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"Love is Lak de Sea": Figurative Language in Zora Neale Hurston's

Their Eyes Were Watching God

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

Kalina Saraiva de Lima

May 2002

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Keywords: Figurative Language, Zora, Neale, Hurston, Pear Tree, Symbolism,

Mepathor, Personification, Porch

## ABSTRACT

"Love is Lak de Sea": Figurative Language in Zora Neale Hurston's

Their Eyes Were Watching God

by

Kalina Saraiva de Lima

The principal objective of this paper is to investigate the use of Hurston's figurative language in the novel Their Eyes Were Watching God. Metaphors, symbolism, and personification have always been present in the African American language. Hurston uses the richness of figurative language to depict the African American experience in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Figurative language is observed in various instances in the novel, such as when the author places special importance on the porch and the "lies" told there. Other significant examples of figurative language include the kiss and the bloom. Hurston also uses the seasons in a symbolic manner to reflect the main character's state of mind through winter, spring, and summer.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Benilde Saraiva de Lima, my mother, my first teacher, and who has shown me that the pear tree, God, the horizon, and all of the feelings of the seasons reside in the very inside of each one of us. I also dedicate it to all the children of the world for they are the hope in a future with plenty of “springtime,” through the person of my nephew, Joaquim Mamede Lima Neto.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I appreciate the guidance, patience, and support I received from committee chair, Dr. Yousif Elhindi. I am also obliged for the assistance and insight offered by the other committee members, Dr. Steven Gross, Dr. Darryl E. Haley, and Robert Russell. I am grateful to the Graduate Faculty of the English Department of East Tennessee State University for the unique opportunity to augment my educational and professional career and to get acquainted with my classmates, who have all been extraordinary to me. My profound and special gratitude to Maria Costa and Robert Russell, as the first members from ETSU to support me when I came to this school, and who have been encouraging to me during this course and my life here in this country.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to those members of my family, my father, Joaquim Mamede, my brothers, Venício and Rui, and my sister, Kassandra, with a special *in memoriam* mention to my brother, Henrique, and my sister, Kátia. I also want to thank all of my friends and relatives who have been personally connected to my projects, my life, and are part of my success: Ana Elisa Marangoni Costa, Suzanny Machado, Alice R. G. Ibiapina, Verônica Anderson, and my aunt, Maria José Menescal Saraiva, and her kids: José Júnior, Eduardo, Liliana, e Silvana.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, metaphors, symbolism, and personification can be identified. These instances of figurative language illustrate the author's message and what it meant to be an African-American female in early twentieth-century America. Through these literary devices, Hurston is able to thread the entire breadth of the experience of the African-American female in intricate personal relationships in the Janie's story.

From the web of her life, Hurston was able to draw on her experience as a child in the small town of Eatonville, Florida, where she was born on January 7, 1891. This African-American community provides the setting for much of her work. Hurston was the fifth child of Reverend John Hurston and Lucy Potts Hurston. She graduated from Morgan Academy in Baltimore in 1918, attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., from 1919 to 1924, and then matriculated at Barnard College in New York City in 1925, where she studied anthropology under the guidance of noted anthropologists Franz Boas and Gladys Reichard.

Not only was Hurston a popular author in her time, but she was also a significant figure in the movement known as the "Harlem Renaissance" that began to take shape in the 1920s. At first called "The New Negro Movement," the Harlem Renaissance was an extraordinary outburst of artistic activity among African Americans, appearing in all segments of the arts. It started as a "series of literary discussions in the lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City" (Diesman). The movement had its underlying purpose in the distinctive culture of African-American artistic expression. Inspired by the term "The New

Negro,” first coined in 1925 by sociologist and critic Alain LeRoy Locke, African Americans were encouraged to celebrate their heritage through writing and the arts. Hurston’s biographer, Hemenway, states that the Harlem Renaissance movement, “[c]onstitutes a perfect unit of literary history” (31).

In addition to Hurston, other important writers representing the movement were Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Angelina W. Grimke, Jessie Fauset, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, Marion Vera Cuthbert, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Hughes, Hurston, and Cullen are anthologized in American literature, as well as specifically African-American literature. Of all these, Langston Hughes is thought to have had the most interaction with Hurston.

Although they differed in style, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance had a common bond: they dealt with black life from a black perspective. The Harlem Renaissance included, besides the literary movement, a heightened racial consciousness, epitomized by “the back to Africa” movement led by Marcus Garvey. Racial integration, the explosion of music (particularly jazz, spirituals, and blues), painting, and dramatic revues were other factions that gained ground during the movement, paving the way for writers such as Hurston to become well-known in the artistic and popular communities. The Harlem Renaissance writers said that Hurston should use her writing as a means to denounce the oppressive situation in the society African-Americans lived, but she herself felt that this was unnecessary. She stated that, as a writer, her role was to write freely. In the words of McLeod, “Hurston’s writing was often unread or misunderstood by her contemporaries and virtually ignored by the time of her death in 1960.”

Hurston was a more productive writer than any of her African-American predecessors. She began to publish short stories and essays in African American magazines such as



Opportunity and Journal of Negro History and worked as coeditor of the literary magazine Fire! in which she published her short story “Sweat.” While writing for these magazines, she was also collaborating with Hughes on the play Mule Bone.

In 1927, Hurston married her first husband, Herbert Sheen, and moved back to the South, where she became interested in collecting material concerning African-American folklore. Her main focus was on gathering folktales, listening to sermons and songs, and visiting hoodoo doctors to learn their practices. In 1936, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to research West Indies obeah practices for her collection of African folklore, Tell My Horse (1938). Hurston also wrote Jonah’s Gourd Vine, her first novel, in 1934, Their Eyes Were Watching God, in 1937, and Moses, Man of the Mountain in 1939. Upon its publication, Their Eyes Were Watching God was well received, but critics said that Hurston should have written the book as a protest novel, which Richard Wright did in his Native Son (Domina).

In 1942, Hurston received the prestigious Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road. She wrote her last novel, Seraph on the Suwanee, in 1948. During this period in her life, she experienced a time of emotional anguish when she was accused of committing immoral acts with a ten-year-old boy. The accusations were confirmed to be unjustified; however, a devastated Hurston chose to withdraw from public life.

Thereafter, Hurston did not write another novel, but instead published essays in the Saturday Evening Post, American Legion Magazine, and Negro Digest. Hurston’s increasingly reclusive life and lack of money led her to live her last ten years in obscurity and poverty. She died on January 28, 1960, in a welfare home in Fort Pierce, Florida, where she is buried in a segregated cemetery. Awkward states that Their Eyes Were Watching God did not receive a fair recognition, “until long after an impoverished Hurston, seriously ill and suffering a stroke in

1959, died of heart disease in 1960 without funds to provide for a proper burial” (2). According to Champion and Glasrud, “Hurston’s grave was unmarked until 1973, when Alice Walker marked the site with a tombstone embellished with the epitaph ‘A Genius of the South’” (260). According to Awkward, Walker, “has been the single most instrumental figure in the recent establishment of Hurston’s literary reputation” (15).

A writer herself, Walker discovered the writing of Zora Neale Hurston while working in Mississippi. After this advantageous discovery, Hurston became a great influence on Walker’s later work. In the words of Freeman, “[t]hrough separated by place and time, these two black women writers, inevitably it seems, were drawn together, and Zora Hurston became an important influence in Alice Walker’s life” (37). Walker has confessed the best book she has ever read was Their Eyes Were Watching God. In 1970, she edited a collection of Hurston’s fiction titled I Love Myself When I Am Laughing. . . and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader.

Hurston is now regarded as a significant writer in American literature. Her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God receives considerable attention. In this work, she uses figurative language such as symbolism, metaphor, and personification as a way to emphasize and illustrate her message. Awkward comments on Hurston’s importance as a writer by saying that, “[a]fter years of general neglect, Their Eyes Were Watching God has since the early 1980s achieved a position of prominence within the American literary tradition” (4).

Hurston uses metaphors throughout the novel as a means to emphasize meaning and intention in her message. A metaphor is an expression that describes a person or object in a literary way by referring to something that is considered to possess similar characteristics as the person or object being described. For example, ‘the mind is an ocean’ and ‘the city is a jungle’

are both metaphors. The types of metaphor present in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God are, "rooted in physical and cultural experience; they are not randomly assigned. A metaphor can serve as a vehicle for understanding a concept only by virtue of its experiential basis" (Lakoff and Johnson 8).

Symbolism is another type of figurative language fundamentally present in Hurston's works. Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas. It also refers to a type of art and literature that originated in France and Belgium in the late nineteenth century that attempted to express states of mind rather than represent reality, using the power of words and images to produce ideas in the imagination. Through symbolism like the pear tree, Janie's hair, and Green Cove Springs, Hurston's novel begins to unfold as a bigger picture of the African-American experience in twentieth-century America.

Along with metaphor and symbolism, personification is another literary device Hurston uses to emphasize her message. Personification occurs when a particular quality or idea is represented in the form of a human being; for example, in Greek myth, the goddess Aphrodite personifies love. Personification also means attributing human characteristics to inanimate objects, so that the object is used as an example of that quality; for instance, the clouds wept. Personification is also used to represent a particular quality or entity by being a typical example of it, such as, Nathan personifies truthfulness.

Some critics view Hurston's use of figurative language in a romantic and abstract way, such as when they associate symbols like the pear tree with romanticism only. In the novel, Hurston not only speaks of romantic experiences but also connects ancestral experiences with nature or agricultural imagery to relate the events in her story. Hurston uses metaphors like the townspeople as grass and the pear tree in spring. The latter is the strongest feature Hurston uses

as a reference to Janie's life. The roots of the tree represent Janie's ideas of sexual pleasure and internal feelings about herself. The pear tree gives Janie the roots that Nanny has told her they do not have, the roots of the African-American past. Hurston draws from her experiences as a child and the stories she heard. She can identify herself with Janie working "in Jody's general store where she finds black folk who tell the tall tales, the "lies" Hurston loved and wrote about to reclaim the roots of a people" (Cantarow). Janie's experience of listening to stories and Hurston's own are mingled, which suggests that Hurston meant to tell her personal story in the novel. According to Cantarow, the book is "in part autobiography." Hurston used her experiences as an African American to tell a story, but she was not bitter about the plight of African-Americans. In the words of Hurston's biographer, Hemenway, "She went to great lengths to assure readers she was not bitter over the treatment of her people" (xvii).

Hurston's literary techniques deserve careful study and thorough analysis because these devices can help guide and inform the reader and scholar to discover the underlying facets of Janie's search for identity. On a broader level, the study of her works, particularly Their Eyes Were Watching God, helps to explore a whole culture's search for identity. By using figurative language like metaphor, symbolism, and personification, Hurston was able to open up the world of twentieth-century African-American existence to a reader that had, hitherto, been uninformed. Two questions are going to guide this thesis: What is Hurston's purpose when she uses figurative language in her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God? And what effect does it bring to the novel?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon its publication, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* did not receive the critical acclaim it deserved. Around the 1930s, critics saw it in a different light, based on the events of the day. They and other writers said that Hurston was not faithful to her race, that she did not portray a fair image of black people, and that her novel did not serve the purpose of denouncing the harsh situation blacks occupied in American society. Rich Potter asserts that such criticisms are fundamental in understanding Hurston's book, as he feels that the novel "is indeed socially and racially critical" (15). He goes on to say that "*Their Eyes* certainly supports the development of a new and unique African-American personality, but one truly distinct from white culture, and founded upon the traditional black values that had distinguished the race, honorably, in the past" (15). Potter asserts that those who pointed to Hurston as a writer who neglected black culture did not understand and could not realize that she was "a writer ahead of her time" (16). He also says that she, along with other notable writers, was criticized for having an avant-garde vision. Still, according to Potter, Hurston portrays early twentieth-century black culture as one that is proud of itself, with no "silly" images, free and reflecting real folk culture (17). Hurston used her artistic skills to an ultramodern mode of writing to tell the story of the trials and tribulations of her race's making use of resourceful figurative language.

Susan Meisenhelder talks about Janie's search for identity. She mentions aspects of the novel where Janie suffers and when she does not have a definition of certain aspects of her life, such as when people call her the name Alphabet as a consequence of having used a variety of names for her. What Meisenhelder does not point out in her study is the fact that Janie's different

first names are representative of her own situation as a child born to a woman who had been abused by a white man. As a child, Janie has no sense of self-identity, nor does she have a paradigm by which to define herself. She does not know she is colored until she sees herself in a picture. Even her name does not help to define her as a child because people call her different names. Therefore, at first she does seem to have the right to have a clear definition of what she is as a human being. Their Eyes is a novel about the life of Janie and her search for identity. She suffers at the hands of many men until she meets Tea Cake, who becomes a partner to her, not a master, as her previous husbands had been. According to Meisenhelder, “She has been given so many names by others that she is finally called Alphabet (Eyes 9), an indication of her fragmented identity reinforced by the fact that she does not see herself as black and cannot even recognize herself in a photograph” (106).

Potter states that the time Janie spent in her youth with Mrs. Washburn and the white family strongly influenced her quest for identity (17). He is not entirely correct here because he misses the point that Janie’s history and her ancestors are what define the events in her life. Her life with Mrs. Washburn and the white folks do not protect Janie from suffering from such men as Killicks and Starks. Potter sees Nanny as Janie’s, “only resource for questions of identity,” (18) and this is a problem because she is, “thoroughly saturated with white social issues. She therefore steers Janie onto a path of mimicry that consumes nearly forty years of her life” (18). Potter limits Janie’s resources to Nanny, neglecting the fact that Janie has the pear tree, which represents her own feelings and insights about her identity and what she wants for herself.

Furthermore, Potter offers a male position when he talks about Janie and Tea Cake, asserting that, “Tea Cake finally introduces her to the genuine black social patterns that define the spirit of her race” (18). In Potter’s male perception, it is as if Tea Cake had been the one

responsible for Janie's discovering her own identity. However, Janie already possessed ideas about her identity long before Tea Cake came into her life. This understanding was present when she left Logan, and also, in some instances, in her life with Starks. To Potter, Nanny's intention of marrying Janie to Logan Killicks is to give her "the wealth that would fulfill the 'white' dream bequeathed to her" (18). He does not recognize that Nanny is also trying to protect Janie from the sexual exploitation she and Leafy have experienced.

In the same article, Potter affirms that Janie and Joe, "settle in Eatonville with the intention of fulfilling Joe's dreams of being a 'big voice'" (14). He also states that she is defined through Joe and that, "[b]ecause of this denial of self-determination, the marriage becomes increasingly oppressive to Janie" (19). Potter does not recognize that Janie leaves Killicks to go with Starks for her own reasons. It is clear in Hurston's text that Janie sees in Starks a possibility of achieving a 'far horizon', which is a symbol Hurston uses to imply possibilities for Janie to accomplish her self understanding. Potter restricts his analysis of the marriage in Starks' expectations, not pointing out Janie's vision of the marriage.

Regarding the pear tree, Meisenhelder relates Janie's experience under the tree to sexuality, as well as creativity and delight, by saying, "The relationship imaged here, one between active equals, is not only one of delight, but as the metaphor of pollination implies, one of creativity" (106). The pear tree represents much more than sexuality and delight. The pear tree carries Janie through different times in her life. Meisenhelder analyzes the pear tree as a "vision of female possibility" for Janie only.

By marrying Janie to Logan Killicks, Nanny intends to give Janie a reference point for self-identification because she herself believes that she and Janie are "branches without roots" (Hurston, Eyes 16). Meisenhelder views Nanny's purpose in marrying Janie to Killicks as one

formulated under the supposition of economic gain only, “Nanny dreams of marriage and economic security for Janie” (106). However, this is not completely true because Nanny’s intentions go beyond economic security. She wishes to prevent a situation that would damage Janie’s self-esteem and cause humiliation.

Meisenhelder says that Janie’s marriage to Joe Starks is merely a continuation of her oppressing situation. Although reluctant to leave because of Nanny’s cautionary influence in her life, Janie believes she can be happy in Starks’ company. Thus, “Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance” (Hurston, Eyes 29). She does not acknowledge that Janie believed or at least hoped that she would be able to love Joe Starks; it is not the love Janie idealizes for her life, but she relies on what she supposes he represents, which is a “far horizon” and the possibility of escaping the oppressive situation with Logan Killicks, gaining not only personal freedom for herself but change as well. Hurston talks of “far horizon” to represent freedom and the possibility for Janie to obtain her ideal life and that Joe Starks represents part of this horizon. Believing that she would be able to love Joe, Janie associates this experience with the one under the pear tree.

Despite the hope that Janie has for her relationship with Starks, he still oppresses her. Meisenhelder notes that Starks elevates Janie above others but still sees her as below himself. She connects the relationship of Janie and Starks to Nanny’s experience and states: “Janie lives a life with Joe that Nanny worked so hard to avoid for her, enduring what Nanny feared despite having attained the economic circumstances she desired” (107). Meisenhelder goes on to say that by associating Janie with “the situations that Nanny most feared,” Hurston illustrates the “shortcoming of Nanny’s strategy for black women” (107). Meisenhelder acknowledges issues



of confinement and oppression in the relationship, “when Joe demands that Janie bind her hair in a ‘head-rag’ (86), a remnant of the slavery period. Despite her husband’s wealth, Janie becomes a “spiritual slave in this marriage, a sexual object owned and controlled by her master” (107).

Kayano says that Janie searches for help from nature in critical moments of her life only. He does not point out that, to Janie, nature is much more than just a source of solace. He also restricts his analysis to say that all of Janie’s experience with nature is religious. Janie’s relation to nature is deeper; she finds not only God but also a sense of identity and a voice in society.

Furthermore, Kayano associates Janie’s experience at age sixteen under the pear tree to Janie’s idea of marriage: “from that time on, Janie keeps searching for a true “marriage” that Nature taught her under the pear tree” (Kayano 38). Kayano’s assertion is true, but limited, since it is under the pear tree that Janie finds solace, comfort for her soul, and an important understanding about herself, independent from the idea of marriage. He says that at age sixteen Janie is not fully conscious of what matrimony is like; therefore, her perception of marriage extends to other segments of her life.

When the conjugal problems between Janie and Killicks arise, Kayano asserts that Janie is the one who does not want to talk to Killicks and that her refusal to help him comes as a protest for his refusal to treat her as a companion. So, “[a]s a result, her direct contact with nature is reduced. Besides, Janie wants no real communication with her husband: ‘Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband stopped talking in rhymes to her’(45)” (Kayano 38). When Hurston says that Killicks does not talk in rhymes to Janie anymore, it is to demonstrate that it is becoming clear to Janie that Killicks is unquestionably not the man for her. She understands that he is not connected to her in her ideas of communion and marriage, and that they have different expectations about the relationship. Kayano says that Janie is no longer

interested in talking to Logan. Kayano is not clear when he uses the term “real communication” because, in fact, Janie is the one who starts to realize her husband no longer speaks to her in “rhymes.” The “rhymes” stand not as a representation of Janie’s present situation but of her outlook of communication, communion, romance, and understanding. The rhymes have the ability to speak to her heart and soul.

When Janie marries Joe Starks, “[h]e forces her to keep her head tied up to hide her beautiful hair and forbids her to talk with townspeople, whom he calls ‘trashy people’(85)” (Kayano 39). Kayano sees only superiority and control when Joe Starks has Janie tie her hair up, which represents phallic power. He feels threatened by the message that the free-flowing hair of a woman sends forth to society, one of sexual liberation and autonomy. Tying her hair does not stifle Janie’s creativity or self-expression but it forces her to invent other ways of venting her desires for a self-governed life. These desires are expressed in her personality, which draws the communication to her side while repelling the controlling nature of her husband. As stated before, Joe wants to elevate Janie above the other women, but he does not want her to rise above him. The covering of her hair helps him to retain power over her.

Kayano also discusses the significance of the porch symbol. After providing some history about Nanny's, Leafy's, and Janie’s situation, he acknowledges that Nanny’s understanding of safety for Janie has to be through marriage. He argues, “With all these harsh experiences, it is quite natural that Nanny develops her own views of the social structure in which black women are at the very bottom” (37). He states that marrying Killicks is the only possibility that Nanny sees for Janie to experience protection because Nanny, “views marriage as the only protection for black woman’s happiness—‘a mighty fine thing’—that she wants for Janie” (37-8).

Kayano sees the porch as the “center of the community” (39) and a symbol of power. He shares Nanny’s thought of the porch as the center of the community, but I believe the porch is also representative of an extension of home and a place where one belongs. Further in his article, Kayano states that it is Joe’s death and the property Janie inherits that cause her to become independent (41). It is factual that upon Starks’ death, Janie makes decisions that she would not have been able to make while married to him, but it is also true and relevant to mention that these decisions and Janie’s independence are a product of her own maturity, which is separate from the power of Starks.

Like Kayano, Goodwin presents a male view of the novel, which leads him to misunderstand Janie’s needs. Throughout the article, he gives a vague analysis of nature imagery in Hurston’s book and only in the fourth page of his article does he discuss the purpose of the pear tree. Before that, mention of the pear tree is present only in the form of quotes from the text. Goodwin is not specific when he talks about general nature imagery that is rich in the book, saying, “[t]hat imagery taken from nature acts as the touchstone to the tortured, inner world of her heroine” (93).

Goodwin says that, “Overwhelmed by the beauty and copiousness of nature’s flowers and insects, Janie assumes that her marriage to Killicks will be replete with kindred romanticism” (91). This assertion does not correspond to the reality Janie encounters in her life. Janie finds a certain level of solace and acceptance under the pear tree when contemplating her marriage to Killicks but, young and imbued with idealistic visions of marriage in her mind, Janie does not expect or think that her marriage to Killicks will reflect “kindred romanticism.”

Goodwin is too general a second time when he implies that nature is a “mirror into which Janie looks at herself and defines her place in her marriage” (91). I believe nature is not only a

mirror to Janie but also an extension of herself. Nature stands for Janie's dreams, ideals, and accomplishments as a woman. Goodwin incorrectly says that "[n]ature begins to intercede in her life because Janie needs a refuge against Jody's cruelty" (92), when, in fact, nature has been an essential element of Janie's life since its sentient beginning, long before she meets Joe Starks.

Furthermore, Goodwin's male view of Janie's condition imposes in his analysis of her relationships with men her search for happiness, "[a]s she accepts Tea Cake's world, [and] her need to seek solace in an inner world of nature recedes" (93). With Tea Cake, Janie experiences spiritual union and partnership because they accept one another; it is not only Janie accepting his "world."

Barbara Johnson concentrates her article on the 'folklore' aspect of Hurston's novel. Within her article she introduces the writer and the novel and then goes on to state that Janie's imposed marriage to Logan Killicks is only a way Nanny finds to provide Janie with, "[s]ecure harbor for [her] awakening sexuality" (209). Johnson does not acknowledge the event of the kiss and its significance, which led Nanny to decide about the marriage.

Critics have generally analyzed the novel as a romantic portrayal of male/female relationships in which Janie is constantly influenced by the men with whom she becomes involved. The objective of this thesis is to explore the idea that through interpreting figurative language the reader is able to see the novel as a story about Janie's search for identity and her independent development.

## CHAPTER 3

### NATURE

“The words of the trees and the wind.”

(Hurston, Eyes)

Nature is the most important element Hurston makes use of figurative language related to nature to address her message because it is present in the crucial points and surrounds people's mood, names, places, and situations. It is present in the characters' state of mind, such as when Nanny says that the slaves are “branches without roots” (Hurston, Eyes 16) to emphasize how displaced she feels. Another example is when the townspeople comment on the way they respect Joe Starks' authority, by saying: “he's de wind and we'se de grass” (Hurston, Eyes 49). Both examples express negative ways of seeing themselves as people with no voice, no value of their own, and no power. There is also a significant number of positive associations the author makes throughout the novel, such as when Janie leaves Logan Killicks to marry Joe Starks and Hurston expresses her optimism of love and fulfillment by saying: “now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything” (Hurston, Eyes 32). Furthermore, Hurston uses the seasons to emphasize state of mind and associates them with fertility, hope, blooming, or the opposite of it, through “springtime,” “summertime,” and “wintertime” respectively.

Nanny associates herself and by extension the women slaves to elements of nature by telling Janie:

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 back due in

slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. (Hurston, Eyes 16)

This is negative plant imagery because to Nanny they are branches without roots. Therefore, all that is left for them is to take whatever life offers them, as if they could not choose or wish for more than a degrading situation. Nanny's words suggest that she and all women of her family will never bloom or grow into anything better than what they are. The branches can be seen to represent offspring, the phallus, and the scourge of life as evidenced in thorns, pain, severity, righteousness, friendship, and protection. Nanny has an attitude that is destructive to the feeling Janie has about the pear tree. In Claire Crabtree's words, "Nanny unconsciously deflates this fantasy by identifying Janie and herself with a more sterile version of the same sort of image" (61). As a matter of fact, Hurston apparently relates the episode with Nanny to a family experience she had as a child when her father had a family meeting to ask his kids what they wanted for Christmas. The child Zora expresses her desire of having a saddle horse, which infuriated her father. He reacts to her request by saying, "It's a sin and a shame! Lemme tell you something right now, my young lady; you ain't white" (Hurston, Dust 29), implying that she was not supposed to have a saddle horse or even to hope for something like that.

Nanny thinks that because she was born in slavery she is not supposed to fulfill her own dreams as a woman. Her vision of black people reflects the idea of displacement the slaves experienced and the consequent exploitation that she has suffered. According to Crabtree, "Nanny's aspirations derive from a distrust of life, a distrust of men both white and black, and a negative attitude toward blackness and femininity" (61). Branches without roots do not belong anywhere; they simply die for they possess nothing from which to gather nourishment. Therefore, the slaves are taken to places and put in situations, sometimes against their will.

Intending to protect Janie from the harshness of slavery and all the sexual abuse she and her daughter Leafy have been through, Nanny arranges Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks. She fears Janie may end with the same fate she shares with her daughter Leafy, whose school teacher raped, abused, and then abandoned her. It is ironic that Nanny's attempt to protect her from being exploited by white men results in Janie's ultimate exploitation by her husband Logan Killicks, who treats her like an object. In effect, marriage does not prevent her from suffering. She feels no true connection with Logan, and sees herself as having been thrust into a situation similar to Nanny's. Because she is not free, she is on equal footing as "branches without roots."

Nanny confesses that the person who Janie marries is not important because she thinks Janie needs protection only, and that's what she seeks: "Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection. Ah ain't gittin' ole, honey. Ah', done ole" (Hurstons, Eyes 15). Nanny thinks she is old, about to die, and is afraid to leave Janie unprotected. She believes Killicks personifies protection and security. Nanny intends to protect Janie from the exploitation she and her daughter Leafy have experienced and also to leave Janie in a financially favorable situation. Therefore, because Killicks owns sixty acres of land and the house has a porch, which is a symbol of wealth, status, and prosperity, Nanny believes he is the right person for Janie to marry. She hopes that Killicks will provide Janie with the support she needs. Although Nanny's intentions are to protect Janie, she makes Janie once again suffer oppression, humiliation, and submission from Logan. Janie's grandmother has a completely different view of love and sex than Janie does because when Nanny was young black people did not have any right to be accepted as thinking human beings. Consequently, she thinks the same fate will befall those in her family who come after her. According to Nanny, they are loose people, not attached to any strong "root," and should be grateful for whatever comes to them.

In the novel, Hurston describes Janie's encounters with Joe:

Every day after that they managed to meet in the scrub oaks across the road and talk about when he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits.

Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees. (Hurston, Eyes 29)

Hurston uses scrub oaks as the setting of Janie's furtive encounters with Joe Starks, the man she marries after leaving Logan Killicks. Hurston uses these elements of nature to represent the sturdiness of marriage but says that Joe Starks does not represent blooming for Janie to accept such commitment, instead he represents only the possibility of leaving Killicks' lonesome place. Joe Starks talks to Janie about things that speak to her heart such as change and his dreams of becoming "a big ruler." Thus, although he does not represent "bloom, pollen, or sun-up," she begins to see him as a way of getting rid of her terrible situation as wife to Logan. He talks about far horizon and romance, but she is still extremely connected to her grandmother's "slave" ideas and it makes her reluctant to leave.

Finally, Janie makes the decision to leave Logan Killicks. Joe waits for her in a hired rig; he is solemn as he helps Janie onto the rig to sit beside him. With Joe "on [the rig], it sat like some high, ruling chair. From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything" (Hurston, Eyes 32). She changes her mind about him; thus, Joe becomes "[a] bee for her bloom" (Hurston, Eyes 32). Joe is the bee, which is the agent of new flora. It is associated with professional advancement and with the flower of womanhood. Bees have often been viewed as brave, industrious, clean, politically harmonious, and aesthetically gifted. These qualities provide extensive examples for symbolic representation. The bee represents perfect community and strongly symbolizes Janie's spirit and wisdom. The feel of



the season, springtime, which Hurston implies in different instances of Janie's life symbolizes the fruitful, positive, optimistic, and happy experience she hopes to have with Joe.

The townspeople, Jeff Bruce, Oscar Scott, and Sam Watson, think they should only obey Joe's decisions about Eatonville and its people, never questioning his authority. This shows the influence and power Joe has on the community: "He's uh whirlwind among breezes, Jeff Bruce said. Speaking of winds, he's de wind and we'se de grass. We bend which ever way he blows" (Hurston, Eyes 49). The way in which the townspeople give total deference to Joe and how they express this is another use of nature in a negative sense because they allow him to have total authority over them. It is, in essence, the same idea Nanny has of being branches without roots. As grass they have no voice, no choice, and no strength to make decisions.

To Janie, love reminds her of the sea, for she says, "Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (Hurston, Eyes 191). The enormous sea is mysterious, can be dangerously attractive, and can even be fatal. Each shore represents individual situations, reflecting the outlook people have on life. The sea, unlike the ocean, has known boundaries.

Another important symbol that is related to nature is the sun. The sun is the center of being and intuition, knowledge, warmth, and glory. It is absolute cosmic power. According to the Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, the sun is the male creator, the spirit, the wind; it is generative heat, light, healer, and restorer. The sun is also a symbol of splendor, magnificence, and authority. Nanny hopes the sun will shine for Leafy, representing the hope that Leafy will have opportunities and a better life than she does. Nanny elucidates her feelings on the consequences of slavery in earlier times by telling Janie a story:

I wouldn't marry nobody, though Ah could have uh heap uh times, cause Ah didn't want nobody mistreating mah baby. So Ah got with some good white people and come down here in West Florida to work and make de sun shine on both sides of de street for Leafy. (Hurston, Eyes 19)

Nanny cannot prevent Leafy from being sexually abused. Her school teacher rapes and abandons her in the woods. The following day Nanny realizes Leafy is not back home at the same time as usual. She looks for her, but can't find her, "'De next mornin' she come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day" (Hurston, Eyes 19). Hurston displays positive and negative symbolism in this passage. The schoolteacher represents the oppressive white power. The positive aspect is that the teacher is likely to have offered protection and the negative aspects are the rape and the night, which appear dark and dangerous. He might have managed to get her to the woods, promising protection. The woods share meaning with the tree, but in this instance they are representative of slavery, darkness, and ignorance. The school teacher rapes Leafy and then abandons her in the woods.

The woods are presented again as a setting that symbolizes imprisonment and negative experience. Janie, upon seeing Killicks' homestead, relates how, "It was a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been. The house was absent of flavor, too" (Hurston, Eyes 21). The 'woods' again have a negative connotation. No one would go to this isolated place in the forest. According to the Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, wood is a symbol of mother in the form of tree; it is the feeder of the sacred flame; wisdom, life, and death. It symbolizes forest, fertility, enchantment, and spirituality. The woods are considered to be man's earliest temple. However, going to live with Killicks in the woods represents death and the

darkness of forest to Janie. In the darkness, one is helpless, and there is no light. The absence of flavor serves the purpose of emphasizing Hurston's idea of non-identification between Janie and the place. For Janie, there is no flavor in being with Killicks.

The desolation of living with Killicks instigates dreams in Janie, "So [she] waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things" (Hurston, Eyes 25). Hurston uses symbolism to talk about the passing of time and seasons and the way Janie counts on it. She hopes time (different seasons, nature) would bring her blooming, flourishing, and happiness; but it does not happen. She believes time (rotation) would bring her some new feeling and perspective and thus change how she feels about her marriage to Killicks; however, it only makes her realize marriage is nothing but a social institution.

Hurston also gives places symbolic names. When Janie runs away with Starks they go to a place called Green Cove Springs and, "they were married there before sundown, just like Joe had said. With new clothes of silk and wool" (Hurston, Eyes 33). Hurston names the place Green Cove Springs to highlight the connotation of hope, life, fertility, and flourishing. It is suggestive of a promising beginning for both Janie and Joe. "Green" and "spring" serve the purpose of reinforcing that Janie expects her marriage to Starks to be blossoming, fruitful time.

Just as she uses spring symbolically, Hurston also uses the seasons of winter and summer figuratively to indicate times of despair and happiness, respectively. During winter, Nanny's owner promises she will send Nanny away with her little daughter as soon as Leafy is one-month old. Because she has to go back to work before properly recovering from childbirth, winter also represents the slavery treatment: "'She flounced on off and let her wintertime wid me. Ah knowed mah body wasn't healed, but Ah couldn't consider dat'" (Hurston, Eyes 18). In the

novel, winter is characteristic of hard times, suffering, darkness, and bleakness. Wintertime comes to represent Nanny's feelings of difficulties, sadness, and the darkness that surrounds her life. The season of winter also signifies death because all the leaves fall, and it is cyclical, like sunrise and sunset.

On the other hand, summertime is intended to represent happiness and freedom. To her chagrin, Janie observes her shadow one day and it causes her to realize how submissive she has become:

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 her clothes. Somebody near about making summertime out of lonesomeness. (Hurston, Eyes 77)

With the symbolism expressed in this passage, Hurston suggests opposing ideas. Janie is not physically close to Joe but is dependent on him. This dependence is illustrated through her shadow prostrated before Joe, as if she could not be free and her shadow were not connected to her body. The shadow symbolizes the soul and may also be interpreted as a shadow of her former self. In this passage her hair and her clothes are free, representing her half freedom and the hope she still has. The author uses contrasting words such as "prostrating" to stand for Janie's condition of slavery to Joe. On the other hand, Janie is physically under a tree, in communion with nature and herself. It is as if she were half-free and half-slave. Janie makes "summertime out of lonesomeness" to emphasize that summertime is a happy time, and Janie will be able to find a way to ease her situation. According to McKay, Janie is aware of her "duties" as a wife and has learned to protect herself and her feelings:

Buried deep inside her, she packed and stored away the thoughts and emotions she never expressed to him. In time, she hoped to find someone to share them with. Meanwhile, she had two lives. In one she carried out her wifely talks and as much as possible avoided confrontations with Joe. In the other, she developed a self hidden from everyone else. (61)

A further reference to nature occurs when Hurston says that Janie is not “petal-open” to Joe to reinforce Janie’s disillusionment about her marriage. After having been married to Joe Starks for a long time, Janie realizes that there is no longer love in their marriage: “She wasn’t petal-open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew” (Hurston, Eyes 71). The negation of the “petal-open” reflects her realization about her relationship with Starks, and that there will not be any blossoming to her being with him. Hurston extends the implication of “petal-open” as a flower to Janie’s life, which is one of oppression by Starks.

Janie has reverted from what she felt at the beginning with Starks. She realizes she cannot love Joe, and she no longer has mixed emotions. She now looks at Joe and is sure that he is not what she wants in a man. He does not represent blossom of any kind or any young fruit, meaning nothing would ‘be born’ or generated from this relationship. He becomes doom to her when Janie realizes she feels:

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

She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (Hurston, Eyes 72)

Hurston emphasizes how sterile the relationship has become. Janie is now certain about her feelings and expectations in the relationship with Joe. She knows there is nothing fruitful to expect from it and she knows how to separate the two sides of the situation, yet she still maintains her ideal image of marriage. The seed that is not present in this marriage resides in her heart and she hopes it will be allowed to flourish in another relationship.

Janie desires to be guided by her instincts, so she often looks to the natural world for help. She questions her search by saying,

What things? She didn't know exactly. Her breath was gusty and short. She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, "Ah hope you fall on soft ground," because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed.

(Hurston, Eyes 25)

During this introspective look at herself, she does not foresee her dreams about marriage coming true. Janie learns about fulfillment, about herself, and her expectations of life and relationships under the pear tree. Hurston states that the trees and the wind speak to emphasize the idea of communication between Janie and nature, which is an instance of personification of the wind and trees. She speaks to fallen seeds as if they were human beings. Janie identifies with the seeds and tells them she hopes they fall on soft ground. Seeds symbolize fertility, reproduction, and consequent renewal.

Another natural reference, the horizon, plays an important role in the book because Hurston begins and ends the book with it, giving the novel a full cycle of life, renewal, and

continuity. Janie believes Nanny is responsible for much of her painful existence, and she has felt choked by Nanny's ideas, which she realizes after Joe's death. She compares her understand of "horizon" to her grandmother's:

She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. But she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after *things*. It was all according to the way you see things. Some people could look at a mud puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon – for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you – and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her grandmother's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love (Hurston, Eyes. 89)

After the realization of Nanny's hold over her and the death of Joe, Janie begins to feel that she is free to live her life:

Inside the expensive black folds were resurrection and life. She did not reach outside for anything, nor did the things of death reach inside to disturb her calm. She sent her face to Joe's funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world. (Hurston, Eyes 88)

All of the arrangements for the funeral have different meanings to Janie and the funeral itself. Hurston uses contrast to pronounce that the arrangements for the funeral are a sign of freedom to

Janie. The end of Starks' life is the beginning for Janie to live her dreams. Janie "sent her face to Joe's funeral" and she herself is free and ready for spring.

In the end of the novel, Janie has acquired what she expects from her life. She has become active. She has pulled her horizon "like a great fish net" (Hurstun, Eyes 193), allowing herself to be the one who controls her life. Janie uses the horizon as a protective garment as she "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" (Hurstun, Eyes 193).

Janie now feels power, strength, protection, control, and beautification. Now Janie sees her life in the horizon, not attached to the tree only. Thus, she is free. Horizons often symbolize temples, places where this world and the other meet, the land of the dead, and paradise.

Hurstun concludes the book with a new beginning for Janie, a new dawn. The garden seed is the only kind of love she wants and from which she can renew herself. It stands for a new dawn after the doom, which is represented by the hurricane, ensuing flood, and the loss of Tea Cake. It is ironic that the water that fertilizes the plants and helps them stay alive actually kills Tea Cake in its excess.

After Tea Cake dies, her friends insist that she stay there, but Janie decides to leave the muck because it does not make sense for her to stay anymore. All she sees there now is "just a great expanse of black mud" (Hurstun, Eyes 191). In her grief, Janie finds a way to remember Tea Cake as she:

give[s] away everything in their house except a package of garden seed that Tea Cake had bought to plant. The planting never got done because he had been waiting for the right time of the moon when his sickness overtook him. The seeds reminded Janie of Tea Cake more than anything else because he was always



planting things. . . Now that she was home, she meant to plant them for remembrance. (Hurston, Eyes 191)

Janie leaves her belongings behind but keeps Tea Cake with her by planting the seed. Symbolizing the continuity of life, Janie's love for Tea Cake is associated with images of fertility, growth, plants, and seeds. The seed epitomizes Tea Cake, and when she plants it, she memorializes him, making him eternal (a branch with roots).

In conclusion, Hurston uses elements of nature to tell the story of the people of Eatonville, especially Janie's story. Some of these elements reinforce her theme, such as when Janie gains strength as a consequence of her communion with nature. Also, her feelings about her last husband, Tea Cake, are nature related, signifying fertilization, continuity, and reference. These emotions are opposite to what she would feel had she stayed "slave" to Nanny's view of the world. Hurston shows that Janie frees herself from all that is negative and unproductive to lead a peaceful life.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PEAR TREE

“Oh to be a pear tree - *any* tree in bloom!”  
(Hurston, Eyes)

An example of the limited analysis that has been done about the novel is that critics have associated Janie’s experiences under the pear tree to sexual awakening only. In fact, she experiences much more than sexual arousal under the tree, which in some instances appears as a symbol and in some instances as a metaphor for herself. The tree symbolizes strength; it is vertical growth and heaven. This thesis will also explore the figurative language that shows the pear tree as the “roots” that Janie’s grandmother believes the slaves do not have. It is Janie’s strength and point of reference in life. She expresses her desire to be a tree herself. To Janie, the tree represents all of her feelings and experiences.

Hurston uses the words “dawn” and “doom” in the first pages of the book to describe how the pear tree makes Janie think about her life, explaining: “Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches” (Hurston, Eyes 8). Janie mirrors her life in the tree and sees the tree as an extension of herself. Dawn and doom represent the ups and downs of her life. Hurston uses “dawn” to emphasize the idea of beginning, flourishing, and positive thoughts. The “doom” is a metaphor that refers to the opposite of dawn and stands for Janie’s sad experiences, deaths, and losses. “Undone” refers to Janie’s dreams, to the part of her life not acquired yet, the one related to her ideals of freedom, love, and fulfillment in life.

As part of the natural world, the pear tree serves as a reference for Janie and also for everything else in her life. On a spring afternoon, Janie spends a long time under the pear tree,

ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? (Hurston, Eyes 10–11)

Hurston uses the questions to elicit Janie's confusion about her sexuality. The bloom of the tree evokes a bloom in Janie's life, too, the "snowy virginity of bloom." It is the awakening of her sexuality; however, she does not know or understand it clearly. She compares her bloom into womanhood to the bloom of the pear tree. Actually, at this time, sex is not clear to her yet; these feelings had just begun to bloom inside of her. Intimacy is a part of nature. She has a natural and social view of sexuality. Janie looks to nature as a model of a loving relationship. She experiences what life should be like to her. It arouses her fantasies of love and passion. She is completely overwhelmed by this feeling. Hurston's use of the tree as a place where Janie experiences overwhelming feelings is significant as a reference to Janie's search for identity. Under the pear tree, her sexuality is defined and understood. In nature, her ideas of marriage arise like the bee pollinating the bloom, which carries a sexual/erotic overtone.

Hurston uses personification through nature imagery to communicate Janie's feelings about her world. On this same occasion under the pear tree, Janie notices how, "This singing she heard that had nothing to do with her ears. The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep" (Hurston, Eyes 10–11). According to the Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, the rose symbolizes the female generative principle, physical love, spring. When offered to a woman it symbolizes idleness,

gladness, courtesy, and youth. Its thorns signify pride, evil tongue, modesty, and fear. The rose symbolizes spiritual love, inspiration, perfection, and the sun as well.

Janie wants to be the pear tree herself and bloom, like the pear tree does. Hurston states that to emphasize the idea of perfect identification between Janie and the pear tree.

Oh to be a pear tree- *any* tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. (Hurston, Eyes 11)

Logan Killicks, when betrothed to Janie, crushes her dreams of marriage because her “vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn’t know how to tell Nanny that” (Hurston, Eyes 14). The author uses the term “desecrating” to accentuate the fact that the vision Janie has of Logan Killicks is completely opposite to what she feels about the pear tree, and by extension Janie’s idea of marriage. He does not make her feel as she would naturally about her body or her sexuality. Janie’s vision of Logan Killicks desecrates the pear tree, stealing the purity, blooming, and fulfillment. Logan is a part of doom, suffering, and sacrifice. With him, she experiences harsh reality. He represents the taking away of natural freedoms. Therefore, he is opposite to the pear tree passionately fed by the first kiss and represents the death of Janie’s fantasies and ideals.

Janie’s time spent under the tree comforts her and helps her feel confident that she will be able to love Logan. Janie needs comfort in her forced marriage to Killicks, because Nanny believes it is the best for her. The tree, in this regard, is a symbol for Janie’s comfort in her harsh situation with Logan. She believes that she will find the love she undergoes under the pear tree with Logan. She wants the feeling the pear tree gives her to return: “Janie asked inside of herself and out. She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking” (Hurston,

Eyes 21). Janie herself does not see how or why she could love Logan Killicks, but she believes she will have a happy marriage because Nanny and the old folks have told her so.

Janie is married to Logan Killicks but is not happy because he has not brought her what she expects from a relationship. Therefore, she searches for comfort and complains to Nanny about her marriage, “Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think. Ah. . .” (Hurston, Eyes 24). Janie is full of questions about marriage. She wishes her marriage would satisfy her. Hurston uses the pear tree as a symbol of the natural world and its love towards Janie. As a refuge, she goes back to the pear tree, where she finds a shelter for her soul and comfort in her situation. She wants the sensual feelings she experiences under the pear tree in her marriage because they are connected with her heart and make her feel alive. Janie’s connection with the tree leads her to believe that she will be fine, and that she would even be able to love Logan after they get married, as grandma had said. It would help her to deal with marriage. But her marriage to Logan is passionless. She tells Nanny what she feels about her marriage and how she wanted a different marriage instead. Again, her idea of love is related to the pear tree as she yearns for a passionate, blooming love that is exciting. Yet, the love she gets from Logan is stagnant and controlling. The pear tree represents the freedom in love that she desires and the feeling the fruit tree brings to her mind and body.

Janie’s third lover, Tea Cake, looks like her dreams coming true. Janie describes her feelings figuratively in the following message:

[h]e looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God. (Hurston, Eyes 106)

Tea Cake brings the inspiration of fertilization back to her, the blossom idea of fertility, and the nice feelings she had when she was young. Janie is happy with Tea Cake Woods, whose name implies happiness to Janie, as well as to Hurston herself. As she says in her autobiography, “I was only happy in the woods, and when the ecstatic Florida springtime came strolling from the sea, trance-glorifying the world with its aura” (Hurston, Dust 41).

Hurston draws from her personal experience with nature to portray Janie and her identification with the pear tree. Through figurative language, the pear tree represents Janie’s relationship with herself as she seeks solace in her own company. In addition to finding herself, Janie also discovers that she is productive in life and can also bear valuable “fruit” in that she has the ability to satisfy her own longings.

## CHAPTER 5

### INANIMATE OBJECTS

“Crayon enlargements of life.”  
(Hurston, Eyes)

Hurston uses inanimate objects to talk about her characters state of mind as well. Once again, it is through Nanny that she reports her condition as woman slave, which is always negative. Nanny associates Janie with negative substances as well but states that she wants to avoid it for Janie. Another significant use of inanimate objects is how the author describes the stories told on the porch, calling them “pictures” and saying that these pictures are “crayon enlargements of life,” which is a powerful manner of emphasizing the significance of the stories and how the tellers are performing them. As a vessel of movement, the ship figuratively represents that a transformation will occur in Janie’s life as a move towards self-actualization begins.

Nanny expresses her psychic condition of being fragile through the folk metaphor of “a cracked plate” by saying, “Ah don’t want yo’ feathers always crumpled by folks throwin’ maybe de menfolks white or black is makin’ a spit cup outa you: Have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah’m a cracked plate” (Hurston, Eyes 20). Nanny is weakened by the harshness she and the other people of her race have experienced. Nanny sees herself, once again, as a fragmented entity, incapable of further use. The spit cup and the plate are both artifacts that pertain to dining, which receive negative implications in the passage because Nanny sees herself as one that no longer has use. A plate is positive and represents nourishment because foods are served from it. Trash goes into spit cup. They do not last forever, and with extensive use they eventually break down.

Many members of the community would gather on the porch outside of Joe's store to swap stories and converse about life. Janie could listen to the stories, and, "[t]he fact that she thought pictures were always crayon enlargements of life made it even nicer to listen to" (Hurston, Eyes 51). The stories told on the porch as "crayon enlargements of life" means they were representations of real facts and experiences. Hurston tells that the stories were "crayon enlargements" to illustrate the idea of the stories being told out of imagination, as when children tell them. The enlargements suggest distortions of reality to signify that not all of the stories were true but were happy and fun visions of reality, which made them "even nicer to listen to."

Hurston also uses ships to represent and symbolize Janie's feelings. The first paragraph of the novel talks of ships. They can be seen to represent the minds of men, and for others ships can indicate a lack of control over one's destiny and the futility of dreams. For some people dreams come effortlessly. The ship is also representative of retreat from society; therefore, one is free from social labels. The ship can also indicate a place where dreams are likely to come true and where people can reach a horizon.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. (Hurston, Eyes 1)

Ships can be solar or lunar, carrying these two celestial bodies across the seas. With their close connection to water, ships often bear significance as fertility symbols and are linked to the Great Mother, which gives the ships characteristic of fertility. For Janie ships bring her dreams and her horizon to her.



These inanimate objects stand for different events, situations, and characters in the novel and help explore Janie's view of the world. As her perspective is revealed through these inanimate objects, Janie's story unfolds and Eatonville becomes a place in which even ordinary objects and events have significance.

## CHAPTER 6

### JANIE'S HAIR

“yo’ plentiful hair breaks lak day.”  
(Hurston, Eyes)

In addition to inanimate and nonhuman objects, Hurston also uses the human characteristic of hair figuratively. Hair is symbolic of physical strength and virility, and the virtues and properties of a person are said to be concentrated in his or her hair and nails. It is a symbol of instinct and also of female seduction and physical attraction. Baldness may suggest sterility. Flowing hair can depict freedom and looseness, and the unwilling removal of hair may be a castration symbol. It also carries the context of magical power and can also be thought of as the external soul. Hair on differing parts of the body implies different meanings as well, as hair on the head indicates spiritual powers and hair on the body implies irrational powers.

For Janie, hair represents the level of male attention towards her. She realizes Logan no longer loves her because he does not pay much attention to her hair anymore: “Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her. He had ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it” (Hurston, Eyes 26). Killicks no longer touches her hair, which for her seems to indicate indifference and distance, the end of the marriage.

Joe Starks convinces Janie to follow him, using rhymes and words, talking about her hair and telling stories that speak to Janie’s dreams and heart. Janie is reluctant to leave with him and talks about possible difficult situations that could arise between the two of them. Joe interrupts her and makes the arrangements for the two of them to leave the following day: “You come go wid me. Den all de rest of yo’ natural life you kin live lak you oughta. Kiss me and shake yo’ head. When you do dat, yo’ plentiful hair breaks lak day” (Hurston, Eyes 30). After Joe makes

these promises to Janie, she decides to go with him. With the same words, Joe promises to give Janie the life she should have. He shows his authoritative manner when he decides on the actions they should take, silencing her and taking away her newly realized power. He talks of her hair and convinces her it is beautiful and attractive but later on he controls her and forces her to tie it up.

With his comments on her hair, Joe seduces Janie, while at the same time, lowering her into a position of submission. “The business of the head-rag irked her endlessly. But Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store. It didn’t seem sensible at all. That was because Joe never told Janie how jealous he was” (Hurtson, Eyes 55). Janie is not happy about having to tie her hair, but Joe is adamant on this demand. Janie’s hair tied up shows the castration she suffers in her marriage to Joe.

In addition, different forms of hair also carry differing connotations. Loose hair may indicate a woman suspected of adultery, and disheveled hair is a conventional sign of bereavement. Long hair is usually associated with a woman but can mean penitence in a man, and curly hair may signify an artist or speaker of many languages. Hair color carries symbols too: golden is related to sun symbolism, white is associated with eternity, red is characterized as demoniacal.

Janie feels free after Joe’s death, and she burns the head rags he forced her to wear as a way of showing this control over her: “[b]efore she slept that night she burnt up every one of her head rags and went about the house next morning with her hair in one thick braid swinging well below her waist” (Hurstson, Eyes 89).

Janie is beginning to have a relationship with Tea Cake. She enjoys freedom and frequently changes hairstyle. It leads Sam Watson, Phoeby's husband, to notice the change in Janie's hair and comment on the subject with Phoeby,

'It's somebody 'cause she looks might good dese days. New dresses and her hair combed a different way nearly every day. You got to have something to comb your hair over. When you see uh woman doin' so much rakin' in her head, she's combin' at some man or 'nother' (Hurstun, Eyes 111).

Sam Watson suspects Janie's new way of combing her hair is a sign that she is committing "adultery."

Tea Cake loves Janie's hair. Thus, she does not have to tie it up anymore. Now she is free to enjoy the beauty of it. Another reference to hair occurs when one day before Tea Cake goes gambling, he "cut[s] nine hairs out of the mole of her head for luck and went off happy" (Hurstun, Eyes 125).

In conclusion, Hurstun exploits hair in the novel to talk about how free Janie is and how her husbands see it. The fact that she can have it free when she is with Tea Cake shows how different it is from her time with Joe Starks, who employs all his means to suffocate and dominate her, including having her tie up her beautiful black hair. Hair is seen as seductive and threatening in a husband/wife relationship. In the novel, hair represents the tension between male and female and the trust or mistrust men have for women.

## CHAPTER 7

### NAMES

“Tea Cake, the son of the Evening Sun.”  
(Hurston, Eyes)

When naming her characters Hurston clearly created names that would signify certain characteristics and attributes her characters would have. The main characters are named Alphabet/Janie, Nanny Crawford, Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, and Tea Cake. To be considered here for analyses are the main ones, Janie and her grandmother, Janie’s three husbands, and the struggles she faces with each one.

Hurston uses symbolism when she names her characters. One illustration of this is when Janie speaks of what people called her as a child, “‘Dey useter call me Alphabet ‘cause so many people had done named me different names’” (Hurston, Eyes 9). Janie does not have a defined identity, which is also indicative of the situation of being the descendant of a slave. The message Hurston intends by this use of figurative language is that Janie has an existence marked by non-definitions. To emphasize this, she names Janie Alphabet at first, which is representative of what Janie stands for in the book, because she can be seen as everyone and everything. Alphabet is Alpha and Beta, the two Greek letters together. Alfa is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and figuratively means the beginning; God is alpha and omega of everything, the beginning and the end. In an alphabet, the letters come displayed in a conventional order. Janie’s life follows an order of events in which she experiences sadness and disappointments until she finds peace. It is implied in her name that she knows much. Hurston uses the name to introduce a paradoxical situation. On one hand, Janie’s name, alphabet, symbolizes non-definition, but on the other hand,

alphabet is extensive in meaning because it implies both definition and non-definition. Janie carries the legacy of the African-American woman before and after her. Hurston portrays Janie herself with significant symbolism. She is born to a black mother but has Caucasian-like straight hair, which is a trace to represent her mixed ancestry. It represents her independence, an African-American woman with voice and some attitude of her own. Through Janie's experience, Hurston displays the whole breadth of the African-American woman.

Nanny tells Janie how she took care of Leafy and that she had to hide with Leafy to protect her little child from her owner who wants to send them away because Nanny carries her master's child: "Den, one night Ah heard de big guns boomin' lak thunder. It kept up all night long. And de next mornin' Ah could see uh big ship at a distance and a great stirrin' round. So ah wrapped Leafy up in a moss and fixed her good in a tree and picked mah way on down to de landin'" (Hurston, Eyes 18).

Leafy is Janie's mother's name. Leafy's name suggests natural, positive, blossoming, and fruitful characteristics. She was born before the end of the Civil War. By naming Janie's mother Leafy, Hurston intends to express the idea of a fulfilling life to Janie in the years to come. In the Garden of Eden, leaves were used to hide nakedness. Leaves also protect the forest animals, they provide a shield of protection. Nanny names her Leafy because she hid her in the leafy part of the forest. The moss provides protection like the trees give shelter to the birds. Leafy also stands for abundance, health, and prosperity and is opposite to death. Thus, Leafy is opposite to Killicks and Starks and is related to Tea Cake Woods. Leafy means reproduction and continuity, green, youth, rebirth, and eternity as well. When the trees are in leaf, it is springtime, and it is associated with what is wonderful. Dependent on the tree, the moss is a bush, and looks like a

nest. Hurston does not clearly state that the birds are on the nest with a vision or protection and sustenance, but it is left to the reader to make a symbolic extension.

Nanny tells Janie about her conversation with her owner about Leafy. The owner is questioning her why Leafy is not dark-skinned. Nanny's owner beats her and insists that Nanny tell her what happened:

'[s]he kept astin me how come mah baby look white. She asted me dat maybe twenty-five or thirty times, lak she got tuh sayin' dat and couldn't help herself. So Ah told her, 'Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave.' (Hurston, Eyes 17)

Nanny says she has too many feelings to follow because her situation is already conflicted. Leafy's skin color brings Nanny problems with her owner, who represents an extra burden because she does not have a satisfactory answer to give about Leafy's skin color. It is also another example of the lack of voice, of their "earless, tongueless" (Hurston, Eyes 1) condition as slaves. She then tells what the lady really expects her to say, which is that she knows nothing, has nothing to say except to repeat that she is a slave and has to submit to her owner. The owner wants to ensure that Nanny and Leafy do not become important because Nanny carried her husband's child.

Nanny Crawford is another name that carries important symbolism in the novel. Janie's grandmother does not have a name of her own other than Nanny. She is the only family member physically close to Janie. Still, Janie is not given the chance to call her grandma or another special name to represent their blood relation and differentiate her from the other kids of the Washburn family for whom she works. Hurston names her Nanny Crawford and Janie calls her own grandmother Nanny to emphasize another evidence of their fragmented situation. During

the period of slavery, and long after that, wet nurses were called nannies. They would have their babies at the same time as the white women and the nannies would breastfeed both white and black children. Thus, Nanny is representative of maternalistic care, protection, nurturing, sustenance, and guidance. Nanny is protection to all the kids, including Janie. She is a binding force in a general way, but to Janie she is the same as to the other kids. Her name also suggests that Nanny “crawls” in her life.

Janie’s first husband, Logan Killicks, represents the death of Janie’s dreams about marriage and love. As his name implies, he “kills” and “kicks” her dreams and ideas about marriage and about nature because she never feels any connection with him and their marriage is unfulfilling for Janie. They live in the woods but Janie is not happy there with him. He kills her naïveté and innocence of youth.

Another instance of symbolism in naming the characters is Joe Starks. He is bleak and does not go anywhere for Janie in the end. Janie’s marriage to him only represents another unhappy experience for her. This marriage is the second doom and “death” experience for Janie. This death is also in the form of the silence he imposes on Janie, prohibiting her from participating in the city gatherings and expressing her opinion. He wants a voice for himself only. In Reich’s words, “His is the big voice in his community and it defines and silences Janie.” He is empty, “stark,” and barren. He has nothing to offer to her happiness. She does not feel that she is moving on or accomplishing the apparently promised “far horizon” with him because he does not bloom for her. Although Starks speaks of a “far horizon” and they leave to the all-black Eatonville with him promising her the life she wants, he treats her as a property: “[i]n his bourgeois life, a man must have (own) a wife to display his success” (Reich). Again, Janie is not marrying a “man” or going towards “far horizon” but changing owners. This time with a man



who wants to have “a big voice” for him only, and he believes that her being by his side is the best for her and all she should hope for. Starks is linked in contrast in pattern with the situation, the environment, and Janie’s own concept. He represents non-bloom. Starks is winterlike and a contrast to Leafy, who is spring, and to Janie’s concept of life. There is no hope for any kind of reproduction in any sense: no children, no fulfillment. Starks is a consummate politician and becomes the mayor, postmaster, storekeeper, and the most important landlord in town. With his ambitious talk, he manages to convince Janie that she may acquire her dreams as well. Starks puts all his efforts into having a “big voice” in the community, no matter what he has to do to acquire it. Domina speaks about Janie’s deprivation of her voice with Joe Starks, “She can never be fully a member of this community and instead must live in emotional isolation.”

Tea Cake Woods is Janie’s third husband and true love. Tea Cake, given the name Vergible Woods, is not as conventional as Logan Killicks. Vergible sounds like verdant and green. He is not a businessman like Joe Starks and much of his money comes from gambling. He spends a considerable amount of his time playing the guitar and planning a party. Tea Cake’s skin complexion is dark. Although he is a lot younger than Janie, he plays the role of a true partner with her; he is not dominant or dominated. McKay sees Janie’s relationship with Tea Cake as one based on “honest love and respect between people” (61).

It is in her marriage with Tea Cake that Janie is happy, because he brings the sweetness she has always longed for. The name Tea Cake is suggestive of all that is social and gentle, friendly, understanding, and compatible, which is opposite of Starks and Killicks. Tea Cake is also associated with New England propriety and correctness. Tea Cake is sweet fulfillment, a full stomach; with him one can feel full, satisfied. Olson asserts that, “[Tea Cake’s] name implies that he is like a communion wafer” (89). He represents nourishment and life, resembling Leafy.

He has a zest for living. With Tea Cake by her side, everything is worth living for Janie. The love between Janie and him is described as “blissful.”

She works with him, not for him; she joins in the story-telling and is no longer silent; her feelings and her words, her self and her man are all unified. But Janie herself never sees the limitations in the way he defines her, though they are there for the reader to see. She is so in love with him that her place is wherever he wants it to be, that she is able to let him slap ‘her around a bit to show he was the boss,’ that she waits for him at home or goes with him to work, as he wishes.

(Reich)

Tea Cake, trying to save Janie from the dog in the hurricane is the one who the mad dog bites. He dies because he contracts rabies. Janie feels as if she died as well:

Well, she thought, that big old dawg with the hatred in his eyes had killed her after all. She wished she had slipped off that cow-tail and drowned then and there and be done, but to kill her through Tea Cake was too much to bear. Tea Cake, the son of Evening Sun, had to die for loving her. She looked hard at the sky for a long time. (Hurston, Eyes 178)

Tea Cake represents the sun, “the sun of the Evening Sun.” Hurston uses nature to symbolize how Janie isolates Tea Cake from the other sun, the one that burns. The evening sun is a cooling one. It shows lack of oppression, means warmth and calmness. The evening sun symbolizes a certain amount of rest, healing, contentment, and satisfaction. Janie spends a long time looking at the sky trying to understand why Tea Cake had to die. The setting sun also represents death, the end of it, which happens to Tea Cake.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A KISS

“The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light.”  
(Hurston, Eyes)

The kiss is present in Janie’s life. When Nanny sees her kiss with Johnny Taylor at the gate, she makes Janie feel dirty. Throughout the novel, Janie uses this event to symbolize her acquired freedom by allowing the kiss of Tea Cake’s memories to bring her comfort. It is important to emphasize that the significance of the kiss completely reverses as it meaning transforms from negative to positive.

Nanny’s words make Janie’s feeling of self-discovery appear to be dirty and sinful. Hurston uses the metaphor of the moistened manure pile to emphasize how dirty Nanny thinks the kiss is and how fragmented Janie feels after hearing Nanny’s disapproving comment about seeing her and Johnny Taylor at the gatepost. Nanny’s “words made Janie’s kiss across the gatepost seem like a manure pile after a rain” (Hurston, Eyes 13). The manure pile is the fertilizer that feeds the pear tree. The kiss feeds Janie’s sexuality for the rest of her life; but it is what leads Nanny’s decision to make Janie marry Logan Killicks, “seeing the danger of a bad marriage, or a pregnancy without marriage, transfers Janie to her first husband, Logan Killicks, a steady, economically independent man” (Reich). A kiss has different significance in different settings. It can be seen as an act of faith, friendship, love, fellowship, and intimate contact. A kiss can have spell-breaking power, restoring cursed people to their original state as in such fairy tales as Beauty and the Beast and Sleeping Beauty. Carr and Crouther see the event as, “an innocent kiss between Janie and Johnny Taylor” (52). Jung considers it more an aspect of nutrition than sexuality. According to the Dictionary of Imagery and Symbolism, it is a bad

omen for girls to kiss over a gate or when seated. Thus, in Janie's case it ultimately represents a bad omen. Because of the kiss, Nanny decides to marry Janie off to Logan Killicks, who would protect Janie from becoming a victim of sexual exploitation as she has been.

As time passes, the negative aspect of the kiss not only persists but also becomes worse: "Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked" (Hurston, Eyes 7). Janie's first kiss, with Johnny Taylor, is still something she cannot fully understand, but her conversation with Nanny makes her feel as if she has done something condemnable, dirty, and depreciative. The adjective monstropolous serves the purpose of emphasizing Janie's puzzling feeling about the whole situation. She had just been innocently kissed by Johnny Taylor at the gatepost, but Nanny makes her feel she did much more, and that she has to be punished for that.

In the last paragraph of the book, Hurston brings back the kiss but not as a negative and condemning act anymore. The kiss is a transient symbol that becomes symbolic of a sweet part of the elements Janie keeps to remember Tea Cake, and it provides her with comforting feelings, "He could never be dead until she herself had finished and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall" (Hurston, Eyes 193). The kiss that once was a "monstropolous old thing" is reversed into positive ideals and personified in beautiful and positive memories, which is possible because of the action of time and Janie's personal growth and ultimate freedom.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE PORCH

“The Porch rocked with laughter.”

(Hurston, Dust)

Hurston uses the porch as a platform for verbal interaction, which is the most important means of communication between African-Americans. The porch symbolizes wealth as well. It is a memory from Hurston’s childhood. When she lived in Eatonville there was a store whose owner was named Joe Clarke. This porch at Mr. Joe Clarke’s place has been a significant source of inspiration for Hurston, making some of the stories she told later on literally memories, not fiction, as she remarks in her autobiography, “[t]here were no discreet nuances of life on Joe Clarke’s porch. There was open kindness, anger, hate, love, envy, and its kinfolks, but all emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at” (Hurston, Dust 46). Valentic agrees that Hurston draws from her recollections of stories and songs she heard at the porch, a place “where the tales were told and songs were sung. It was there that Hurston heard the ‘old big lies’ that she later incorporated into her work” (Valentic).

When she is back in town coming from the Everglades, the townspeople sitting at the porch greet her and stop talking to observe her, “[t]hey scrambled a noisy “good evenin”” and left their mouths setting open and their ears full of hope. Her speech was pleasant enough, but she kept walking straight on to the gate. The porch couldn’t talk for looking” (Hurston, Eyes 2). They all stare at Janie, curious to learn what she has done to her life. It is a personification of the porch, which here embodies the people present there. Because talking is the most important form of interaction between African-Americans, the porch, as anchor of the community, is very significant.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the porch in the novel is a representation of a place and its particulars that Hurston frequented as a child in Eatonville. It becomes obvious when she names Joe Starks, because the Mayor of Eatonville and the storeowner where the porch was is named Joe Clarke. According to Awkward, “in Their Eyes Were Watching God, storytellers sat on the porch of mayor Joe Clarke’s (Starks’ in the novel) store” (1). The porch is a magnet to the whole community; it is where the “lies” were told and a significant source for Hurston’s research on folklore. Hurston says of Joe Clarke’s store porch, “Joe Clarke’s store was the heart and the spring of the town. Men sat around the store on boxes and benches and passed this world and the next through their mouths” (Dust 45). The “big old lies” told at the porch were entertaining as Hurston states in her autobiography, “[t]he porch rocked with laughter. They had the answer to everything” (Dust 16).

Another significance of the porch is that it is a symbol of the cultural implications of wealth and family. Starks and Janie sit on the porch at the boarding house in which they stay: “[t]hey sat on the boarding house porch and saw the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged” (Hurston, Eyes 33). When they get to Eatonville and Joe becomes the most powerful man in town, he has meetings on his porch, “[t]hey got up and sauntered over to where Starks was living for the present. Already the town had found the strangers. Joe was on the porch talking to a small group of men” (Hurston, Eyes 36). The porch at Joe’s is a place where he can be the king, the locale he uses to deliver orders and control the town.

Hurston designs Joe Starks’ house with two porches to accentuate how wealthy he is and how distant economically he is from the other people in town. “Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with banisters and such things. The rest of the town

looked like servants' quarters surrounding the 'big house'" (Hurston, Eyes 47). By comparing Joe's house to a slave's house, Hurston clearly shows the townspeople's subservience and inferior position to Joe.

It is with Tea Cake that she enjoys the porch, which at this point is a place for leisure for her: "He invites her to play checkers on the porch as Joe never had. 'and she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play.' Perhaps most significantly, 'Look how he had been able to talk with him right off!'" (Domina).

Another symbol that Hurston uses in association with the porch is the sky. Hurston introduces the story by giving a panorama of the slavery. In the first page she synthesizes ideas, feelings, and the slaves' condition after slavery is over. Hurston makes a transition with sundown to tell what the black experience was when she says,

The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.

(Hurston, Eyes 1)

The sun in this passage represents the harshness of slavery because the slaves have worked in the field during the day and under the sun. Sundown is a rest from labor. It is the end of slavery. The era of slavery is gone, but its impressions are still in the slaves' minds. Symbolically, as well as literally, they had been silenced; they had no voice. Slaves were powerless; they worked and were treated like mules and other animals. In the opening passage of the novel, the use of

figurative language is not particularly about Janie but about the African-American race and their experience. Sundown helps them understand their plight. They have no self and no soul. Now the slaves can “pass the nations” through their mouths and denounce their humiliating situation to their families and tell the history. They sit in judgment of their oppressors. The sundown here is real and represents the end of an era. It is after work, so the slaves are free and can see Janie arriving. The footprints of the sun are the impressions and feelings the slaves have within themselves about the day and about their lives and experiences of exploitation. The impressions, or footprints of the sun are also representative of the strong real sun under which many of them were forced to work for long periods of time. The time to sit on the porches beside the road, to swap stories and talk is the time for rest, after slavery, when they could speak freely and relax from heavy labor. Slaves were both symbolically and physically powerless. There was nothing they could do to protect themselves from the exploitation they were under; therefore, they were “tongueless, earless, eyeless” (Hurston, Eyes 1). Hurston turns the slaves, once free, into “lords of sounds and lesser things” to emphasize how powerful and free the slaves have become (Hurston, Eyes 1). Her purpose here, in the same paragraph, is to strongly deal with the two significant situations of slavery and then freedom. Hurston asserts that the slaves have turned into “lords of sounds and lesser things” to reinforce the dramatic change in their situation; it is a reverse from dominated to absolutely free.

In conclusion, the porch is the stage for the telling of the story. Hurston places characters on it to reinforce her theme of the African-American culture that gathered and found solutions for their problems at the porch. It is also significant that she places Janie on a porch when she tells her story to Phoeby.



## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

Although Hurston died in obscurity, in the past 20 years her literary contributions have been recognized, analyzed, and examined in an effort to understand the complexities of her writing and the world in which she lived. As an African-American female during the Harlem Renaissance, she believed that her role was to write freely and that belief presents a level of verisimilitude in her work that affirms her place in the canon of American literature.

Through figurative language, Hurston is able to capture the underlying tones and subtleties of the human condition. The use of symbolism, metaphors, and personification contributes to her ability to paint a distinctive picture representing twentieth century African-American culture. Figuratively, she uses words to convey the thoughts and ideas of a new cultural movement that was beginning to emerge. The richness of the figurative language Hurston uses brings embellishment and expressiveness to the text.

As the first African-American female to write with such eloquence and intuition into the human spirit, her works formed the foundation from which future writers could build. In the character of Janie, she created someone who could identify with both the African-American female of Hurston's era while also creating a timeless heroine within whose story the modern-day female can discover herself and, consequently, find her own voice.

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