganda when they depict who the black is, the injustice of slavery and what they want as American citizens. Furthermore, if they were not allowed to tell the Truth, being a free man would mean nothing:

> Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before. And what have been the tools of the artist in times gone by? First of all, he has used the Truth[…]
>
> Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize an ideal of Justice […]
>
> Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy (Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art").

In contrast to Du Bois, Hurston does not see the Truth he claims as the correct tool that a Negro artist needs to represent the blacks. I argue that in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,

the rabid dog denotes the raging black artist that taints the black identity with his propaganda writing. With the pure hate in the dog's eyes, Hurston signifies upon the Truth, or propaganda, Du Bois advises the Negro Artist aspire to:

> You was twice noble tuh save me from dat dawg. Tea Cake, Ah don't speck you seen his eyes lak Ah did.[…]Ah'm never tuh fuhgit dem eyes. He wuzn't nothin' all over but pure hate. Wonder where he come from? (247).

On the other hand, while Hurston disagrees about the tools Negro artists use to present the blacks, she advises the female writers in the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* what Du Bois advises black literati. In his article, he states that black man is upset when he looks back to the past, so he does not want to remember it; however, he is also becoming aware that he has black heritage that he can be proud of and hand down to his children:

> This is brought to us peculiarly when as artists we face our own past as a people. There has come to us -- and it has come especially through the man we are going to honor tonight -- a realization of that past, of which for long years we have been ashamed, for which we have apologized. We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember; which we wanted to hand down to our children. Suddenly, this same past is taking on form, color, and reality, and in a half shamefaced way we are beginning to be proud of it. We are remembering that the romance of the world did not die and lie forgotten in the Middle Age; that if you want romance to deal with you must have it here and now and in your own hands (Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art").

While Hurston's contemporaries were busy with the profound effects of slavery, she was too busy with sharpening her oyster knife to weep at the world: "I'm not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do

not mind at all […] No I do not weep at the world- I'm too busy sharpening my oyster knife" (Hurston, How It Feels). Instead of crying over history, she tried to find a way to deal with it, which was her black culture. She sharpened her pen to process the pearls, which would shine out through the pages of her works, in the oysters she found in Florida, Bahamas, Hawaii and Jamaica. As Pam Bordelon claims "Hurston's choice not to deal with the subject of race on a personal level may have proved wisest of all" (Bordelon 19). Instead of personal race matters, she concentrated on individuals' problems. To build an African American identity, she focused on both past and the present. Her prominent expeditions and researches, the significance of which we appreciate and comprehend better today, helped her to create works having an African American tone and an optimistic approach to the impediments in life. She was never offended with her dark complexion; on the contrary, she embraced the values that came along with it.

Henry Louis Gates, in his article "Zora Neale Hurston and Speakerly Text" discusses the norms in the black novels. He suggests that Hurston perfectly followed those suggested by W.S. Scarborough in his 1899 plea for a great black novelist:

> Let him portray the Negro's loves and hates, his hopes and fears, his ambitions, his whole life, in such a way that the world will weep and laugh over the pages, finding the touch that makes all nature kin, forgetting completely that hero and heroine are God's bronze images, but knowing only that they are men and women with joys and sorrows that belong to alike to the whole human family. Such is the novelist that the race desires. Who is he that will do it? Who is that can do it?" (Gates 180)

As he stresses, it was a "She", Zora Neale Hurston, who succeeded: "He that could do it, it seems, turned out to be a she, Zora Neale Hurston." Hurston's talent enables her to convey a story that is so alike to a woman's of any race on earth; however, that Hurston focuses

black culture's values should not be overlooked. Almost the whole book shines out the languages and folktales of those 'bronze images of God'.

Once Toni Morrison was asked why she wrote the kinds of books she wrote and her reply was "Because they are the kinds of book I want to read" (cit. in Walker 7). As Walker stated neither 'Jane Eyre' nor her creator can be identified with a black person even though that character and the creator are widely-esteemed. In her essay called "The Site of Memory", Toni Morrison refers to the opening sentence of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, which is "Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 1) and asserts that "These 'memories within' are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me" (Morrison 71). It is quite obvious that Zora Neale Hurston was a great artist, by whom other great artists were inspired. She sets an example for her next generation how to create art from life experiences. They all managed to make 'the jewel' shine deep inside of themselves.

In *Dust Tracks on a Road* Hurston recalls the southern white man who helped her mother to deliver her into the world. He was her first mentor and instructed her about how to be a proper colored girl. He strongly advised her not tell any lies, because according to him only the scared person took refuge in lying. The other person would certainly understand it, and continue his abuse:

> Niggers[1] lie and lie! Anytime you catch lying, they are skeered of something. Lying is dodging. People with guts don't lie. They tell the truth and then if they have to, they fight it out. You lay yourself open by lying. The other fellow knows right off that you are skeered of him and he's

[1] The word Nigger used in this sense does not have a racial connotation. It means a weak, contemptable person of any race (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 30).

> more'n apt to tackle you. If he don't do nothing, he starts to looking down on you from then on. Truth is a letter from courage. I want you to grow guts as you go along. So don't let me hear of you lying. You'll get 'long all right if you do like I tell you. Nothing can't lick you if you never get skeered. (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 30-31)

Although her mentor affectionately tries to protect her, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston claims that all the tall tales that black tell are part of their culture, and they constitute the folktales. Contrast to the old man, she believes that those lies do not make them scared people; on the contrary, they provide them with an agent representing them as blacks. The 'Truth' is not a letter from courage, but the tall tales, or the African American folktales. They should hold on these tales so that they can stand bravely before the oppressor.

3.2. Figurative Narration and the Mule Tale

During slavery, blacks developed a rhetorical practice called 'signifying' to communicate among themselves. Their practice later forms the "The Signifying Monkey", which is originated from of Esu, the trickster figure in Yoruba culture of Africa (Gates 11). This rhetorical principle of African American black vernacular discourse enabled slaves to create their own folktales signifying their white masters and conveying their message symbolically. Since the tales had double and indirect meaning, they were only understood by blacks:

> The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writings but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize

it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song"(Hurston, *Mules and Men* 4-5).

These narratives and the animal stories, most of which collected towards the end of 19th century, are related to slave experience and constitute a large body of folk narrative. They were part of entertainment in Southern life. In these stories, there is a slave called 'John', and he is always subject to deal with the plantation owner. He plays tricks on his master, and tries to narrow the gap between his status and his master's. Although he is considered as a hero and gains victory over the master, the narratives mainly result in John's being punished. Briefly, John the slave or other animals in those stories provide camouflage for social criticism (Dickson 420-423)

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston uses folk tales to signify on black men rather than whites. The Mule Tale in the novel serves as one of the 'John and the Old Master' stories drawing attention of the reader to the situation of black women. Hurston practices the 'signifying' tradition and reinterprets her black culture to stress the dominance of the patriarchal structure in a black society: "These myths are reinterpreted and retranslated by Hurston to reveal the position of women within the African American community" (Johnson 56). In other words, folktales are exaggerated critical adaptation of black people's experiences to African American motifs.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Matt Bonner's stubborn mule becomes the matter talked about on Jody's porch. The exaggerated lies and tales about the mule spring up on the porch only after Jody emancipates him. His post-emancipated life is so enlarged with crayons that he becomes a freed folk living in the town, or on the other "side of the canvas of the world (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 85). Indeed, in the novel the mule represents Janie's desire to get rid of the bridles Jody has put around her. Nanny's comparison of black women with mules makes her identify herself with Bonner's yellow mule. Not only

does she want them to stop mule baiting, she also wants to be freed from her bridles. She wishes to find a way to deal with male oppression: “They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasing dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin’ im tuh death. Wisht Ah had mah way wid ’em all” (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 89).

In the mock funeral, instead of crows, the sacred animals in Africa, Hurston identifies buzzards as the trickster figure, since buzzards were considered sacred in United States. Then she adapts the folk song of “crow dance” and its dance into the buzzard scene; thus, the buzzards become the folk figure representing men in Eatonville. A Lomax – Hurston recorded interview provides a clarification about the talking buzzards:

> Hurston: This is a game that evidently has come from Africa. Dr. Herskovits says that he saw the background of it in West Africa, of the crow. The crow in some way seems to be sacred in Africa. But what they are talking about is what we know in the United States as the buzzard and the buzzard comes to get something to eat and they are talking about it and they dance it. And one person gets in the center and imitates the buzzard and the rest of them from the back ground.
>
> Song
>
> Oh, my Mamma come see that crow
>
> See how she flies
>
> Oh, Mamma come see that crow
>
> See how she flies
>
> This crow, this crow goin’ fly tonight,
>
> See how he flies

This crow, this crow goin' fly tonight,

See how he flies

Oh Mama come see that crow

Caaaa

Oh Mama come see that crow

Caaaa

Oh, my Mamma come see that crow

See how he flies (cit. in Hemenway, The Personal Dimension 42).

Kathleen Davies claims that "With the buzzards, Hurston evokes a stunning recuperation of the 'inaudible voice', Nature the last laugh and hinting at what is to come. This 'inaudible voice' actually speaks as the buzzards ('The Parson' included) assemble to mock the human mock-eulogy in a call-and-response segment that serves as a judgment against the mule mockers" (Davies 152). Certainly, Hurston mocks Jody and the mule baiters in the tale; therefore, "the Parson" constitutes a satire of Jody. In Eatonville, Jody is like a parson preaching to everyone. He is the 'Big Voice' that knows what is right and wrong. After Jody becomes the mayor, he routinely begins almost every sentence with 'I god', and associates himself with a religious figure; thus, Hurston uses a sacred figure in the mock- eulogy to satirize him. Furthermore, that the leader is white headed is both a trickster figure and an allusion to Jody's impersonation of white people and his overlooking the conventional behaviors of blacks. Briefly, with the Mule's Tale Hurston criticizes black men with heavy irony to express how they turn out to be a trickster figure playing tricks on the women in their imitative white-like world.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis in her article "Power, Judgment, and Narrative" states: "The mule is an actor in Janie's realization and emancipation" (DuPlessis 113); however, the mule not only represents Janie, but also the black women that work too hard. As Nanny states at the very beginning of the book, "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 29). They are the "beast of burdens" working to death. They work not only at home but also in the field with black men, because black men leave the rest of the work they are assigned to the black women. Although black women are emancipated, they have to work as slaves for their black men. Furthermore, black women are also subject to starvation. In the end of the mock funeral, the white-headed leader arrives and makes a speech. The leader representing Jody gives his speech as proudly as Jody does. He walks around the dead body of the mule to make sure that he is dead, and then he asks "What killed this man?" The flock responds: "Bare, bare fat" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 97). That part of the ceremony will be clarified when the reader finds out about the story of Mrs. Tony, who comes to Jody's store and begs for some food. She claims that her husband does not feed her and her children. All Jody gives her is a piece of meat, which will certainly not be enough for them. While she leaves his store she says: "Some folks ain't got no heart in dey bosom. They's willin' tuh see uh po' woman and her helpless chillum starve tuh death." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 115) Thus, the question and response dialogue is ironic, because Jody and the rest of the menfolk are oblivious to the main reason of 'what killed the mule'.

Before Mrs. Robbins is portrayed, Hurston denotes acting-out courtship, at center of which is Daisy. She knows how to use her female features. It is certain that not only Jim, but other males are willing to "step backward offa dat earoplane just to walk home wid" her (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 108). While it is an honor to accompany Daisy, it is also a shame for Mr. Tony to have her as a wife: "If dat waz *mah* wife,..Ah'd kill her cemetery dead." And Cooker adds "Ah could break her if she waz mine[…]Making uh fool outa me

in front of everybody." Moreover, what Joe Lindsay says is much crueler: "Tony won't never hit her. He says beatin' women is just like steppin' on baby chickens[…] tain't no place on uh woman tuh hit but Ah'd kill uh a baby just born dis mawnin' fuh uh thing lak dat. 'Taint nothin' but low-down spitefulness 'ginst her husband make her do it." Women are compared to a helpless baby chickens, which makes Janie exasperated enough to thrust herself into the conversation and criticize unfair judgment and comparison: "It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh starin against but women and chickens'" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 115-117). The pride of the men is so strong that they wouldn't hesitate to kill a baby girl, on the day she is born, if she is likely to embarrass her male in the future. It is very obvious that the men in the town are too selfish and they fail to see the problems of women. Not only do they talk about hitting a woman as something to be proud of, but they do not take the blame for committing serious crimes against women, as in the end of the mock funeral. With figurative narration, Hurston criticizes how men ignore the mule's cause of death, or in other words the damage they cause in women's well-being.

3.3 Black Vernacular Language and Black Identity

In biographical slave narrative, black authors readily borrowed the dominant American rhetoric to construct their self-representations and to reach their intended audience. They thought that their dialect would be a "literary trap" (Gates 177); however, expressing themselves in dominant discourse removed and obscured the natural difference between the two languages, and as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese claims, made them represent themselves with the other's point of view: "But the abiding danger persisted of seeing themselves through the prism of a (white) androcentric discourse, literary through men's eyes, through white's eyes"(Fox-Genovese 223). Definitely the works of African-

American autobiographers germinated the seedbed of African American literature, but the penetration of black vernacular language into dominant language through the works of literate blacks created a new way to approach to black culture. In contrast to those slave narrations, Hurston used her black language and presented it proudly to construct the ethnical difference and black identity. As she states in *Dust Track on a Road,* her dialect was an important part of her racial representation: "In the first place, I was a Southerner, and had the map Dixie on my tongue" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 92). Thus, she made the rhetorical difference more apparent by blending vernacular language with the canon's, to create a distinguished rhetorical genre that black people were identified with: "for Hurston the search for a form of narration and discourse, indeed the search for a black formal language itself, both defines the search for the self and its rhetorical or textual analogue" (Gates 192).

With the immersion of dominant discourse, Hurston made her folk culture, or oral culture distinctive from the other. One of the reasons that made *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a successful and distinguished novel is the well-balanced and skilled usage of black vernacular language and dominant discourse. The originality of the novel is marked out with the usage of vernacular language. As Priscilla Wald claims "because of her anthropological training and her doubly marginal status as an African-American woman, Hurston invented a remarkable strategy that enabled her to speak from the margins" (80). That Hurston uses black oral language is very important in the sense of representing blacks' cultural values with their own style of speaking. In the novel, the third person narrator uses the dominant discourse while characters speak in the black vernacular language, which makes the narration a story within a story. The within story is a long porch talk between two black women; therefore, Hurston intentionally uses 'black oral language' to narrate an 'oral story':

> One can readily agree with Susan Willis that black texts are "mulattoes" (or "mulatas"), which a two-toned heritage: these texts speak in standard Romance or Germanic languages and literary structures, but almost always speak with a distinct and resonant accent, an accent that Signifies(upon) the various black vernacular literary traditions, which are still being written down (Gates xxiii).

Moreover, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou makes clear where to speak black vernacular language and the dominant discourse. She points out how her different dialect distinguishes her race from the white one in everyday life, and she had to immerse herself in white culture to recognize the differences:

> My education and that of my Black associates were quite different from the education of our white school mates. In the classroom we all learned past participles, but in the streets and in our homes the Blacks learned to drop *s'*s from plurals and suffixes from past-tense verbs. We were alert to the gap separating the written word from the colloquial. We learned to slide out of one language and into another without being conscious of the effort. At school, in a given situation, we might respond with "That's not unusual." But in the street, meeting the same situation, we easily said, "It's be's like that sometimes." (Angelou 219)

Hurston also had the same experience, when she left her town and had education outside of Eatonville. Thus she starts *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as an outsider with third person narration, leaves the great portion to Janie to tell the story with black vernacular language in black tradition.

Fox-Genovese asserts that if Hurston had not used black vernacular language in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Janie's story, or Hurston's biographical story, would be

just a life, not a story, since "only her exposure to another discourse has permitted her to tell her story" (Fox-Genovese 228). According to Fox-Genovese, Hurston speaks her native language as an outsider of Eatonville and simply interprets the story of townspeople; however, I argue that the reason is not to interpret the story, but to point out the difference of black vernacular language. Even if Hurston had used the canon's language, her book would still be in the frame of 'story within a story'. Another discourse is not required to tell a story within, but Hurston uses her black discourse because Janie's story is an 'oral story' as it is discussed before. Therefore, she expresses Janie's story in quoted colloquial speech. As an author, she is an outsider; however, she does not depict the mule's funeral in colloquial speech although it is also a 'story within a story'. She does not have any need exposure to another discourse to tell her mule story. Moreover, as it is discussed in the beginning of the chapter, in Eatonville Janie is not authorized to tell her story to a large audience in her town. Her only listener is her close friend Pheoby. On the other hand, it is Hurston, the author, who tells a story to a quite lager audience. Fox-Genovese also states that Hurston "transcends her gender-specific discourse in her interpretive community. To the extent that she speaks in the language of that community, she does so as an outsider rather than a member" (Fox-Genovese 228). As an author she speaks white as well as 'Negro', and the novel would be too pale without the black vernacular.

Hurston was an innovative author from whom many African American writers were inspired; however, she was not the first writer using the vernacular language in literary works. Black intellectual like Sterling A. Brown and Jean Toomer, whose works take an important place in the structure of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, had already initiated black discourse, but Hurston extended their rhetorical innovations in her fictions. When Hurston used black vernacular, the issue of dialect had already risen. W.H.A. Moore in *A Void in Our Literature*, in 1980, discusses the reasons why "The Afro-American has not

given to English Literature a great poet." According to him the mission of the Afro-American poet was to take a self journey to find out the values helping how to portray himself. That is exactly what Hurston did in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The marked difference is she did not contribute English Literature, but became the keystone of Afro-American Literature, which was a success for New Negro Intellectuals in the long run. In 1893, H.T. Johnson, the editor of the *Recorder*, claimed that the Negro authors needed to express racial aspirations in their works, since the white authors failed in representing the Negro. Five years later H.T. Kealing would state that the unique indigenous contributions could only be done by Negro authors: "...the product of the national peculiarities and race idiosyncrasies that no alien could duplicate" (cit. in Gates 175). Kealing also advised the Negro authors not to imitate whites but to reach "down to the original and unexplored depths of his own being where lies the material that is to provide him a place among the great writers" (175). Instead of mirroring them, they were to use their own crayons to enlarge their literature, as Brown, Toomer, Hurston and many other followers did.

In her article, Priscilla Wald compares the mirror stages, "the Lacanian drama of identity" (Wald 81), in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and in W.E.B Du Bois' "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." Janie becomes 'fast brown' when she sees herself in a photo taken with her white playmates; thus, the picture constitutes a mirror stage for Janie; however, in the story within, or Janie's story, it does not establish the stage for all future identifications about herself, since she is not yet in search for her "black" identity, but herself. She wants to be an individual who can share her thoughts and get involved in conversations. It is only Hurston who deals with black identity and she marks the difference with the language of the black characters and the narration. As Priscilla Wald argues: "Hurston's 'mirrors' work uncannily through grammatical deviation and rhetorical disjunction to defamiliarize cultural subjectivity" (Wald 81). Thus, the mirror stage takes on a different dimension in

later stages. That she finds out her difference does not constitute a turning point affecting her future. Indeed, when Wald's claim and the Janie's story are taken into consideration, it could be argued that it is her third marriage with Tea Cake that offers Janie the mirror through which she sees herself and the mirror stage determines what she wants for her future. On the other hand, Du Bois is mirrored by his white schoolmate, whose refusal to exchange greeting cards will determine all his future identifications about his skin color. While he accepts to be 'the problem' and expresses 'how it feels to be a problem', Hurston embraces her difference, because her spyglass enables her to see what lies beneath her complexion.

For Hurston her color was not an obstacle; on the contrary, it was a trait that she had always been proud of. In her well-known article "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" Hurston reveal her positive approach to her color clearly. She proudly expresses how it feels to be a black person. When the physical traits are compared, she does not see any difference between her race and whites. Unless she is exposed to racial discrimination, she is as American as an American white person: "I feel most colored When I'm thrown against a sharp white background" (Hurston, How It Feels). When it comes to racial values, she proudly embraces her African-American identity. Her experience with a white friend in The New World Cabaret makes the color difference quite visible for her. The orchestra starts playing jazz and she starts dancing wildly inside herself. While she takes an inner trip to deep down Africa, her white friend sits in his seat unresponsively smoking his cigarette: "He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am so colored" (Hurston, How It Feels). In his essay, W.E.B. Du Bois explicates the profound effects on the black person how he is perceived by others. "The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world which yields him no true self-

consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused and contempt and pity." (Du Bois 5) When Hurston looks herself through a white friend, she does not feel pity; on the contrary, she assumes 'color' as the 'difference' that she is proud of. Indeed, the positive approach of Hurston's to her race is the result of growing up in an all-black community that is proud of itself. Also, she was not greatly subjected to racial discrimination in her early ages, which prevented her from being confined to the definition imposed by the "other".

3.4. The Fictional Self of Zora in Her Two Works

Hurston's short story, *John Redding Goes to Sea,* is not only an early attempt at figurative narration, it also grounds her semi-autobiographical novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The important difference between the short story and the novel is that the main characters have different genders, and different approaches to racial matters. In the former, John's dream of traveling to the farthest land is mocked to death by time whereas in the latter Janie is able to reach her horizon, where she identifies herself as a black woman. In her both literary works, while Hurston basis her claims on racial identity on the apostrophe of Frederick Douglass, she very skillfully embroiders some slices from her life into her works. In *John Redding Goes to Sea*, Hurston criticizes her black contemporaries who focus on racial matters. In her opinion that is a barrier to representing racial identity. As she says in *Their Eyes Were Watching God:* "Race consciousness was a plea to Negroes to bear their color in mind at all times" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 179).

In the short story, John is an imaginative child fond of dreaming. He is as concerned with illustrating his surroundings as Hurston was in her childhood. He fancies

himself as prince, as a knight, or captain having adventures, at the end of which he reaches the horizon: "No matter what he dreamed or who he fancied himself to be, he always ended by riding away to the horizon; for his childish ignorance he thought this to be farthest land" (Hurston, *John Redding 2);* however, while Hurston creates wonderful, funny and amazing tales, her fictional male character personifies his surroundings with a racial approach. John is reminiscent of the "Watcher" in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Therefore, instead of focusing on his black culture, he is enslaved in his thoughts. When he conjures up stories, he unconsciously refers to the racism: "Often he was a knight bestride a fiery charger prancing down the white shell road that led the distant lands" (Hurston, *John Redding* 2). Indeed, he dreams that the black knight - that is himself, a black man - knocks down the whites' ships to liberate his mind. He is as obsessed with the white vessels as Frederick Douglass was in his autobiography *Bondage and Freedom.* Also he imagines the twigs as ships whose way is blocked with weeds: "But these twigs, which John called his ships, did not always sail away. Sometimes they would be swept in among the weeds growing in the shallow water, and be held there. One day his father came upon him scolding the weeds for stopping his sea-going vessels" (Hurston, *John Redding* 2). He gets frustrated since his way is blocked, and he cannot sail away to make his dream true.

John is not the only person who has dreams about traveling to the farthest land. His father used to dream of sailing away, but his dreams are also crushed. While John's mother cannot tolerate his personifications and severely objects his desire for traveling, his father encourages his son, and tries his best to provide opportunity as much as his poor condition permits: "You 'magine lotser things nobody else evah did" (Hurston, *John Redding* 3). Moreover, when John is upset about the weeds blocking his imaginary ships, in order to comfort him he states: "You mustn't take it too hard 'bout yo' ships. You gotta git uster things gittin' tied up. They's lotser folks that 'ud go on off too ef somethin' didn't ketch

’em an’ hol’ ’em!” His response to his father clearly reveals that he lacks in his black cultural values: “Do weeds tangle up folks too, pa?” (Hurston, *John Redding* 2). He does not get what his father signifies upon. He takes what his father says literally, and cannot understand what his father signifies upon.

In her autobiography, Hurston expresses how the tales she heard on Joe Starks’s porch stirs up fancies in her. “But I know that Joe Clarke’s store was the heart and spring of the town. Men sat around the store on boxes and benches and passed this world and the next one through their months. The right and the wrong, the who, when and why was passed on, and nobody doubted the conclusion” (Hurston, *Dust Track* 45). It becomes quite natural for her to imagine a talking animal, or trees in scary shapes as the one similar to John’s personification in her short story: “There was a tree that used to creep up close to the house around sundown and threaten me. It used to put on a skull-head with a crown on it every at sundown” (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 52). She is so absorbed into her fancies that sometimes she cannot distinguish her fantasy from reality. In her short story, her character is frightened of a pine tree as Hurston was:

> “Se dat tallest pine tree ovah dere how it looks like a skull wid a crown on it?”
>
> “Yes, indeed! It do look lak a skull since you call mah ’tention to it. You ’magine lotser things nobody else evah did, son!”
>
> “Sometimes, Pa dat ole tree waves at me just aftah th’ sun goes down, an’ makes me sad an’skeeered, too” (Hurston, *John Redding* 3).

When John tells his fear about the pine tree, his father comforts him and tells it is because of the dark and his young age; however, although he gets older, he cannot get rid of the disturbing feeling of the tree. The tree does not only scare him, but also “laughs at him like it had some grim joke up its sleeves” (Hurston, *John Redding* 10). That Hurston

uses her experience from her real life in her short story, but expressing with a male character is interpreted by Gordon Thompson as Hurston's hesitation of representing herself in a story:

> We need take only one example to acknowledge Hurston's struggle with presenting herself, and therefore women, as storytellers. In her earliest published piece, for instance, in order to camouflage her private (female) concerns with telling tall tales and travel, Hurston purposely uses a male rather than a female character to dramatize these concerns and their interrelatedness in Hurston's universe. (Thompson 749)

Hurston does not depict the scary pine tree only to show how John is good at conjuring up images, as she was, but how he is obsessed with slavery. The tree like a skull with a crown on denotes white colonists initiating slavery in America. He is a free man, yet his past still scares him. His being stuck in his past like the Watcher sets a barrier in his way. His dream of travelling to the farthest land has been crushed by time. Thus, the prevailing white colonist is very pleased and laughs at him like he has some grim joke up his sleeves.

'Horizon' is a critical concept in Hurston's life; she uses it both in *John Redding Goes to Sea* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and both John's and Hurston's mothers have common reaction to their desire for horizon. Matty, John's mother, states that "John kain't help wantin'tuh stray off, cause he's got spell on 'im" (Hurston, *John Redding* 3). Similarly Hurston states: "She used to say that she believed a woman who was an enemy of hers sprinkled 'travel dust' around the doorstep the day I was born" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 22). She also expresses the need for traveling to horizon as an inner force. From the moment she learns walking, she follows the inside urge to go to places: "I just took to walking and kept the things a' going. The strangest thing about it was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go […] following some inside

urge to go places" (22). Hurston adapts her desire for horizon to her fictions, but the horizons John and Janie want to reach are quite different. John has a great desire to travel to the farthest land but this trip has no specific reason: "in his childish ignorance he thought this to be farthest land" (Hurston, *John Redding* 2) With "his childish ignorance" Hurston stresses the ineffectual motive behind his ambition, which is the reason he fails. On the other hand, Janie is motivated with a desire of a perfect union. She does not merely want to go a new place and see it, but desires change. She marries Jody because he speaks for a change; however, John's ambition has no sense of change. In other words, his motive for traveling to the farthest place is not strong enough to succeed.

Another reason why he fails is related to the motif of the horizon. Since John does not have a strong reason to travel to the farthest land, he cannot find enough strength to defy his mother, Matty, who constitutes the main impediment in his way. She does not consent to her son's sailing away. Therefore, Matty and Nanny resemble each other as misleading characters. They both 'force' them to marry in the name of 'love': "Matty always took refuge in self-pity and tears. Her son's desires were incomprehensible to her but she did not want to hurt him. It was maternal love, that made her cling so desperately to John" (Hurston, *John Redding* 5). When John gets married her mother feels relieved. Just like Janie, John has agreed to marry, but he does not cease his desire for the horizon. A few weeks after his marriage, "he began to saunter out to the gate to gaze wistfully down the dusty road; or to wander again to the river as he had done in childhood" (Hurston, *John Redding* 6). A few years after his marriage he gets a chance to join the Navy and sail around the world, but his mother stands in his way and does not give her permission. John, who cannot pass over his mother, stays in the town and a few days later he gets killed in the flood. He would be alive provided that he had enough strength to move on in the way he desires. What makes Janie successful in reaching her horizon is she manages to leave

behind the misleading codes of her grandmother and move on: "...having turned against both her grandmother's and the community's wishes, she finally finds love" (Thompson, 743-744).

Gordon Thompson compares John's father's approach to Hurston's father in her real life: "In *Dust Tracks*, it was both Hurston's father and father's mother who distrusted Zora. We may find that the father's pride in his son, John Redding, fulfills an emotional need Hurston's father only occasionally fulfilled for her, one which her mother more frequently met. And yet, John's father happily realizes that his son can" (Thompson 750). Contrary to Hurston's parents, in her story John is praised for his personifications by her father. It is quite possible that John's father could be the reflection of her desire to be praised for the tales she conjures up. To create a father she likes can be her invention she keeps to herself: "I knew that I did not have to pay too much attention to the old lady. Furthermore, how was she going to tell what I was doing inside? I could keep my inventions to myself, which was what I did most of the time" (Hurston, *Dust Tracks54*). She also uses the same strategy in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that helped her to overlook her grandmother's criticism about her personifications; Janie sends her shadow to prostrate itself before Jody, and meanwhile she sits under a tree's shade enjoying her solitude.

Thompson clearly claims that in her early years of her career, Hurston was not confident enough to reveal her gender as an author: "it is almost as if Hurston, being female, felt that storytelling was a taboo and decided to allow a male character to represent this aspect of herself" (Thompson 753). In Hurston's both works, *John Redding Goes to Sea* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main characters are good at personification, but it should not be overlooked that in the former the story teller is not John, but Hurston. It is not a story within a story as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which enables Janie to

tell her story; besides, if she really felt that story telling is a taboo, she would have not dare to tell a story, or she would have used a male pen name. Concisely, the gender does not decide who is telling the story. The reason why Hurston creates a male character is to explicate how males fail in dreams. While John is hampered by her mother in search of his horizon, Janie breaks herself free from the pinched horizon around her neck.

3.5. The 'Niggerati Manor' on the Muck

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, although Hurston depicts the rural life in Florida, the life on Muck calls to mind the experiences of Hurston in Harlem. I claim that with the life in the Everglades Hurston refers to New York, where both male and female black artists had an opportunity to have a voice to represent themselves in the course of Harlem Renaissance; however, although both genders were given the same opportunity, Hurston's attempts were as overlooked as Janie's in the novel. I believe with 'perfect union' Hurston signifies upon the 'union of black and black culture' as the only way for her to represent blacks. She strongly objects to the union of black and suffering of slavery that her male contemporaries are in favor of. Her education outside of Eatonville and her collection of lore provided her with a great knowledge of black folklore, and the Harlem Renaissance enabled her to experience perfect union in representing her ethnicity: "When I lift my eyes to the towering structures of Manhattan, and look upon the mighty tunnels and bridges of the world, I know that my search is over, and that I can depart in peace." (Hurston, *Dust Tracks* 248)

After Janie and Tea Cake get married they go to the Everglades to work. They make new friends and start a brand new life there. On the Muck, they work on the field in daytime, and get together with their friends at their home in the evenings, or when they do not work. They play music, they dance and play cooncan:

> Tea Cake's house was a magnet. The unauthorized center of the "job." The way he would sit in the door way and play his guitar made people stop and listen and maybe disappoint the jook for that night. He was always laughing and full of fun too. He kept everybody laughing in the bean field. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 197)

That Tea Cake's house is a magnet for people on the Muck, is reminiscent of the little apartment called 'Niggerati Manor' by the black literati in Harlem. Indeed, 'Niggerati Manor' is the name of a residence in Wallace Thurman's novel *Infants of the Spring* published in 1932, and the characters in the novel are fictional counterparts of black intellectuals: "The residents of Niggerati Manor are artist/ celebrities who bear the burden of black representation" (Herring 588) Similarly, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I argue that Hurston signifies upon the life of Niggerati in Harlem Renaissance.

Janie's first impression seems like that of a person's in a big city like New York. The description of the Everglades calls to mind the big buildings of New York City. Everything is big like the big and tall buildings of New York:

> To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 197)

Hurston describes the soil in Everglades as so fertile that everything comes into leaf there. Moreover, not only the soil, but also the black roads are so rich with humus that even a half mile of it will be enough to fertilize a Kansas wheat field:

> Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized

> a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too. (197)

The description of the rural South, however, refers to Harlem, where Negro Art was in bloom during the Harlem Renaissance. The New Negro Movement, aiming at self respect and racial consciousness, afforded the opportunity of introducing many talented black artists to the whole world. The place Tea Cake and Janie stays is called 'Muck,' denoting Harlem, where the black intellectuals had the opportunity to produce their works. The Muck host different kind of people, as Harlem in New York City. The black roads rich in humus refer to the prolific Negro artist rich in cultural values. In *Cane*, by Jean Toomer, precursor of Black narration of South, 'the wild cane on the either side of the road' may refer to the works of the blacks that mainly focus on black values in the same way.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when Tea Cake, Janie and their friends gather around at their home, they carry out conversation full of allusions of racial matters. They tease each other by referring to their racial features:

> Bootyny challenged. "You getting' too yaller" […]
>
> Sop said "Aw 'taint nothin' tuh dat bear but his curly hair" […]
>
> Ed looked around and and saw Gabe standing behind his chair and hollored, "Move, from over me, Gabe! You too black. You draw heat!" […]
>
> Ed laughed and said, "Git off de muck! You ain't nothin'. Dat's all! Hot boilin' water won't help yuh none." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 201)

Moreover, the heated debates on the cooncan refer to heated debates of Hurston and her contemporaries carried at the 'Niggerati Manor.' With Ed's words, Hurston criticizes the black intellectuals like Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, whose primary subject in their works is race discrimination. Sometimes the game they play gets rough, but people do not get mad, because everything is done for laugh, or for the black art. When Janie

compares Eatonville to the Muck, she states that people in the Muck hold arguments as the people in Eatonville hold on the porch, but here on the Muck "She could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (Hurston, Their Eyes 200). While Hurston expresses Janie's joy for freedom to tell stories, she denotes her contentedness at being a writer. Furthermore, the fire that is kept on to cook or boil something reminds us the periodical called *The Fire!,* which Hurston and her friends Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman and some other young generation of black intellectuals published their articles (Hughes, The Black Sea 237).

After the Emancipation the blacks were free, but because of the Jim Crow Laws they were separated from whites in many places. Racial discrimination was everywhere; however, during the Harlem Renaissance, black intellectuals were provided with the opportunity for publishing their works by white publishers. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, after the flood, Tea Cake is urged to go with white people to bury the dead bodies. The white man calls Tea Cake 'Jim," which offends him, and he wants to go back to Muck as soon as possible: "Yeah, Ah know, Janie, but it couldn't never be lak it 'tis heah. […] de white folks down dere knows us. It's bad bein' strange niggers wid white folks. Everybody is against yuh." (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 255). The Muck, or Harlem, is a place where the blacks get a better treatment. Similarly the white publishers, who support the advancement of black art know the Negro artist and are not prejudice as other whites. When they get back to 'Muck,' Tea Cake sees their old friends, or their literary peers, and he becomes very happy.

After Indians leave the Everglades, the rest of the people gather at Tea Cake's house and tell stories about High John Conquer, but Hurston suggests that no matter how good John is playing harp, God wants to hear guitar: "Somebody tried to say that it was a

mouth organ harp that John was playing, but rest of them would not hear that. Don't care how good anybody play a harp, God would rather to hear a guitar. That brought them back to Tea Cake" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 232) In my opinion, the story about High John Conquer refers to the works of black male writers heavy with slavery memories and racial issues. With 'God' Hurston refers to her white patron Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason, also known as 'Godmother,' and implies that she does not want to publish stories on slavery. She wants rather to hear stories depicting African American values. (Hemenway, Zora Neale 104)

During the Harlem Renaissance, Harlem was the heart of black bohemia. There were many artists not only from the other states of America, but also from Cuba, Jamaica and other places. Identically, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* there are workers from outside Everglades, and after long work day, they go to the jooks in Everglades, where the workers dance, sing, fight and play games. These jooks are the entertainment spots in Everglades and they call to mind night clubs in Harlem. Moreover, Hurston uses the Bahamian workers to refer to the exotic black dancers attracting both whites and blacks in Harlem:

> Since Tea Cake and Janie friended with the Bahamian workers in the 'Glades, they, the "Saws," had been gradually drawn into the American crowd. They quit hiding out to hold their dances when they found that their American friends didn't laugh at them as they feared. Many of the Americans learned to jumped and liked it as much as the "Saws." So they began to hold dances night after night in the quarters, usually behind Tea Cake's house. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 228)

Dancing was an important tradition in Cuba, Jamaica and Caribbean islands. The slaves used to gather to dance and drum together after the long workday, and crate new traditions from the ones they brought from Africa (Harding). Thus, with Bahamian workers, Hurston

refers to a black custom that was carried over into Harlem. Moreover, all the social activities carried out by them refer to the all artistic activities carried out in Harlem, because Hurston expresses what they do as 'art,' and mentions Madison Square Garden, in New York and hosting many sports events and concerts:

> This was a show-off game. Everybody posing his fancy shots […] he others forgot the work and the weather watching them throw. It was art. A thousand dollars a throw in Madison Square Garden wouldn't have gotten any more breathless suspense" (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 233).

Hurston, who was criticized by her literary peers, deals with her worries about being misunderstood in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* too. When Janie is accused of killing Tea Cake, she does not fear being punished, but she wants to make people comprehend how much she loved Tea Cake and why she has had to kill him. Hurston denotes her peers using propaganda in their works with the rabid dog, and at the end of the novel Tea Cake does not differ from the that rabid dog. Briefly, Hurston does not tolerate any rage, even if for the one she loves, or for her literary peer:

> It was not death she feared. It was misunderstanding. If they made a verdict that she didn't want Tea Cake and wanted him dead, then that was a real sin and a shame. It was worse than murder. (Hurston, *Their Eyes* 279)

CONCLUSION

Zora Neale Hurston, the "Genius of the South" (Walker 107),is a leading Afro-American woman writer from whom other black women writers, such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor were inspired to developed Afro-African Women's Literature of today. She was a brave woman breaking the rules of the society and became a torchbearer for her next generation. As Florence Edwards says; "she was not afraid to swim against the tide; […] Whenever Zora Neale Hurston spoke or wrote about herself, she came through loud and clear, black and proud, and a few light years ahead of many of her contemporaries" (Edwards and Hurston 90).

Hurston was not the first woman to write autobiography. African American people were represented by other black female authors, such as Harriet Jacobs, but she was the first to use black vernacular language in a large portion in her works; moreover, she reaches deep inside the female character, and liberates the woman inside that has dreams, passion, and her own thoughts. Most important of all, she gives back the voice taken from black women violently:

> While Hurston provides the reader with an autobiographical 'inside view', she also signifies on the earlier African American tradition represented by Harriet Jacobs, a tradition that did not provide a realistic, psychological development of protagonists. Jacobs is necessarily silent about her emotional and sexual development, Hurston not only discusses her 'inside' development, but also tells the reader much about what it means to be an African American woman living in the United States in 1930s (Johnson 47).

As Johnson states, she clearly depicts the black women's unbearable conditions. What bothers her most is that they were also subject to the male oppression and injustice of their own race. They had to come over both social and racial barriers. "It is evident that Hurston

bore the burden as well as the accolades of being the first black woman to escape the narrow confines of the South and establish a professional writing career" (Bordelon 20).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston deals with women issues, but the male oppression Janie suffers from cannot be explained with traditional feminism, since the black feminist theory differs from traditional feminism as much as black vernacular language differs from the canon language. As bell hooks asserts, "Racism is fundamentally a feminist issue, because it is so interconnected with sexist oppression" (cit. in Kim,108) Although Hurston's aim is not to denote the women suffering from slavery, she has to refer it to make clear why Nanny puts Janie's horizon around her neck. or why Jody treats her as his own possession. In the novel, she grounds her life experiences in her works, and deals with sexism with her racial identity very skillfully: "Hurston was an artist who drew from her personal experiences. Southern black rural folklife was grist for her writer's mill, the primary source of her imagination, and the most influential part of her creativity" (Krasner 536). She uses her cultural values as a weapon to develop Janie's identity. As Janie obtains her own self-realization, she sets an example in her community and becomes a leader.

While Hurston subtly depicts the racial over the gender issues, her works were viewed as insignificant and herself as quaint by her contemporaries; thus, she did not receive the support she deserved. Her marginalization made her invisible till she was rediscovered in the 1970s. She managed to be quite ahead of her time, and became a keystone of Afro-American literature despite the bitter criticism and inaccurate attacks of her contemporaries. She was successful simply because she was always herself and was very good at narrating the black folk life in her works. Nothing had prevented Hurston to advance in her career. She walked her own way, no matter how hard it was.

You are right in assuming that I'm indifferent to the pattern of things. I am. I have never liked stale phrases and bodyless courage. I have the nerve to walk my own way, however hard, in my search for reality, rather than climb upon the rattling wagon of wishful illusions (Edwards and Hurston 90).

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