Chapter - IV

ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

During the 1920s Harlem, the black community situated uptown in New York City, sparkled with passion and creativity. The sounds of its black American jazz swept the United States by storm, and jazz musicians and composers like Duke Ellington became stars beloved across the United States and overseas. Among the rich variety of talent in Harlem, many visions coexisted. Carl Van Vechten's sympathetic 1926 novel of Harlem gives some idea of the complex and bittersweet life of black America in the face of economic and social inequality.

The literary achievement of African-Americans was one of the most striking literary developments of the post-Civil War era. In the writings of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and others, the roots of black American writing took hold notably in the forms of autobiography, protest literature, sermons, poetry and song.

The Harlem Renaissance is generally considered the first significant movement of black writers and artists in the United States. Centered in the Harlem District of New York City and other urban areas during the 1920s, the movement constituted an unprecedented flowering of cultural activity among African Americans. During this period, new and established black writers published more fiction and poetry than ever before. The first influential black literary journals were established, and black authors and artists received their first widespread recognition and serious critical appraisal. Although widely diverse in content and style, works of the Harlem Renaissance were often characterized by heightened racial awareness. Many black writers and artists sought to counteract white racial prejudice as well as
to perpetuate African aspects of their cultural heritage. Among the major writers associated with this period are Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston. The Harlem Renaissance also arrived on the American stage, beginning with the Broadway opening of the black musical *Shuffle Along* in 1921. At the same time, jazz was coming into its own in New York City and Chicago. Historian Nathan Irvin Huggins has written about this vibrant period of artistic rebirth in his book *Harlem Renaissance* (1971).

These writers and others were encouraged by Charles S. Johnson, who edited *Opportunity*. Like other American writers in the 1920s, black writers reflected the spirit of the times, and the importance of personal fulfillment. And like others, they reflected wide literary trends, including the struggle between traditional and experimental literature. For example, whereas Countee Cullen favored traditional poetic forms, Langston Hughes incorporated contemporary jazz rhythms into his verse. But the writers of the Harlem Renaissance had unique aims to define and renew the black heritage: to protest oppression of blacks; and to make other Americans aware of black life.

Folklore encompasses the tradition and myths of a culture as conveyed by stories, sayings, dances and art forms. Typically, these are passed on by word of mouth or preserved in customs and ceremonies. A folktale is a story originating in the oral tradition. Many writers, among them Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Amos Tutuola and Louise Bebbett, draw on folklories for inspiration in their writings.

Among the first to identify folklore as vital component of black culture were Sterling A. Brown, and Zora Neale Hurston, both of whom began their research in the American South in the 1920s. Subsequently, Bernard Dadie published a noted collection of African folktales in the 1950s. Jean Price-Mars wrote several works on Haitian folklore, and Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps published *The Book of*
Negro Folklore in 1958. More recent collections include Black Folktales (1969), and The Knee-High Man and Other Tales (1972), both by Julius Lester, and studies by Daryl Cumber Dance. Shuckin and Jivin: Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans (1978) and Folklore from Contemporary Jamaicans (1985) are informative.

Mari Evans’s poetry collections Nightstar: 1973-1978 (1981) and A Dark and Splendid Mass (1991) are noted for their use of idiom to present authentic black voices. Her works for children include I Look at Me!(1973), a personalized work. Her plays Eyes (1979), a musical adapted from Zora Neale Hurston’s novel Their Eyes Were Watching God is much revealing.

Zora Neale Hurston was recognized as one of the lights of the Harlem Renaissance, a gifted short story writer, novelist, folklorist, journalist, and critic for thirty years, the most prolific writer in America.

Zora Neale Hurston was born probably on January 7, 1891. She was born and raised in America’s first all-black incorporated town, Eatonville, Florida, which provided the inspiration for most of her fiction. She said, “I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back-side of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America.” So on August 18, 1886, the Negro town, called Eatonville, after Captain Eaton, received its charter of incorporation from the state capital, Tallahassee, and made history by becoming the first of its kind in America, and perhaps in the world. So, in a raw, bustling frontier, the experiment of self-government for Negroes was tried. White Maitland and Negro Eatonville have
lived side by side for fifty-six years without a single instance of enmity. The spirit of the founders has reached beyond the grave.

The whole lake country Florida sprouted with life—mostly Northerners, and prosperity was everywhere. It was in the late eighties that stars fell, and many of the original settlers date their coming just before, or just after the stars fell.

Hurston's father, John Hurston, was a former sharecropper who became a carpenter, a Baptist preacher, and three-term Mayor of Eatonville. Her mother, Lucy Hurston, died in 1904. Hurston was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to school, but wound up, neglected by her remarried father and worked a variety of menial jobs. Though she was taken out of school at age thirteen, an employer later arranged for her to complete her basic education.

At fourteen Hurston sought book knowledge, not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle for channeling and articulating the visions and dreams dammed up inside. Thus, her formal education at Morgan Academy, Howard University and Barnard College fully satisfied this need in that it introduced her to the world of literature, a meeting that finds an eager mate in 'the hemisphere of her imagination,' according to Robert Hemenway. It is at Barnard that Hurston declared her intent to pursue a writing career, although she became captivated with anthropology as a result of meeting Franz Boas. Hemenway comments, "When Hurston became fascinated with anthropology, she acquired the relatively rare opportunity to confront her culture both emotionally and analytically, both as subject and as object. She had lived Afro-American folklore before she knew that such a thing existed as a scientific concept or had special value as evidence of the adaptive creativity of a unique subculture. Hurston came to know that her parents and their neighbors perpetuated a rich oral literature without self-consciousness, a literature illustrating a creativity seldom recognized and almost universally misunderstood."
Hurston first came to New York City at the age of 16—having arrived as part of a traveling theatrical troupe. A five year gap in her personal history at this time has led some biographers to conjecture that she married; however, no evidence exists to support or disprove this speculation.

In 1917 Hurston began studies at Baltimore’s Morgan Academy. Moving to Washington D.C in 1918, she became a part-time student at Howard University and began to write, gaining the attention of some of the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance with her essays and short fiction. She moved to New York in 1925 and broadened her contact with both the black and white literary communities. Her first short story appeared in the college literary magazine. She later won a scholarship to Barnard College, where she studied anthropology. She studied at Columbia University with the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas and she came to grasp ethnicity from a scientific perspective, an experience that influenced her work.

While living in New York, Hurston worked as a secretary to the popular novelist Fannie Hurst. Hurston already, the author of four novels and a number of short stories, essays, and nonfiction works, is acknowledged as the first Black American to collect and publish African-American folklore. She is considered a major force in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s.

From 1927 to 1931, Hurston collected African-American folklore in Alabama and Florida, working on a private grant. She drew on this folklore material for her plays, musicals, short stories, and novels.

Hurston has influenced such writers as Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Gayl Jones, and Toni Cade Bambara.

By the mid-1940s, Hurston’s literary career had largely failed. During the remaining years of her life she worked variously as a newspaper reporter, librarian, and substitute teacher. She suffered a stroke in 1959 and was forced to enter a welfare home in Florida, where she died penniless in 1960. She was buried in an unmarked
grave in Fort Pierce’s segregated cemetery, the Garden of the Heavenly Rest. Dorothy West’s story “The Typewriter,” which shared an award with a work by Hurston, reflects Hurston fascination with people’s hidden motivations.

The post-II World War aesthetic movement is an artistic response made by African-Americans to the black aesthetic movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. Writers since then have adopted a somewhat different tone in their work, with less emphasis placed on the disparity between black and white in the United States. In other words, of post aesthetic authors such as Toni Morrison, John Edgar Wideman, and Kristin Hunter, the themes of self-reflection and healing are evident. African Americans are portrayed as looking inward for answers to their own questions, rather than looking to the outside world.

Since the black aesthetic movement, African-American writing has become more legitimized in America and barriers have fallen in various genres. For example, Octavia E. Butler and Samuel R. Delany have delved into the world of science fiction; and Donald Goines wrote detective fiction. Novels of both folk history and the urban experience have been equally well received, and many artists have found that they can straddle more than one genre—Alice Walker and Gayl Jones being examples—and have published fiction, poetry, essays, and children’s books.

Black women writers have played a particularly important part in the post-aesthetic movement. Morrison, Walker, Jones, Terry McMillan, and Gloria Naylor are all examples of successful female authors who have become prominent figures in the literary arena. Many of these women wrote in reaction to the black aesthetic movement, protesting the subordinate role in which they had been cast by male-oriented black nationalism.

Hurston’s work was resurrected for inspiration. These women were also supported by the women’s liberation movement, allowing their works to reach a
wide audience. In this way, the somewhat female-repressive politics of black aesthetics provoked women writers to express themselves. By the 1980s, black women writers were at the leading edge of publishing in both quality and quantity of their work.

An influential anthology of black writings *The New Negro* was assembled by philosopher Alain Locke. *The New Negro* is an expanded version of the magazine *The Survey Graphic*, which celebrated black cultural life, especially in the urban north after the Great Migration. Many of the thirty-eight contributors, including Hurston, Hughes, and Cullen, were later associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Other important contributors are W.E.B. Du Bois, novelists Jessie Fauset and Jean Toomer, and Arthur A. Schomburg.

**Zora Neale Hurston’s Works:**

Zora Neale Hurston was a prolific writer. She was a novelist, short story writer and folklorist. What follows now is a critical survey of her literary output.


Hurston’s *Mules and Men* bridges the gap between her career as a creative writer and her profession as an anthropologist, a collector of African-American folktales and traditional stories. She collaborated on several plays with various writers, including *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*, written with Langston Hughes. Franz Boas, an anthropologist, urged and arranged a fellowship for her that allowed her to travel throughout the South and collect folklore from her native Florida environment, which she did. The result of these travels was the publication of Hurston’s first collection of black folktales, *Mule and Men*. The distinguished
folklorist Alan Lomax called her *Mules and Men* "The most engaging, genuine, and skillfully written book in the field of folklore."³

*Mules and Men* is divided into two parts. The first section deals with material she collected from her home state of Florida. This material is mostly about racial tensions and competition in the days before the Civil War. Some of the stories use talking animals to make points about race relations. In "What the Rabbit Learned," for example, Brer Rabbit shows that he has learned to beware of Brer Dog, despite the latter's assertion that dogs and rabbits are now friends. "The Talking Mule" tells the story of Bill, who one day simply refuses to finish the plowing for his owner, startling the man so much that he runs away. A recurring human character in other stories is John, a slave who always outsmarts Ole Massa, a white plantation owner. "Member Youse a Nigger" is about a bargain John makes with Ole Massa. John agrees to bring in a bumper crop if Ole Massa will in turn give John his freedom. Ole Massa agrees and keeps his promise. As John walks away, however, Ole Massa continually reminds him of his status. John responds each time, but he does not stop walking until he reaches Canada and safety.

The second part of the book contains material collected in and around New Orleans and gives an account of Hoodoo, an accumulation of folk beliefs drawn partly from native African religions. Rather than stories, the second part contains sketches of the characters who practice Hoodoo. Portraying herself as a student, Hurston carefully describes the rituals and beliefs that the different Hoodoo doctors use to drive people away, to bring them back, and in some cases to kill them.

2. *Tell My Horse* (1938):

Hurston published African-American folklore. Her interest in anthropology took her to several Latin American countries, including Jamaica, Haiti and Honduras. Her travel experiences appear in her second collection of folktales. She
spent time in Haiti, studying voodoo and collecting Caribbean folklore that was anthologized in *Tell My Horse*. Her natural command of colloquial English puts her in the great tradition of Mark Twain. Her writing sparkles with colorful language, and comic or tragic stories from the African American oral tradition.


Hurston’s first novel, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, is loosely based on the lives of her parents in Eatonville. It was written shortly after *Mules and Men* (although it was published first) and has been criticized as being more of an anthropological study than a novel. The work combines her knowledge of folklore with biblical themes.

4. Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937):

Hurston was an impressive novelist. Her best-known work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was published in 1937. Written after a failed love affair, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* focuses on middle class and middle-aged woman’s quest for fulfillment in an oppressive society. The novel depicts an African American woman’s struggle to assert herself in rural Florida in the early 20th century. The protagonist is Janie Crawford, granddaughter of Nanny Crawford, a maid to a white family. Janie is the product of two generations of racial and sexual violence. Nanny gave birth to Janie’s mother after being raped by her owner and Janie’s mother bore Janie after being raped by her schoolteacher. The novel opens when Nanny, who has kept Janie secluded to prevent more sexual violence, discovers her granddaughter kissing a boy over the fence. Nanny believes that she needs to find Janie a husband quickly. She chooses a local farmer named Logan Killicks, and the two are married. However, Janie quickly becomes bored with Killicks and runs off with Joe Starks, a storekeeper in Eatonville, Florida.
Starks proves to be more complex than Killicks had been, but Janie soon realizes that he regards her as little more than window-dressing for his political ambitions. For about twenty years, Starks dominates Eatonville. He isolates his wife, setting her above the rest of the village but also depriving her of her identity. Finally Janie asserts herself. Joe never recovers from this blow, and he dies soon after. Janie inherits the house and store, and begins living with Tea Cake Woods. For a time the two travel through southern Florida, working with migrant laborers. However, Woods is bitten by a dog and contracts rabies. As he sickens, he becomes both violent and paranoid, and he threatens Janie. Finally she is forced to shoot him to save herself. The novel is narrated by Janie after she returns to her home in Eatonville and tells her story to her best friend, Pheoby. The novel vividly evokes the lives of African Americans working the land in the rural South. Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is discussed in great details in the following pages.

5. Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939):

Hurston’s *Moses, Man and Mountain*, attempts to fuse biblical narrative and folk myth. It was an allegorical novel of American slavery. Hurston made use of her studies of voodoo in New Orleans.

6. Dust Tracks on a Road (1942): An Autobiography:

*Dust Tracks on a Road* is Hurston’s own story of growing up in Florida. Considered one of the most controversial figures of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston drew on her imagination and her anthropological studies as well as her own experience to create a picture of African American life in the Deep South in the early 20th century. The book begins in Eatonville, Florida, where Hurston spent her childhood, and describes her early life. Especially inspiring in her mother, a former schoolteacher who encourages her daughter to look beyond the limits of her world.
When Hurston is thirteen, her mother dies. Her father remarries, and Hurston is left without a home or family. She finds work as a maid and discovers a discarded copy of John Milton’s complete works in the trash, which helps her decide to return to school. After another job as a maid, she enrolls at Morgan College and then at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Hurston finds friends and patrons who encourage her writing, including the editor Charles S. Johnson and the novelist Fanny Hurst. She receives a scholarship to attend Barnard College and there meets Franz Boas, an anthropologist who encourages her to collect African American folklore. With the help of Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy philanthropist and supporter of the arts, Hurston begins her writing career.

*Dust Tracks on a Road* was sharply criticized by other African American writers for its refusal to attack segregation. In one striking example, Hurston records her embarrassment at a black man who insisted on having his hair cut in a barbershop for whites. However, Hurston’s lack of sensitivity and apparent obliviousness to her racist environment may derive from her belief in an individual’s ability to control his own destiny—a belief she expresses often in *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Shrimati Das observes, “Hurston’s autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), can be a discomfiting book, and it has probably harmed her reputation. Like much of her career, it often appears contradictory. Hurston seems to be both an advocate for the universal, demonstrating that this black woman does not look at the world in racial terms and the celebrant of a unique ethnic upbringing in an all-black village.”

The early chapters (I-V) of the autobiography recount the sense of shared life that Hurston knew in Eatonville, Florida, through the experiencing voice of the happy, energetic, curious and fiercely independent black girl-child. However, in the latter part of the work we hear the narrating voice of the rugged-individualist, successful black female author who has made it against the odds. Robert Hemenway
aptly points out that the two voices cannot be reconciled successfully into one autobiographical self and that the problem of voice largely accounts for the sense of confusion and inconsistency. Hemenway states, “She was trapped in Dust Tracks by the personal identification she cultivated as one of the folk, for it limited her freedom to account for her experience as part of the larger world.”

Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God: As a Feminist Narrative

Hurston’s masterpiece Their Eyes Were Watching God is a fine novel about the African-Americans in the 1940s. Sheela Banu observes, “Published in 1937, Their Eyes Were Watching God is the story of a black woman’s search for her authentic self and for real love in a distinctly gendered African-American story. Janie Crawford, the female protagonist faces three marriages in her life and her experience with her three husbands gives Janie the maturity to lead her life independently without the company of a man.”

Hurston’s novel is an epoch-making novel in the African-American literature. She tells the story through the frame story method, beginning with Janie’s childhood and leading up to the present, while Janie is telling her friend Pheoby the story of her life in only a matter of hours. Another method she makes use of is oral-print textual form. Hurston’s use of these two writing techniques makes the novel more appealing to the senses and more entertaining to read.

Their Eyes Were Watching God begins with a description of the text as a figuration of male struggle. The writer begins, “Ships at a distance have every man’s with on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.” In a different, less metaphorical voice we confront Hurston’s answer to this voice, the construction of a female authorial and narrative voice: “Now,
women forget all 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 according.”(p. 1).

The novel is set in Eatonville, Florida. It is described through the critical eyes and mouths of a Florida woman. The protagonist, Janie Starks, is forty years old: she had left town in a blue satin dress; her husband had died and was presumed to have left her money. She refuses to ‘stay in her class.’ Phoeby Watson brings Janie a dinner of ‘mulatto rice. They have been friends. Overhearing the conversation between Janie and Phoeby we are initiated into the novel’s world. Janie reveals to us that she has been gone a year and a half, and to Phoeby that Tea Cake is gone down in the Everglades there.

_Their Eyes Were Watching God_ is a Bildungsroman, a story about one’s passage from childhood to maturity. We see events primarily through Janie’s eyes. Janie “saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, and things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches.”(p. 8) The motif of the tree, a recurrent thematic element, will recur throughout the novel. Janie was raised by Nanny, her grandmother, first in the home of Nanny’s white employer, and later, in a house Nanny buys. In the first chapter Janie recalls two events that define her childhood. The first concerns a photograph: the second, a first kiss. Janie is photographed with a group of white children and she cannot see herself in the finished picture. ‘Oat’s you, Alphabet, don’t you know yo’ ownself?’ a white women laughs. For Janie, the realization that she is ‘colored,’ and not ‘just like de rest’ is an epiphany, a profound revelation that changes her stand toward the world. Her ‘colored’ schoolmates tease her, about ‘livin’ in de white folks backyard’ and refuse to play with her, so Nanny buys a house and land for the two of them. ‘Shiftess’ Johnny Taylor comes later, transformed by her youthful perceptions. She kisses him. She names this moment the beginning of her ‘conscious life.’
In chapter three Janie marries Killicks, hopeful that marriage might somehow ‘compel love like the sun the day.’ It does not, and she turns to Nanny for advice. In Nanny’s experience love has always demanded sacrifice—a woman’s sacrifice. She advises Janice to be patient, but Janice feels for Killicks only that ‘(s)ome folks never was meant to be loved and he’s one of ‘em.’ Within a month Nanny dies. In chapter four, while Killicks is away, Joe(Jody) Starks a well-dressed, ‘citified’ man stops for a drink. More worldly than Janie, he represents to her the possibilities of change and chance. She leaves Killicks and marries Joe Starks. Joe Starks promises to be ‘a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits.’

In the fifth chapter Joe and Janie arrive at Eatonville, a ‘colored town,’ where Starks will establish himself as a civic figure and entrepreneur. Starks astonishes the sleepy town when he pays cash for two hundred acres of land, builds a general store, sells lots to newcomers, and establishes a post office. As Starks predicts, it becomes the natural meeting place for the town. He has Janice work in the store as a symbol and proof of his rank. Her silk dress and long, beautiful hair contrasts the humble percale and calico dresses, and occasional head-rags, of the townswomen. They appoint Joe Starks mayor and ask for a speech from Janie. Starks intervenes and prevents her from speaking because ‘(s)he’s a woman.’ That night he strides home, invested with his new dignity and Janie follows, disappointed in her husband, the bloom off of things. As Joe distinguishes himself as landowner, mayor, postmaster, and civic visionary the Starks become separate from the others by class. More than the commerce at the store Janie enjoys the conversation, ‘(w)hen the people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for others to see. In chapter six the case of Matt Bonner’s yellow mule becomes a metaphor for the community.

The years took all the fight out of Janie’s face, and, in the seventh chapter, at age thirty-five she feels beaten down by the routine of the store and by her
marriage. One day the two quarrel. The black-woman, in fact, all blacks are, therefore, compared to mules. It is said, "Hurston uses symbols extensively in her story to describe the oppression of black women in her time. The symbols of mule and hair run throughout the novel. She uses the animal mule to symbolize the black woman. Janie’s granny Nanny looks upon the black woman as the mule and says, "De nigger woman is de mule un de world so fur as Ah can see" (p. 14).

Joe Starks’s death, in chapter eight, marks another turning point in Janie’s life. She sits alone at his deathbed and pities this man whom she had married twenty years earlier. Janie removes her head rag and lets down her still beautiful hair. At once widowed and released, Janie opens the window and announces to the waiting townspeople ‘Mah husband is gone from me. Hurston uses hair to symbolize things like rape, death and sexuality.

One afternoon, when Janie is alone in the store (in chapter ten) a stranger who identifies himself by the end of the chapter as Vergible Woods, ‘Tea Cake’ for short, enters and greets her by name, ‘Good evening, Miss Starks.’ He is from Orlando, seven miles away: he buys cigarettes, and Janie looks him over and gets little thrills from everyone of his good points.

In chapter eleven, Janie mentally compiles a list of reasons why Tea Cake is an unsuitable match for her. He is around twenty-five and here she is around forty. He does not seem prosperous and may be interested in taking her money, an he is probably the kind of man who lived with various women but never married. However, Janie confides in Phoeby Waston that Tea Cake is her chance for happiness, a chance she is ready to take. She says, “Some of dese momin’s and it won’t be long, you gointuh wake up callin’ me and Ah’ll be gone” (p. 106). In chapter thirteen, Janie leaves Eatonville with Tea Cake. Those few townspeople who see her board the train for Jacksonville early in the morning note that she “looked good, but she had no business to do it. It was hard to love a woman that always made
you feel so wishful" (p. 117). Tea Cake meets Janie on her arrival and they immediately get married. Tea Cake and Janie move into a boardinghouse in Jacksonville and that morning, he leaves early to get some fish to fry for breakfast. By noon he is not returned and Janie discovers that Tea Cake has taken her two hundred dollars. She remembers another woman, a widow at fifty-two, with a good home and insurance money. She had love affairs with men and teenage boys, spent all her ‘ready cash’ on them, and was abandoned by each as soon as their wants were satisfied; then came a man who persuaded her to sell her house and go to Tampa with him. She was as sure as Janie had been when she boarded the train, only to be abandoned by this new man and left to beg in the streets. But Janie is not the fool that the notorious widow was; she has ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank and her house in Eatonville.

Tea Cake returns the next day, with declaration of love and a story about Janie’s two hundred dollars.

On Saturday, Tea Cake buys a new switch-blade knife and two decks of star-back playing cards and leaves for the railroad yards. He returns at dawn, cut in a knife fight when he tried to leave the game; he has won back Janie’s two hundred dollars and much more. He insists that she take the two hundred and deposit it in the bank. He will provide for her from now.

The richness of the land in the Everglades astonishes Janie in chapter fourteen, and the people seem as wild as the lush weeds and wild cane. Tea Cake has come to plant and pick beans and to roll dice. ‘Between de beans and de dice Ah can’t lose,’ he says. He finds a good job with ‘houses fuh de first ones dat git dere.’ He teaches Janie to shoot, advising her that ‘Even if you didn’t never ind no game, it’s always some trashy rascal dat needs uh good killin. It was the most exciting thing on the muck’ (p. 131). All the workers make money and spend it easily; ‘(n)ext month and next year were other times.’ No need to mix them up with the present.
Tea Cake's house becomes a magnet, the unauthorized center of the 'job.' His guitar, his humor, and his ambition draw people to him. In chapter fifteen Janie learns 'what it feels like to be jealous' when a young girl lures Tea Cake away from the crowd with games and teasing to make him chase her. Janie thinks that Tea Cake does not resist the girl strongly enough and jealously, and a 'little seed of fear (begins) growing into a tree.' She discovers Tea Cake and the girl struggling together on the ground between rows.

Chapter sixteen marks the most prominent authorial intrusion into the narrative. Hurston gives to the reader an analysis of Mrs. Turner that Janie would not be able to construct.

In chapter eighteen Janie is home alone one afternoon. Large bands of Seminole Indians are steadily moving inland and she learns from them that a hurricane is coming. The people at last believe the signs of danger when 'the palm and banana trees beg(i)n that long distance talk with rain.' Buzzards gather and stay above the clouds. Tea Cake and Janie collect their cash and their insurance papers and wade into the hip-deep water to the palm beach.

Tea Cake is anxious to leave palm beach in chapter nineteen. But first, he must find work. Two white men with rifles conscript him into 'a small army... to bury the dead.' The white corpses get coffins: the black corpses get quick-lime. He convinces Janie that they must return to the glades. Hurston again intrudes into the mouths of her characters to instruct the reader on racism: "De ones de white man know is nice colored folks. De ones he don't know is bad niggers"(p, 183) They return to the glades where there is plenty of work clearing debris to make way for new buildings. Tea Cake buys another rifle and a pistol. He is a little jealous of Janie's skill with a rifle, but proud that he has taught her so well. He soon develops rabies as a result of the dog-bite during the hurricane. The disease has progressed too far for medical help and Janie wishes she had drowned before Tea
Cake grabbed the dog: ‘Tea Cake, the son of Evening Sun, had to die for loving her,’
she thinks. Suspicions and jealousy become madness in Tea Cake’s diseased mind
and he levels the pistol at Janie’s breast, snapping it once. Janie instinctively brings
the rifle around to scare him. He levels the gun at her again, as if “(t)he fiend in
him must kill and Janie was the only thing living he saw” (p. 184). They shoot
at each other simultaneously and Tea Cake is dead.

An essential feature of the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is its
mellifluous orality. Like the world renowned English playwright and poet of yore
Shakespeare, Hurston draws the story of her novel from epic-established folklore
tales. The narrative fabric of the novel is deftly interwoven with oral tradition. The
text is an excellent example of the oral-print textual form. An oral-print text is the
one that interweaves the forms and aesthetics of oral story telling and print fiction.
Hurston uses distinct oral idioms to define the individual characters as an oral story
teller might do. She was the first African-American writer to use spoken word
conventions within the print form. Hurston celebrates the black contexts of
survivalism, the storytelling and the folk humor, as in the stories about Matt
Bonner’s yellow mule and the funeral the town gives for the mule. Besides she
recreates the energy, rhythms, and the unique beauty of the blacks and their lives
through vibrant words that dance and sing like her folk.

Janie is briefly jailed for murder. Because of the circumstances of the killing
she is represented, tried, and acquitted (by white men) within hours. The judge
observes, “We find the death of Vergible Woods to be entirely accidental and
justifiable, and that no blame should rest upon the defendant Janie Woods” (p. 188).

Tenley Williams observes, “In chapter twenty the narrative returns to the
porch, Janie soaking her tired feet in a pan of water and Phoeby listening to her
story. Phoeby goes home to her husband, Sam, vowing to make him take her fishing, and Janie retires to her bedroom. Tea Cake is not dead to Janie: He could never be dead until she 'herself had finished feeling and thinking.' The killing of Tea Cake suggests that a black woman has an explosive power to claim her voice and to tell her story.9

Robert Bone speaks of Janie's suffering in the novel: "If the first half of the novel deals with the prose of Janie's life, the latter half deals with its poetry. Not long after Jody's death, Tea-Cake walks into her life. First off, he laughs; next he teaches her how to play checkers. One afternoon he urges her to close up shop and come with him to a baseball game. The next night, after midnight, he invites her on a fishing expedition. Their relationship is full of play, of impulsiveness, of informality, and of imagination. Easy-going, careless of money, for the moment, Tea-Cake is an incarnation of the folk culture. After a whirlwind courtship, he persuades Janie to leave Eatonville and to try his way."10

Arthur Davis observes about Hurston’s views of race relations: “In Janie Hurston has created an unusual and fascinating character. Janie, like her creator, different -- an unconventional person and the child of a broken home. A light colored woman married to a dark-colored man, she added problems that color prejudice within the Negro group forces upon such a marriage. In this novel Miss Hurston tells us a lot about the work that ordinary Negroes did in Florida; she also tells us about life in an all-Negro town. One of her better characters is Janie's second husband, the mayor, store owner, and prime mover in this community. He is a new type of Negro character-a wheeler dealer and in everything except color like his counterpart in white novels and white like."11

According to Phillipa Kafka, Hurston’s novel is autobiographical and feminist. She comments: “Unfortunately, over the years, the success myth provides such
distractions to the men who pursue it that they lose their sense of humanity and proportion. Joe acquires an exaggerated sense of ‘godliness’ from his success. Hurston broadcasts this to the reader, because every time Joe opens his mouth, he begins with the words ‘I god.’ But Janie feels that she has been sold out, not only by Joe, and before him, Logan Killicks, but tragically by her own flesh and blood and sex, her grand-mother. . . . . What is not so clear to readers is that Hurston is pitting women’s ‘love game,’ against the masculine material success game, and also against the success game’s antithesis, the masculine hedonist who lives only at the beck and call of his emotions. The latter attracts women more than the former, whose obsession for power through material wealth desiccates his ability to love. But the hedonistic man is equally guilty of pride, of setting the self and its drives and whims above all things.”12
References:
7. All the textual references are from Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Perennial Classics, J. B. Lippincott, New York, 1990.
8. Sheela Banu, “Fustion of Theme and technique in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God,*** Synthesis*, p. 53.