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The Paradoxes of Autobiography, Fiction, and Politics in Their Eyes Were Watching God

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**THE PARADOXES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY, FICTION, AND POLITICS IN *THEIR
EYES WERE WATCHING GOD***

by

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“I choose not to suffer uselessly.”
Adrienne Rich, “Splittings”, *The Dream of a Common Language*

I: Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston’s work is heavily inspired by her own life growing up in Eatonville, Florida, one of the only all-black towns in the South. Hurston moves north to attend Barnard College in New York and becomes a part of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement, and returns back to the South first to do anthropological work as well as use it as literary inspiration for her novels. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, her most famous novel, was published in 1937, and closely follows her life in many ways. Janie Crawford, the novel’s protagonist, has to marry young after she transgresses a gender norm unbeknownst to her at the time, which leads her to two additional marriages that end badly in ways that manifest out of the excesses of male desire. At the novel’s conclusion, Janie is unmarried and happy with her relationship status, untethered to the institution of marriage and the expectations required of her as a wife. Hurston’s own autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was published five years after *TEWWG*, but reveals less about her life’s circumstances and the tone through which Hurston recounts events is substantially more mediated. It is counterintuitive that the medium of fiction allows Hurston to write in a tone that is privy to less outside influence than autobiography, where she is supposed to be the most honest and vulnerable. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, through its lyrical, complex prose which masks Hurston’s personal characterizations of men, women, and the Eatonville society, allows Hurston to insert her opinion that it is unfair that men have the privilege to be complacent in life and women have to conform to other people’s expectations of them because it comes from the characters,

rather from her own autobiographical voice, and fiction as a medium is an easier place for authors to insert their own political beliefs.

This thesis establishes parallel claims about how women's autobiography as a genre intersects with fiction as a means to share an author's opinions on issues of race, gender, class, and topics that the publishing industry deems 'controversial', using Zora Neale Hurston's works *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road* as points of comparison. Throughout this thesis, I will show that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a novel that by virtue of its content is a political novel because of how it represents an overlooked demographic of people and the novel's ripple effect on later black female writers as one of the first novels that celebrates black female joy. *TEWWG* does the work of literary representation that publishers did not allow *DToaR* to do because of the fear that the book would not sell as well if it included more of Hurston's own political perspective. The second claim that I make is that *TEWWG* is first dismissed because of its lack of 'seriousness' in subject matter by Hurston's peers, but its use of nature metaphors like the horizon and the tree and motifs like desire and dreams allow for issues of gender, race, class, and love to be discussed because they are shrouded in a literary image disguise.

Hurston was born in January around the turn of the twentieth century in Eatonville, Florida, and loved people watching and telling stories from a young age. The Eatonville town square and store ends up becoming a central setting in *TEWWG*, very true to its original appearance (Hemenway 12). Hurston attended Howard University and then received a full ride scholarship to Barnard College to study anthropology in 1925, where she was one of the only black female students. In New York, she fell into the group of writers in the Harlem

Renaissance like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, August Wilson, and Richard Wright (Hemenway 43). She was known for being very witty, well-read and intelligent, and someone with funny stories to tell about her southern upbringing, a foreign country to many of the people she encountered in New York. She was part of a very select group of black intellectuals while the Harlem Renaissance literary movement exploded; despite having access to this world of 'high-culture', she focuses her anthropological work in the South and ends up permanently moving back there and used it as the setting for all of her novels and plays.

TEWWG is one of the most written about works of American literature in terms of academic scholarship. Critics have addressed Hurston's use of folklore, religion, the semiotics used in the novel, race, gender, and how the novel lends itself to the question of whether or not it is autobiographical from numerous angles. Postcolonial autobiographical scholars use *DToaR* as an example of the white patriarchy's influence in autobiographical writing. In many ways, *TEWWG* takes on the role that *DToaR* could have played in the literary canon as a more political, autobiographical novel because of its parallels with Hurston's own life and how it is heralded as a novel that gives a voice to rural black people who are overlooked in the historical consciousness because their lives do not follow the singular migration narrative that white people ascribe to black people. Despite its serious subject matter as it addresses universal questions of love, relationships, coming of age, gender norms, and how one belongs to a community, *TEWWG* was not viewed as serious at its release by a few of Hurston's peers. Critics did not begin to view this novel as a part of the literary canon until Alice Walker highlighted Hurston's importance to her own work, around the time of the second wave

feminist movement and a slight reconsidering of the literary canon's lack of representation of any author other than white and male (Walker 83).

Postcolonial literary scholars have linked *TEWWG* and Hurston in the tradition of being an author who provides a voice to those often underrepresented in literature. In Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's anthology entitled *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, they seek to center the narratives of non-white, non-Western, and women of other marginalized communities in a tradition that stems from the narratives of people in those communities, but has become too influenced by the hegemonic, white, Western patriarchy. The anthology extends the political theory of decolonization into the autobiographical literary tradition, one of the first books in autobiographical scholarship to do so, and one of the essays details how Hurston's autobiography unnecessarily caters to a white voice and expands the claim to autobiographical writing and literature as a whole.

One of the first claims that Smith and Watson pose in the book's introduction is "where Western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity, of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference, Western eyes see the colonized as an amorphous, generalized collectivity. The colonized "other" disappears into an anonymous, opaque collectivity of undifferentiated bodies" (Smith, Watson xvii). It is paradoxical yet unsurprising that Western writers and theorists do not see the variety between women's autobiographies from different colonized countries. They seek to cast the narratives as synonymous when the genre's concept depends on authenticity and unique authorial voice dependent on different experience, which means that an autobiography from Brazil is probably very different than a female slave narrative from the United States. This mode of

thought is precisely why a book like *TEWWG* is so necessary because it portrays a world so foreign to northern, white readers at the time, decolonizes and differentiates the South, a seemingly homogenous area to people not from there, and gives a voice to black women who are often overlooked in political discourse. It is ironic and paradoxical that *TEWWG* does this better than *DToaR* as a fiction book rather than an autobiography.

In Richard Wright's review of *TEWWG* entitled "Between Laughter and Tears", he says, "Miss Hurston can write, but her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley. Her dialogue manages to catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind in their pure simplicity, but that's as far as it goes" ("Between Laughter and Tears"). Throughout the review, he dismisses *TEWWG* as not getting to the more 'serious' issues that comprise being black in America because its storyline is about love, women, a small town, and romance. This review discounts how rhetorical style and creativity in this novel allows for more of the author's opinion to be shown, which is counterintuitive but true in the case of Hurston. The abstract imagery of nature and dreams throughout *TEWWG* is Hurston's way in which she adds her views on more controversial issues because her meaning is obscured through language. It is much easier for Hurston to address larger political societal questions through fiction rather than through prose or autobiography, where she is not taken as seriously because of her gender and race.

This paradox extends to the contrast between autobiography and fiction as a medium as well as to the paradox between naïveté and desire shown through Janie's character in *TEWWG*. At the end of the novel, Janie is satisfied with her life unimpeded by other people's expectations of her, but her satisfaction only happens after experiencing immense sadness

and anger caused by Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake, each of whom had different expectations of her as a wife which she did not meet. Janie's innocence and yearning to see and do as much as she can does not lend itself well to being a young, black woman in the rural south, where many of her life's factors are out of her control. Janie does not realize identity until she makes choices that put her life on a constrained path of living in service to someone else. Hurston's own life is very similar to Janie's. In an autobiography, readers at the time would not have taken this as seriously because of Hurston's gender and race, which is why the novel's non-polemic, subtler genre is a better medium to insert one's opinion. *TEWWG* encapsulates themes of identity, gendered desire, coming of age, and sexuality in a way where one sees the book's message coming from Hurston, but also from Janie and the people around her.

II: Other Writers on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Hurston's work lay dormant for literary critics and the popular consciousness until the 1970's, when the writer Alice Walker discovered her work while working on a project related to folklore and black culture. Immediately, Walker felt connected to Hurston's novels because of how she writes about blackness and black people independent of whiteness (Walker 85). Both Walker and the writer Zadie Smith cite Hurston as an inspiration because of how she shows strength and vulnerability within the same female character in a revolutionary way, one of the first female protagonists with which they identified. Love and relationships, the primary subject of *TEWWG*, are some of life's biggest questions and are not taken as seriously by Hurston's contemporary Harlem Renaissance writers. Richard Wright said in his review that her book plays into racial stereotypes of blackface minstrelsy and that black people are more primitive through Hurston's use of dialect in the characters' dialogue ("Between Laughter and Tears"). The postcolonial scholar Hazel Carby also critiques the literary canon for placing too much value on Hurston as a literary inflection point, another paradox, and overlooks the importance of the inspiration she provides for writers that follow her.

Hurston's anthropological book *Of Mules and Men* and later *TEWWG* have inspired many writers like Alice Walker and Zadie Smith, who then use the role that *TEWWG* plays in their lives to inform why they are writers and inspire other writers. In Alice Walker's essay "Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and Partisan View," she describes the joy she experiences when she first reads Hurston's work. The books "gave them back all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed and showed how marvelous, and, indeed, priceless, they are. This is not exaggerated. no matter how they tried to remain cool toward all Zora revealed, in the end they could not hold back the smiles, the laughter, the joy

over who she was showing them to be” (Walker 84-85). *TEWWG* instantly provokes a joyful emotional response in Walker and her peers because it celebrates traditions that white society requires them to suppress. Hurston’s writing affects Walker so much because it engages her in more self-reflection than other books have about the stark lack of representation there was before this book. Hurston’s work is the first time Walker sees herself represented in literature in a way that celebrates her existence, and she can now engage with literature in a way that she otherwise could not because she could not relate to the identity of the protagonist or the author’s subject matter.

The writer Zadie Smith discounts Hurston’s work at first, but then grows to see it as a key influence to her own writing and that the book’s subject matter is more serious than she thought it would be. In her essay “*Their Eyes Were Watching God: What Does Soul Mean?*” she further complicates ‘serious’ fiction by showing how “the story of Janie’s progress through three marriages confronts the reader with the significant idea that the choice one makes between partners, between one man and another (or one woman and another) stretches beyond romance. It is, in the end, the choice between values, possibilities, futures, hopes, arguments, languages, and lives” (Smith 6). Marriage and the surrounding byproducts that come with that decision are not frivolous. For Janie, her choices to get married to Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake determine the entire trajectory of her life, and she is not forced into that choice at the novel’s beginning. This characterization of marriage absolves Janie of all agency and reasoning skills, even when her decision may not be what the reader thinks she should do. These three marriages also have political implications for Janie because who she marries affects how other people in the town perceive her, which dramatically differs between Logan,

Joe, and Tea Cake. Hurston addresses life's big questions like marriage and coming of age in a way that allows the reader to contemplate them simultaneously for themselves. Her writing style is not overtly persuasive and does not appear to be compensating for controversial opinions she may hold, which allows the reader to come to their own conclusions about marriage and life.

Further in the essay, Smith links back *TEWWG* to other famous novels with strong female characters as initially falling in line with that tradition, and shows how men and women have more agency in the romantic relationships described, which sets Hurston apart from those novels. When discussing how Hurston's treatment of relationships fall in line with other female authors, Smith posits that "the potential rapture of human relationships to which Hurston gives unabashed expression, the profound 'self-crushing love' that Janie feels for Tea Cake, may, I suppose, look like the dull finale of a 'long, whiny, trawling search for a man'. For Tea Cake and Janie, though, the choice of each other is experienced not as desperation, but as discovery, and the need felt on both sides causes them joy, not shame" (Smith 7). In Smith's interpretation of the novel, Janie makes the active choice to choose Tea Cake after she spends time on her own and determines what she needs for herself, not in reference to someone else. Janie and Tea Cake choose to be with each other to bring themselves happiness, particularly for Janie because she has not been in a relationship with someone who is initially romantically interested in her before she makes her interest known to him. Smith does not view Janie as weak or that she settles for the most convenient option; because it brings her joy in her life, it is an active choice that she makes and is not settling. Even though Janie's love for Tea Cake is described as 'self-crushing', it also allows her to feel

happy after she has not felt that way for a long time. Janie experiences both sides of extreme emotions throughout the novel, and this instance of deciding to be with Tea Cake allows her to embrace what makes her the happiest.

The novelist Richard Wright views *TEWWG* as a novel that does not focus on 'real' issues and plays into racial stereotypes that which he claims to avoid, which does not acknowledge Hurston's skill as a storyteller and how fiction allows writers to create characters that represent what the literary canon lacks. In his review of the novel, Wright first claims that "neither of the two novels [*TEWWG* and Turpin's *These Low Grounds*] has a basic idea or theme that lends itself to significant interpretation. Miss Hurston seems to have no desire whatever to move in the direction of serious fiction" ("Between Laughter and Tears"). Wright brands seriousness, in the case of literature, as very masculine in subject matter. To him, *TEWWG* is not serious because it is a novel about love, relationships, and one woman's life. It also is not serious because of its setting in the rural South, unlike the novels put forth by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance that detailed the black, male, urban experience, like Wright's own *Native Son*. Not many other writers, particularly black female writers, had written about the rural South. Hurston saw an opportunity to write about her experience through fiction in a way where the reader has to interpret the novel's motifs, rather than laying out her political views through more polemic writing or an autobiography, a genre that is supposedly more authentic to the author's voice and memories. Wright dismisses the story's nuance developed in Hurston's characters and perceives the novel to not make any commentary on race or discrimination because it is not as polemical or negative. Hurston's writing style is lyrical, sensual, and subtle; it draws the reader in through imagery, metaphor,

and its beguiling female protagonist. To say that the novel is not serious discounts Hurston's abilities as someone who weaves together multiple facets of a story to produce a novel with depth and character development.

Later in the essay, Wright argues that "her gift for poetic phrase, for rare dialect, and folk humor keep her flashing on the surface of her community and her characters and from diving down deep either to the inner psychology of characterization or to sharp analysis of the social background" ("Between Laughter and Tears"). It is ironic that Wright says that Hurston's social background analysis is not sharp because she is an anthropologist before she becomes a writer. She can tell stories about her community that allow the reader to empathize with the 'heroes' and 'villains' in *TEWWG* because of how she is adept at observing peoples' and communities' behaviors. His observation also does not allow African American characters to experience emotions other than anger. Hurston is a unique writer in the fact that her characters experience all emotions: joy, pain, jealousy, anger, and are not pigeonholed into one archetype. She writes about happiness in black people more than her male peers do, which is attributed to how her stories center around blackness as independent from whiteness. Hurston highlights folklore and uses dialect in her writing to connect back to black peoples' African heritage, and does not do so in a way that plays into stereotypes about black people or makes it seem frivolous; people experiencing pleasure is not frivolous.

TEWWG also can be interpreted as doing the same type of decolonization work as autobiographies do through its prioritization of folklore culture over black culture in direct reference to whiteness like the Harlem Renaissance. In her essay "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston", the critic Hazel Carby posits that "Hurston's

representation of the folk is not only a discursive displacement of the historical and cultural transformations of migration but it is also a creation of a folk who are outside of history” (Carby 34). Hurston’s choice to focus on black communities that do not follow the traditional migration myth in the novel is a purposeful political decision and shows the multiplicity of black peoples’ stories that literature and history often ignore. She prioritizes the voice of her own community overlooked by the literary canon, which puts her writing in direct opposition to that of Richard Wright or Langston Hughes who focus on the common urban, male, narrative that is an experience of struggle. Although *TEWWG* is full of sadness, it also is full of joy, and the novel’s use of dialect and emphasis on black folklore and traditions highlights Hurston’s pride in her identity. Towns like Eatonville, Florida are outside of the more common black historical narrative, which is why this novel almost feels like it is set in a utopia because its setup is so foreign to most readers.

TEWWG is included in the literary canon for its romantic portrayal of rural black life, Hurston’s effective female character development, and how it serves as an inspirational model for other black writers. At the end of her essay, Carby asks the question “perhaps, it is time that we should question the extent of our dependence upon our re-creations of particular aspects of the romantic imagination of Zora Neale Hurston to produce cultural meanings of ourselves as native daughters” (Carby 42). While I agree that *TEWWG* should not be the sole book upon which black women depend for finding themselves represented in popular culture, I think that an aspect of the book that Carby overlooks here is how significant *TEWWG* is to many black women writers because it is one of the first books where they saw a protagonist with which they could identify. At the time this article was written, black female

intellectuals were having a resurgence (Carby 29), but there is a long way to go until black women are equally represented in literature and cultural criticism. A novel like *TEWWG*, while subtle in tone, addresses issues of race and class like *Native Son* but in a celebratory way, and writing a work of fiction that celebrates black female joy is a radical, political statement that should not be overlooked. To write something that is political does not require explicitly critiquing whiteness; by approaching her novel in a more celebratory way, Hurston asserts the importance of representation for black women who stayed in the south, and the novel's critique of whiteness is implicit. Its writing style resists the singular narrative of male, urban struggle in African American fiction by discussing nature and small towns in a way that highlights history and tradition. *TEWWG* gives dimensionality to black female characters in a way that Hurston's autobiography, the literary genre where an author's political views being obvious seems more appropriate, tries and fails at doing because of Hurston's white editor's influence on her revision process. Hurston's romantic writing style that triggers all of the senses and the way she weaves together anthropology and literature to tell a more nuanced and complex story is one of the first books written by a black woman to do so, and unintentionally creates a literary model for other writers to follow.

III: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Autobiographical Theory

Hurston's most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* does the work of an autobiography because it reflects on her life experience, centers a black woman's narrative as an example of the African American experience, and asserts that her own experience is necessary to be read. Within the novel, Hurston decolonizes within the genre, centering black women's voices as a point of pride and importance. In Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, publishers censor her ideas and minimize her tone to make the work more marketable, antithetical to an autobiography's purpose. It is ironic that Hurston was censored in a medium that is supposed to be the most authentic, which shows how her novel can be seen as a political statement and how white voices and marketability are prioritized in the autobiographical tradition which directly stems from slave narratives and the stories of women of color.

Hurston's first mention of race in her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" is one of the first ways in which the reader can see the parallels between Hurston's life with Janie Crawford's in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a reference to autobiography in a novel that Hurston writes in the essay, "when I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown--warranted not to rub nor run" ("How It Feels" 2). Janie explains an experience very similar to Hurston's to Pheoby in the beginning of *TEWWG* by detailing where she realizes that she is colored and now is in a predominately white space, on her first day of school in a white area (*Their Eyes* 9). The tone of this exchange as well as the dialogue in the essay is very conversational and matter of fact. When reading, it feels as

though Hurston and Janie tell a story of what happens to them, but are not doing so to explicitly prove a point about how they are angry about the racial prejudice they face. Hurston does not present realizing that she is a different race as sad to the reader, both in her own experience detailed in this essay and Janie's reflection to Pheoby. When Hurston says that she 'is no longer Zora', she understands that she is in a larger world, one that does not make her feel special; it in fact minimizes her personality and makes her feel less than the dominant white culture. This could potentially make Hurston feel sad, but her attitude is one of making the most out of her life situation. She does not complain about the discrimination she faces and does not explain it in a way that overtly solicits empathy from the reader.

Hurston's essays about race are effective because of their simple articulation of her value system and does not read as if they are explicitly trying to persuade the reader in a specific way, a different approach to autobiographical writing. Later in the essay, Hurston discusses how discrimination connects to her right as an American citizen by saying, "I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong. Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me" ("How It Feels" 4). Her use of humor as well as inflating her own ego in the last sentence of the quotation is more characteristic of male writers and demonstrates authorial confidence in her ideas. She does not use many words that qualify her feelings in this essay, and deliberately states her opinions in a way that is not obfuscated by flowery language.

“How It Feels to be Colored Me”, similarly to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is not angry, but reflective in its tone, a cohesive autobiographical narrative that puts facts for the readers out there and does not interpret the facts of her own life to the reader. Hurston has no choice but to live in America, a country extremely discriminatory towards black people. It is the only place she has known all of her life, so she may as well live whatever kind of life she wants, regardless of the discrimination she faces as a black woman. She does not write with an overt project of explaining racism and does not cater her writing to a white audience through the ways she talks about her experiences. Her essays and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* showcase her understanding of the world, part of the autobiographical writing tradition, and as a result are in contradistinction to her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* in terms of its perceived authenticity to her own lived experience.

Women’s autobiographical writing, even though it is a way for people of marginalized communities to share their stories that is not mediated by any colonial force, is hierarchical within the genre because of critics’ prioritization of Western authors. In Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s book *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography*, they introduce their argument by asserting that “we need to resist the tendency of Western theorizing to install another colonial regime, albeit now a discursive regime that works to contain “colorfulness” inside a Western theoretical territory” (Smith, Watson xv). Women’s writing as a genre seeks to create space for the female experience within a distinctly male literary canon. Autobiographical writing does so to an even larger degree because the story is about the author’s own life, which stands to reason that it would be accurate and not made up. Despite autobiographical writing having an ostensible goal of

asserting women's identities as valid, there are still colonial practices applied to women's autobiography within the genre; mainly preserving white and western women's narratives over those of the global south. These practices are antithetical autobiographical writing's goals and will not further women's writing if they continue to occur. Later in the introduction, Smith and Watson also say that we have to think of the discourse on identity as containing multiple, intersecting identities, and that "we make a space in autobiographical practices for the agency of the autobiographical subject. In this space too the autobiographical speaker may authorize an alternative way of knowing" (Smith, Watson xix-xx). Autobiographical writing is a vehicle for women to articulate their own point of view, often very different from the dominant perspective perpetuated by men as 'universal'. It acknowledges difference and allows for value systems to be established that are outside the dominant historical narrative, and is a more approachable way for the reader to learn about a human experience that is potentially very different from their own. Autobiography is the perfect medium to bridge the prejudices that readers may have in their heads when picking out a book, which is why it is imperative to not impose hegemony within the genre.

Zora Neale Hurston complicates this theory posed by Smith and Watson because her own autobiography adheres to the colonial practices that Smith and Watson seek to remove, but Hurston's fiction, particularly *TEWWG*, does the decolonizing work that the two of them propose as necessary. For many critics and other writers, her autobiography seems mediated by a desire to have it conform to the white, Western audience, unlike her most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* which does the political work of representing black women and overlooked black people. The question of whether or not it is Hurston's own desire to

change her writing style has been debated by many critics, and it is hard for one to see the distinction without access to archival research. In the essay “‘Rubbing a Paragraph with a Soft Cloth’? Muted Voices and Editorial Constraints in *Dust Tracks on a Road*”, a chapter of Smith and Watson’s anthology, Claudine Raynaud looks at early drafts of *DToaR* and contrasts them with revised drafts and the published version to determine how much of Hurston’s authorial voice shifted through revision and consultation with editors. Raynaud characterizes the text as ‘elusive’ and that there is palpable tension between Hurston’s own voice and the voice that publishers want her to use (Raynaud 35). Much of Hurston’s perspectives on politics, more detailed views about sex and marriage for black women, and the black dialect in which she speaks were minimized or left out by her editor (Raynaud 39). Instead of boxing Hurston in with other black male writers who write about urban struggle in their autobiographical writing, her editor markets her to be similar to a white, more ‘high class’ writer. Hurston’s editors view the early drafts of her autobiography similarly to how Richard Wright views *TEWWG*; its tone, use of dialect, and subject matter play into more stereotypes about black women than the book debunks. Their choice to remove her political beliefs is interesting because they assume a lower level of intelligence from her readers or that white people would be less sympathetic to Hurston’s political views expressed. Even though the references are veiled, they are present throughout the novel because of the novel’s allegorical setting to Hurston’s own life. It is ironic that Hurston’s autobiography is more mediated through a white lens because autobiography as a genre has the capacity to add further depth to an author and their origin story. *DToaR* makes Hurston’s persona more complicated and leaves the reader with more questions rather than answers about her life.

The chapter 'Love' in *DToaR* explores Hurston's romantic relationship with A.W.P., a man similar to Tea Cake Woods, Janie's final love interest in *TEWWG* (Hemenway 232). The way in which their relationship begins is similar to Janie's sexual desire as well as her hesitancy to commit to Tea Cake because of their personality differences. Hurston says in her autobiography, "I did not just fall in love. I made a parachute jump. No matter which way I probed him, I found something more to admire. We fitted each other like a glove. His intellect got me first for I am the kind of a woman that likes to move on mentally from point to point, and I like for my man to be there way ahead of me" (*Dust Tracks* 252). For Hurston and Janie, physical attraction comes after being attracted to someone's personality. Hurston does not fully commit to A.W.P. because he represents every quality she wants in a partner and she has never experienced that in one person before. He comes into her life while she is at a transitional stage in her career after conducting anthropological research and does not expect nor want a romantic relationship (*Dust Tracks* 252). When Tea Cake comes into Janie's life, she is older and cherishes the exploratory time which she did not have when she got married so young. Both women are unsure about their choice to fall in love with their respective partners, and the situations are presented in similar ways with similar reactions. Later in the paragraph, Hurston says that "God must have put in extra time making him up" (Hurston 252), which is similar to what Janie says when Tea Cake comes back to her after they have a fight. Hurston's choice to parallel *TEWWG* so much to her own life experience aids in the claim that her novel is also an autobiographical work, and this is one of the moments in her autobiography that is not censored to appeal to a white audience.

Hurston views work and love as separate aspects of life that do not mix, and has a hard time comprehending the fact that A.W.P. wants her to prioritize love over her career at a time where her career takes off in a different direction. After telling the reader that A.W.P. asks her to leave her job and be with him, she says, "I could not see that my work should make any difference in marriage. He was all and everything else to me but that. One did not conflict with the other in my mind. But it was different with him. He felt that he did not matter to me enough" (*Dust Tracks* 256-57). In *TEWWG*, Hurston uses the horizon metaphor to describe characters' potentials and goals given their circumstances. When Janie meets Tea Cake, her horizon is large because she is focused on herself and her own independence. She no longer has to revolve her horizon around someone like her ex-husband Joe Starks, who has a small horizon which focuses on her within their marriage. In Hurston's own life when she meets A.W.P., her horizon is large; she focuses on her career and her emerging potential as a writer as well as an anthropologist. She considers writing a book and devoting her time and energy to that project, not settling down and being fully in love with one person. A.W.P. offers to keep his horizon small and focus solely on her, with the caveat being that she has to do the same for him. He resents the fact that Hurston's horizon is not as small as his and that she does not want to change her horizon to match the scope of his. It is difficult for both of them to compromise because their goals are opposite, and they are stubborn people that want their own desires to come to fruition. A.W.P.'s desires involve Hurston acquiescing to what he wants, which is more difficult for him to achieve because her persona and goals as a writer supersede her interest in a relationship at that moment. Hurston's relationship with A.W.P. is a role reversal of how Hurston sets up female and male desire at the beginning of

TEWWG, with Hurston herself assuming the more active role in pursuing her career goals but she is passive in her romantic relationship, whereas A.W.P. actively pursues a relationship with her, his sole desire.

III: Gendered Dreaming and Relationships in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston's most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* draws on her own experiences of living in an all-black environment and then returning to it later in life, as well as being a woman who found love and pleasure through romantic relationships, but ends up unmarried and content with her single status. The novel's protagonist Janie Crawford is a carefree teenager interested in exploring romance on her own terms until Nanny, her grandmother, forces her into an unhappy arranged marriage that sets her on a restricted life path. Her dream, throughout tumultuous relationships with Logan, Joe, and Tea-Cake, is to be happy and live a full life, which is first presented to her as solely being accomplished through marriage and the performance of being a wife. Janie's gender, race, and youth force her to dream actively and seek out the few places where she can obtain control over her life. Fullness and meaning do not fall passively at her feet, and only come to Janie and other women when they see the way in which they are able to feel content, in service to no one else, free of expectations and other burdens. By setting up this dichotomy between the way in which men and women dream, this novel shows how gender and race constrain women's potential much more than men through the fact that a woman can only successfully navigate Eatonville's judgmental society through marriage. Janie's character complicates the gendered understanding of dreaming based on her naive personality in interpersonal relationships and the Eatonville town, yet she is someone who has total control of her own sexual desires.

Their Eyes Were Watching God sets up men and women at the beginning of the novel as diametrically opposed in their approach to life through how they are allowed to dream, a theme throughout the novel that the narrator shows at first to be rigid. The narrator asserts in the novel's second paragraph that "women forget all those things they don't want to

remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly" (*Their Eyes* 1). Dreaming is a specifically female gendered notion because it is much more active and dependent on how women want to use their memories to guide their decisions. Men do not have to dream because all of their desires are accessible to them; women have to actively make the choice to go after what they want instead of waiting for it to come to them. Hurston's linkage of female dreams with the truth puts women, in her mind, as never fully living the life that they want because of circumstances beyond their control. A female dream is one of a life unencumbered by the confined expectations of being female. Men do not have to think of a life with no expectations because they have more freedom already ascribed to them, demonstrated by the novel's first paragraph where Hurston shows "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" (1). Male desire is subconscious and not acted on, and men have the privilege to be complacent and treat what they want as not urgent until it passes them by. The use of the word mock implies that Hurston prefers the female gendered notion of dreaming because it involves female agency and not aimlessly waiting for life to take its course, as evidenced by Janie's behavior in her marriages and what precipitates her change and desires at the beginning of the novel.

Janie's sexual awakening at the beginning of the novel introduces another aspect to the female, gendered notion of dreams, where she claims autonomy over her body and equates bodily autonomy and sexual exploration with the ability to make her own meaning

in the world. After Janie visualizes her dream of marriage through having a vision while looking at a tree, “she searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short of impatience. Waiting for the world to be made” (11). The world is now one of limitless possibility; Janie sees her dream of freedom to be young and in love in front of her and wants to do as much as she can to achieve it. Because she has more control of her own body and therefore her own destiny, she now makes the meaning in her new world. This realization that she is in control allows her to think of all of the new possibilities that are open to her and she subconsciously disregards gender and racial limitations. At the end of Logan and Janie's failed marriage, Janie goes back to the site of her previous dreams and reflects, “the familiar people and things had failed her so she hung over the gate and looked up the road towards way off. She knew now that marriage didn't make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (25). Janie returns to the horizon to look for new possibility, because her marriage, a small horizon that she hopes would expand, fails. This quotation is another interpretation of the dichotomy set up on the first page because here, Hurston shows that women have to find new dreams, their way out of situations that are not beneficial to them and do not advance their goals. It is a condition of being a woman for one's dream to fail.

Hurston first presents love and marriage to the reader as being automatically concurrent through Janie's marriage to Logan, a naïve perception of what love means, which she quickly debunks through Janie's experience in her first marriage. Janie says to herself on her wedding day, “yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way

for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks have said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so” (21). The truth in this scenario is assumed, and Janie does not think that she has to do any work to make love come from her relationship with Logan; because of their roles in each other’s lives, they will be in love. Her assumption that love will automatically come from marriage is naïve and does not recognize the stark inequity in their relationship dynamic. Logan is older, already established in the community, and had never shown any romantic interest in her before they were bound to this lifetime commitment. Janie takes Nanny’s word as the truth because if love came with marriage for other people in her community, it would subsequently happen to her. At this point in her life, Nanny is her sole guidepost for what she wants to happen to her after making this decision. After she marries Logan and sees Nanny, Janie says “I wants to want him sometimes. Ah don’t want him tuh do all de wantin’” (23). Logan does want Janie, but only in a way that puts him in a position of male superiority over her, so he can use her for sex but also to assert his dominance. Janie understands from the beginning of their relationship that they are not a match, but she is trapped in this relationship, desperately trying to work for the reality that corresponds with her dream.

Joe Starks is a manifestation of the large horizon metaphor because of his presence when he meets Janie as worldly, simultaneously familiar and a breath of fresh air in comparison to her marriage to Logan. In their first meeting, Joe is shown as a man with confidence and purpose. When Hurston describes him walking down the road, she paints his picture as “[His] shirt with the silk sleeve-holders was dazzling enough to the world. He whistled, mopped his face, and walked like he knew where he was going. He was a seal-brown

color but he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody to Janie” (27). The contrast between Logan and Joe is immediate in Janie’s mind. Logan goes through the motions of marriage without investing any emotion into it and does not express his feelings of love to her in a way that makes her feel desired. Joe, like Janie, is an active dreamer at first, and wants to find his version of the truth through making a new life somewhere else. Through this short conversation, Janie dreams that both of them can move through life together and that she will not be hindered by his insistence on wanting Janie to fit into his life and not him into hers. In a few moments of knowing Joe, Janie is already curious about him and feels that he has more to offer her because of his apparent goals and success. She is comfortable around him because of his familiar aura and appearance. Later in their interaction, Joe demonstrates other attractive qualities like ambition and spontaneity. In their subsequent conversations, Joe lays out his more exciting personality to her through lofty dreams. The narrator shows their interactions to the reader as “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. Still she hung back” (29). Joe lays out all of his goals to Janie when he first meets her, and seems like someone together with whom Janie could grow, whereas Janie wilts with Logan and he stifles her. He is Janie’s way out of her marriage and her way into a more exciting life; she craves his ambition and openness because it is the antithesis of Logan’s mean and controlling nature. She is not as sexually attracted to Joe because his persona does not match with the blooming trees and pollination motif, but she is attracted to the opportunities he can bring her in her life.

Male desire also manifests in Janie and Joe's relationship through Joe's resentment of Janie's beauty and how other men find her attractive, unbeknownst to her. Janie has to put her hair up in a rag when she works in the store because "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. He never told her how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it as she went about things in the store...she was in the store for him to look at, not others" (55). Joe is insecure about Janie's attractiveness and how she is the men in Eatonville's object of desire, which makes him less likely to be friends with the other men in Eatonville because he is territorial, which does not add up in his role as mayor of a small town. All Joe wants is to have control and feel included; he wanted to be the mayor of Eatonville, so he went there and befriended the right people to make that happen, and he views his marriage as another object over which to have control. Joe's horizon, not explicitly mentioned in this quotation, centers around being well liked in the town; his marriage is ancillary to his goals. Janie's horizon centers around love and happiness tied only to marriage at this point in the novel, therefore it is tied to Joe. Earlier when two men have a conversation about Joe and Janie, they remark to each other that "Ah often wonder how dat lil wife uh hisn makes out wid him, 'cause he's uh man dat changes everything, but nothin' don't change him" (49). Joe is obstinate, craves attention and is controlling, yet draws people to him because of his extreme belief that he can change the lives of people around him. His hope for change, actively dreaming, allows him to be passive in changing his own personality and the way he interacts with people. His passivity in improving his personality ruins his relationships with Janie and the other people in the town, and he is content with a marriage and reputation that reflect

negatively upon him. He restricts Janie's bodily autonomy as well as her sexual desire, which leads to a breaking point in their relationship.

Nature imagery connected with sexuality also recurs in *TEWWG* during times of conflict, not times of pleasure like what has been previously shown to the reader. After Joe dismisses Janie's intelligence and self-awareness after an especially bad public instance of shaming her, the narrator relays that "the spirit of their marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor...the bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. it was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired" (71). The motif of flowers in this quotation connects to the tree metaphor which recurs throughout the book. These flowers are a symbol for youth, sexual pleasure, and new relationships, but now the fun in their relationship is lost. Janie's tree no longer blooms for Joe; he insults her, does not think highly of her, and does not respect her as an equal partner in their marriage. She does not feel valued by him, which corresponds to her unwillingness to put herself in that place of vulnerability through sex. Through sex in their bedroom, Janie becomes more confident in herself and who she is as a woman, an unintended purpose of their room. Now, Janie cannot progress as a person through sex because Joe tarnishes her sexual desire through his cruel, dismissive treatment of her needs and desires. After this scene and after Joe slaps Janie a few days later, Janie thinks to herself, "her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it was never the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over...she had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her mean, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be" (72). This slap shatters her perception of Joe because he does not treat her as a person equal to

him. He is enraged at her for performing badly at her job of being a wife and to make his life better. He sees her as a vehicle for his growth, opposite of how he presents himself to her when they meet. Now that Janie has further perspective on her relationship after experiencing Joe's abuse, she sees that their marriage does not have as much substance as she thought it did. Joe's desire for control creates a gap between them that cannot be bridged. Since her abuse, Janie has no sexual desire for Joe; her tree wilts, and her horizon shifts because Joe does not foster love between them or return the love that she gives to him emotionally and sexually. Their marriage is another example of Janie's failed dreams and how she and Joe did not approach marriage the same way from the beginning, which it seems the novel posits one has to do in order to have a successful relationship.

The horizon metaphor's significance changes after Joe's funeral, one of the first instances where it is shown as very restricting and then as a sign of Janie's satisfaction. Janie reflects after Joe's funeral that "here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon--for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you--and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her" (89). Hurston uses the image of the horizon as an extended metaphor for Janie's future which recurs throughout the novel, first meaning limitless possibility because of the large distance between Janie and the horizon in the beginning. Janie's grandmother greatly manipulates her future by tying it specifically to marriage to Logan at such a young age where she had so much more life to live. Her lack of possibility boxes her dreams into being about love and marriage, which then makes the argument that her only purpose is to get married and provide happiness to someone else. The phrase in the

en dashes in the quotation firmly asserts that people's potential is limitless no matter who they are, almost as an absolute perspective. When men try to come to her house to help Janie 'feel better' and offer themselves to her, she declines, knowing in herself that "she liked being lonesome for a change. This freedom feeling was fine. These men didn't represent a thing she wanted to know about. She had already experienced them through Logan and Joe" (90). Janie wants to experience new things on her own, free from her husband's overreaching influence. Janie is now what one would consider to be middle aged, but she still feels very young because her marriages took away so much of the time that she could have used to be on her own and live a life full of new experiences. One of her dreams is to make decisions without always having to think about her choice affects someone else, to be able to go after the ship she wants on the horizon when she wants to, not when she believes she has to. She wants to be able to be satisfied with her dreams and in a space where she can rejoice in complacency, like the two men she marries and like other men in Eatonville.

Vergible 'Tea Cake' Woods comes into Janie's life at an unplanned time, but his presence and attitude around her allows her to feel more confident and like a complete person, outside of the chains of unequal marriages. In their first meeting at the store where Tea Cake teaches her how to play checkers, Janie remarks to herself that "somebody [Tea Cake] wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice. She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points" (96). This scene is like a classic scene from a romantic comedy movie, where neither character expects themselves to feel the way that they do when they meet each other randomly, but grow to have affection for each other organically. There is some shared nervousness between them

but at the same time some comfort in participating in a low stakes game of checkers. They meet each other pretty soon after Joe dies, but enough time has passed so that Janie is not hindered by his death in meeting new people. Through unexpected happiness in her first conversation with Tea Cake, Janie recognizes a healthy relationship and what it feels like to be appreciated by someone else. She is surprised that their connection feels so natural and that he is a mysterious man that at the same time she feels like she has known for a long time. Tea Cake's immediate devotion to Janie is a stark contrast to how Logan and Joe treat her, which shows the reader that immediate equal interest in one another is a key component to a more successful relationship and a way that active dreaming is reciprocated.

After their game ends, Tea Cake tells Janie that she would be good at checkers and validates her own interests, to which she responds, ““You reckon so? Jody useter tell me Ah never would learn. It wuz too heavy fuh mah brains.’ ‘Folks is playin’ it wid sense and folks is playin’ it without. But you got good meat on yo’ head. You’ll learn. Have a cool drink on me”” (96). When Tea Cake tells Janie that she can easily learn how to become a good checkers player, he gives her the potential that it is not impossible, which gives her the opportunity to actively dream about an interest that solely benefits her. He opens her up to the idea that someone who is romantically interested in her thinks that her dreams are worth pursuing and that it is important to him that she succeeds. His little reassurance about this game makes a large mark on Janie because he does not underestimate her or think of her as inferior to him in their burgeoning relationship. He notices more about how her mind works than Joe ever did, and likes seeing how she thinks, the opposite of how Joe treats her. Checkers is a small action, but one that gives Janie the space to learn how to play for herself. At the moment,

their horizon is small because they focus so much on each other, but Janie receives more faith from Tea Cake than she had previously from Logan and Joe, so her horizon is larger because there is more potential for love between them.

Hurston flips Tea Cake and Janie's roles in their relationship, which changes how male desire is represented because it is much more active through Tea Cake. In a conversation between the two of them when they are in a fight, Tea Cake first says to her, "'de thought uh mah youngness don't satisfy me lak yo' presence do.' 'Things lak dat got uh whole lot tuh do wid convenience, but it ain't got nothin' tuh do wid love.' 'Well Ah love tuh find out whut you think after sun-up tomorrow. Dis is jus' yo' night thought'" (105). Janie fights with him out of an irrational fear that their irreconcilable life differences will end their relationship. With him, she could not fulfill all the traditional roles of being a wife like having children, as well as growing together in their marriage, something she wanted but never had in her marriage to Joe. She thinks that her age, two previous marriages, and her independent persona would shrink his horizon and potential for life. Her instinct to push him away is because she thinks she cannot measure up to his expectations for marriage, but she cannot see that Tea Cake's expectation for marriage is to be with her however he can. Tea Cake is similar to Janie in the beginning of the novel because he pursues someone who does not show interest in him at first and persists in fulfilling his goal of being in a relationship with her. He thinks that their relationship is one of substance and love, not convenience which she claims, and by being with her, he will widen his horizon. She sees his statement as falsely reassuring, but her attraction to him overtakes her hesitation about their age difference and life circumstances.

Janie and Tea Cake's relationship reverses the way in which the tree and horizon metaphors are used and places Janie in a position of power over him. Tea Cake comes back to Janie's door after they have a fight and when Janie sees him, she thinks, "he 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" (106). Tea Cake reignites Janie's sexual desire in a way that she can no longer ignore. For so long, Janie's tree wilts and bears no flowers because she does not have a suitable partner with whom to share her life. Her perception of Tea Cake as 'a glance from God' is an even grander statement about his desirability than ones that she made about Joe when they first met. This comparison shows the reader that as much as she tries to avoid her feelings, she wants to be with Tea Cake and cannot keep denying it to herself. Tea Cake pursues Janie even though she previously pushes him away because of their difference in age and life experience, which makes her all the more attracted to him because he loves her in spite of her fears about being with him. His horizon is her, and he does not need hers to be similarly focused on him at this point in the novel; he is the active dreamer in their relationship, subverting Hurston's overarching dichotomy. The language used in this passage triggers all of the senses, describing love in a sensual, warm way through the use of food descriptors like spices, aromatic herbs, and the word scent. Janie is attracted to Tea Cake and likes spending time with him, but also enjoys feeling desired because she has never felt that way in a relationship prior to this one, and wants to remain in this position for as long as possible.

Hurston also uses the tree metaphor to show resentment and growing anxiety in Janie and Tea Cake's relationship, unlike how it is previously used in the book to represent new sexual desire and bodily autonomy. In the Everglades when Tea Cake works in the fields, Nunkie, a younger woman who works with him flirts with him and "Tea Cake didn't seem to be able to fend her off as promptly as Janie thought he ought to. She began to be snappish a little. A little seed of fear was growing into a tree" (136). At first, a tree is a metaphor for Janie's sexual awakening and how that is inextricably linked to new possibility. In this context, it directly contrasts with new possibility and serves to maintain the status quo. Janie does not want to lose Tea Cake; he romantically pursues her when no one has before, and gives her a new life full of change, not Joe who ties her to Eatonville and his own successes. Her jealousy stems from sexual attraction, but now she is the person in the relationship trying to have control instead of being controlled. Janie's jealousy is an active emotion because it involves protecting her relationship with Tea Cake, something that is only hers, before Nunkie is able to take it away. This scene is an example of how the novel's overarching framework of female active dreaming from the first page is shown as arduous with the potential for an unwanted result. Hurston thinks of dreaming as an action that should in theory improve women's lives, and women cannot be complacent in order to achieve them. Previously, actively dreaming is shown to the reader through actions that benefit the characters in interpersonal relationships or in achieving their goals, but this scene shows how active dreaming fills Janie with emotion that exacerbates her anxiety and leads to a fight between her and Tea Cake.

The novel's ending scene brings dreaming full circle, showing how Janie's character shifts from active dreaming to feeling satisfied with not having to chase her dreams because

of how much she has learned from chasing her dreams. After Janie finishes telling Pheoby what happens at the end of her relationship with Tea Cake, she thinks to herself, “the kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come see” (193). Janie’s life comes full circle after her three relationships; she has no more need to dream and explore, and is content to be on her own. Her horizon, once large so she could find a way out of stifling situations, now does not have to be large. Her life does not have to take on the entire world and have the largest possible potential; she no longer needs to have a large horizon to experience a variety of different people and ideas. She could never have predicted how her life would spiral into a varied journey catalyzed by one kiss, but she does not show anger at what happened now that it is over. Tea Cake and Janie will always be connected, and there is no romantic connection that Janie could have that would supersede it. She now can be someone who watches ships in the distance and does not decide to always go after them; she now does not need a relationship to feel content in life. Janie tried to escape enough parts of life already in the novel, which led her back to the town that she once ran from. She slows down, does not rush down the road because another person promises her change, and no longer needs a new challenge and escape from predetermined gender roles and unhappiness.

V: Conclusion

Their Eyes Were Watching God complicates the tradition of novels with female protagonists on quests to find themselves because of the circumstances of how Janie comes to her predetermined strict life path of marriage and being a wife. Janie's youth and wide-eyed innocence stand in contradistinction to even thinking about being a wife as one of her main goals; at the beginning of the novel her horizon is large because it is widened by a sexual awakening and being much more in control over her body. Innocence and bodily control are paradoxical; Janie transcends gender expectations by giving into both sides of her personality, like when she impulsively kisses someone for the first time and is unaware of the repercussions of her actions given her age, gender, race, and social status. At the same time, Janie controls her sexual desire once she is resigned to the fate of her marriage to Logan and Joe because sexuality and blooming trees can only occur if she is in love.

The novel is also set up by a dichotomy between female and male dreams and desire, shown through Hurston's conceit of passive and active dreaming. Passive dreaming, a more male attribute, allows men the privilege to wait for their dreams to come to them and then act on them. Female, active dreaming requires women to go after their dreams to create their version of the truth; they do not have the luxury to discriminate within which dream to go after. Hurston's word choice when female desire appears at the novel's beginning show the reader that she prefers female over male desire because of how female desire requires women to engage with themselves, reflect, and go after what they want. Janie's dream is to have a happy, equitable marriage, but the reader cannot tell whether or not Janie would have chosen this for herself if not for her grandmother compelling her into marriage to save her social status. At the end of the novel, Janie is content with where her dreams led her and

does not need to keep chasing her dreams because of the tumultuous path she went on chasing a happy marriage through Logan, Joe, and Tea Cake. Even though active dreaming requires more effort, Hurston shows the reader that it pays off through the novel's resolution of a woman realizing that her life no longer has to be determined by her social status, relationship status, and how others view her.

Fiction as a genre gives authors a lot of space to insert their political views on issues like race, gender, religion, class, and sexuality. Critics and other writers consider *TEWWG* an autobiographical novel because of how it parallels Hurston's own life as well as representing black society independent from white society, a radical, political act at the time. Hurston's own autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* is very mediated by white publishers to appeal to a broad audience, counterintuitive to a genre based on authenticity and specific narrative voice that depends on the author's prior life experiences. *TEWWG* does the work of representation in the literary canon that *DToaR* could not accomplish because of its mediated tone, paradoxical given the genre. The autobiographical genre prioritizes white, Western women's voices over women's voices from marginalized communities, which does not fall in line with the genre's purpose. Writers within the autobiographical genre should actively work to destabilize the dominant narrative of what voices are deemed acceptable by publishers and readers, and to show that patriarchy is not a universal experience of oppression.

The multitudes of scholarship that surround *TEWWG* at once celebrate its importance and revolutionary style, claim its highlighting of rural black Southern culture as a radical act, yet dispute the academic canon's reliance on it as an inflection point for black female authors. Hazel Carby's claim that Hurston creates a group of people outside of history and asserts new

representation through writing about rural black people is in accordance with my reading of the text, but her further claim that the literary community places too much value on Hurston as a unique writer and voice is not. Hurston's writing style and use of folklore inspires joy through literary representation in subsequent authors like Alice Walker and Zadie Smith, which in turn they then use as a model for their own texts. Hurston's Harlem Renaissance peers assert that because Hurston's work is about love, relationships, women, and dreams, it should not be taken as seriously as their own work. Richard Wright's claim that Hurston's novel is not serious discounts narratives about black people that are not male or urban and brands seriousness as masculine in subject matter. Hurston's work stands as an influential text that represents a key part of American culture because of the paradoxes presented in Janie's desires and intuition, how it blurs the genre lines as a work of autobiographical fiction that allows Hurston's less mediated personal opinion to come through, and its showcase of joy allows for readers to have larger literary horizons after finishing Janie's nonlinear, unpredictable journey through life.

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