Freedom and the Fire Of Humanity:
The Fiction Of Zora Neale Hurston

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)
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A Personal Essay On Zora Neale Hurston

Drinking coffee in a White Castle at two in the morning, I asked Johnny what he thought of my upcoming move to a college in the west whose graduate programs in English were almost exclusively British Literature. He poured more sugar in his coffee and said, "well, why do you need a program that offers courses in American lit?"

"Not just American lit, Black American lit. I'm interested in it."

"What are you going to do with it? It seems kind of useless to me."

"Not everything must be useful. Maybe I'll just use it to live wisely. Maybe I'll be like Zora and do five or six things. Maybe I won't do anything useful at all. God knows I've not done anything useful up to this point and there's not any good reason that I can see to start now."

Now, Johnny is a good sort, well-meaning and harmless. He's an apprentice actor with the professional repertory company in Indianapolis whom I met while I was working in the wardrobe department of a summer stock company a few years ago. His only serious limitation as a friend is that his reading and knowledge of the world are limited to plays, roles, and the theatre. And, at 25, he is becoming strangely obsessed with being employed, a career, a calling—a trait common among actors, but a concern which has recently been increasing among people of my generation in general.
But none of this can ever excuse his next comment. He took a big, bitter swig of his lukewarm coffee, looked at me and said, "This Zora who you're doing this research on, don't you think she's just an interest that will pass? I mean, you've done this kind of thing before—you're ALWAYS doing this."

When I began to announce to family and friends that I'd chosen to write my senior honors thesis on novelist, essayist, playwright, folklorist, voodoo student, anthropologist, champion scholarship-winner, manicurist and avid gardener Zora Neale Hurston, I expected a lot of blank stares to fall my way, a lot of dull silence to follow the name, while brains were being wracked for the slightest memory of the woman to whom I was referring. I expected the response would be a question of one sort or another, ranging from a polite 'what did she do?' to a more honest, 'who the hell is that?' The most common response after I said her name came to be a 'pardon me? I didn't quite catch that word.'

None of that fazed me, not really. Reading Alice Walker's essays on Zora Neale Hurston had prepared me for her obscurity, her books out of print for years, lack of critical respect. In fact, reading Walker's book of prose in which Hurston comes up over and over again, *In Search Of Our Mother's Gardens*, had been the impetus for me to return to one of the short stories I read in my Black Literature class written by Zora. It had gone by quickly on the syllabus; and I found it a little strange that her name, out of all the short story writers we'd read, still stuck in my mind. After re-reading "The Gilded Six-Bits" and comparing it with some of the other short stories included in the anthology, I realized why this was so--Zora's work was clearly
superior to most of the writers in that paperback.

It might have ended there; and I might have written an honors thesis on some other author or written a few poems for a creative thesis and never have discovered just what Johnny's true opinion of my eclectic interests was and never have read any of Hurston's novels, had it not been for my roommate at the time, a young woman who describes herself as an 'idealist.' I moved in with her because she owned more books than anyone I'd ever met before. I moved out when I came to understand she hadn't read many of them, she'd just heard what people worth respect thought of them and decided to purchase a copy for her shelves. As many modern-day idealists are, she was a woman haunted by the degradation of the everyday mid-western world. She was appalled by the low level of sophistication, mediocrity usually, in which her fellow students functioned -- they'd never heard of Hesse or Kafka, never tried acid, never wrote poetry. She was a psychology major, forever lamenting the sad state of that department and regretting that she hadn't transferred to an Ivy League School when she'd had the chance. She often contemplated suicide.

Without any trepidation, I would call her educated in the modern sense of the word; and she possesses one of the best minds of my generation. Nevertheless, I see in retrospect that she is no different than the generation Allen Ginsberg called, "destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked," nearly thirty years ago, except that she has even less hope than they did, having witnessed their sad end, and the sad end of the generations in two decades since that poem was written.¹ She no longer looked for any goodness
in her world; she knew she'd never find any. That's why she never read the thousands of books on her shelves--she knew they provided no reason for hope in the human race. And so, she proclaimed herself an idealist living in a fallen world, for whom each compromise is a life-blow to the soul; and this young idealist will soon enter into a world beyond college, a world she is sure will turn out just as disappointing as the world from which she is emerging. And excepting the role that the work of Zora Neale Hurston was to find in my consciousness and not in hers, we might be very much alike in the outlook with which we leave Ball State--inconsolably disappointed. But I can say without any hesitation that discovering Zora has made all the difference between us.

It all began when I read the following words reprinted from one of Zora's essays entitled, "How It Feels To Be Colored Me;"

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it...No, I do not weep at the world--I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

It may seem strange that these words written in the 1920's about being a black woman with an oyster knife to sharpen so moved me, a young white student of the 1980's from a hometown in which Ku Klux Klan bumperstickers are common and for whom black colleagues and friends number only three, that I went out to search for her novels, plays, any scrap of writing that she put onto paper, and wrote this thesis, designed to be the capstone of my undergraduate degree, about what I found--words that tell of the the black culture, a Biblical character named Moses, neurotic, humorless whites, and
most significantly, a woman who creates herself by re-interpreting her reality. I do not deny that it is strange, perhaps even useless as Johnny suggested. But neither can I deny that in this quotation lies a set of viewpoints on humanity, written in a style so perfectly suited to its subject, unlike any I had heard in a long time—perhaps ever. It is a set of assertions that make hope possible, that make life worth bearing, artistically, at least. And if an artist can look at her experience and come up with the hope to produce a work, the student can look at that work and come up with the hope to accept her as a model, walk through her legacy, and continue on the path that the artist began.

For me, if the legacy contains the base perception that life is not worth living; I cannot follow its path through time. I can read (or see or hear) and appreciate, even savor; but I cannot follow. Since much of the work produced around me has the pointlessness of it all nailed to its heart, I was and am sustained by a tenuous thread of hope which has been lost altogether at points in my life and study. But with the discovery of Zora's existence I discovered that the thread with which to weave was not lost; I discovered a model. And although we are very different as people and I know that I can never fully understand Zora's world nor have the soul to live as she lived or to speak as she spoke or to know as she knew, I will always feel about Zora Neale Hurston as Pheoby felt about Janie Crawford at the end of Their Eyes Were Watching God:

'Lawd!' Pheoby breathed out heavily, 'Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin'.³
The purpose of the following paper is to examine the theme of freedom, one of the most deep-seated themes of Black literature in general, in the four novels and selected short stories of Zora Neale Hurston. This theme, according to Alice Walker and other less well known critics and writers, is the chief distinction between black and white American writers: "Black writers seem always involved in a moral and/or physical struggle, the result of which is expected to be some kind of larger freedom." On the other hand, Walker perceives and I do too that white American writers create characters which in the end believe that "there were(are) no better existence for which to struggle. The gloom of defeat is thick." While perhaps not statistically true, this perception certainly applies to the recent American fiction I have studied as an undergraduate English major.

Zora Neale Hurston was born sometime between 1891 and 1903 in the self-governing, all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. The nature of her childhood hometown is probably responsible for a good deal of her self-confidence and even some of her later conservative political views that her critics were to find so confusing. If her autobiography is to be at all believed, she got along with her mother better than her father; her mother always urged her to "jump at de sun" while her father cautioned her that such behavior would get her into trouble. Her mother died when Zora was nine though, and the years after her mother's death were difficult ones for her. Her father remarried, to a woman Zora came to hate so much that she nearly killed her; and Zora was sent away to school in Jacksonville. When money became tight,
Zora became a maid, unsuccessfully, and for eighteen months a wardrobe girl with a travelling repertory company.

In 1917, Zora enrolled at Morgan Academy in Baltimore, a high school where she did well, "but not spectacularly." She then went on to Howard University, supporting herself by working part-time as a manicurist. Howard Academy granted her an associate degree in 1920. In 1921, she published her first short story, entitled "John Redding Goes to Sea" in the campus literary magazine, The Stylus. In 1925, two of her works, a short story set in Eatonville, "Spunk," and a play, Color Struck, won prizes in an Opportunity magazine writing contest and Zora Neale Hurston went to New York, to become a part of the Harlem Renaissance.

The novelist Fannie Hurst offered Zora a job first as a secretary and then as a chauffer and companion before Zora returned to school, this time at Barnard, the women's division of Columbia University, under the support of Annie Nathan Meyer, a Barnard founder. She was Barnard's only black student at that time. While in New York, she became involved with the Harlem Renaissance and helped to publish the short-lived but brilliantly conceived FIRE!! magazine. Two years later, she left Barnard, not a novelist as she had planned, but an anthropologist under the tutelage of "Papa" Franz Boaz. She went south, supported by a scholarship from the anthropology department, to collect folklore from the town in which she grew up, and many points inbetween.

Zora first met Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason, a wealthy patron of the arts, in mid-September of 1927. They discussed the idea of an opera Zora would write with Langston Hughes, later called
Mule Bone, which became a point of conflict over which Hughes never forgave Hurston. In December of the same year, Zora signed a contract with Mrs. Mason that employed her for the entire year of 1928, and possibly 1929, collecting folklore in the South. Zora got a car, the Sassie Susie, and enough money on which to exist. She was receiving money irregularly from Mrs. Mason until September of 1932. During this time, Hurston was collecting folklore and studying the ways of root doctors and hoodoo men, literally descended (they claimed) from Marie Leveau. In 1928, she went through the crowning ceremony which was designed to test if she had the soul to see; she passed the test that consisted of lying naked, wrapped only in a snake skin, for 69 hours, experiencing several visions. The culmination of this collecting was her book, Mules and Men (1935).

Hurston did not exclusively deal with folklore during this time, however. Fast and Furious, a play written by Hurston, opened in 1931, and closed in a week, not to Hurston's surprise. She also wrote skits for Jungle Scandals and The Great Day, later re-titled From Sun To Sun.

In 1933, Hurston returned to writing fiction, producing "The Gilded Six-Bits," a short story published in Story magazine, a publication which led to Hurston's first novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine. After 1935, Hurston collected less folklore, producing only one volume, collected in Haiti and Jamaica and partially funded by a Guggenheim, called Tell My Horse. She turned in her best performances in the form of fiction, publishing Their Eyes Were Watching God in 1937, and Moses, Man of the Mountain in 1939.
According to Hurston's letters, Their Eyes Were Watching God was the result of an unfortunate love affair. The affair was unfortunate because romantic love and Zora Neale Hurston never mixed. The best estimate of why this was true is that Hurston was as devoted to her career as the men were to theirs. She was married twice, perhaps three times, but none lasted very long.

Dust Tracks On A Road, Hurston's autobiography, was published in 1942. Her next book, Seraph On The Suwanee, was published eight years later. Dust Tracks... sold well and won Zora the Saturday Review's $1,000 Anisfield-Wolf award. She was living on a houseboat at the time. Between 1945 and 1948, she spent her time in Honduras.

During her later life and the war years, Hurston became politically conservative, particularly on racial matters. She emphatically supported the abolition of all Jim Crow laws, but opposed desegregation of schools, on the grounds that the ruling would suggest black schools were educationally inferior. Hemenway, Hurston's biographer, identifies three sources of her conservatism: self-pride, a suspicion of communism, and the social science philosophy that affected her folklore collecting. 8

In 1948, she was arrested for child-molestation, accused by a disturbed child. The charges were dropped, but Hurston's faith and life were never the same. From that point on, money was scarce. In 1950, she took a job as a maid in one of Miami's fashionable suburbs to supplement her income from writing. If she could have stayed healthy, Zora would have survived her dire financial
troubles, but that was not the case. By 1956, Zora suffered from
gall bladder trouble, an intestinal fluke, and overweight. In
1958, she had a stroke. "Herod the Great," a novel Hurston had
been working on since 1945, was never published; and Hurston died
a pauper in 1960, although "gallant and unbowed." In the early
1970's, Alice Walker placed a tombstone on her unmarked grave,
which reads ZORA NEALE HURSTON, "A GENIUS OF THE SOUTH," 1901---
1960, NOVELIST, FOLKLOРИST, ANTHROPOLOGIST. ¹⁰

Until she was re-discovered by feminists in the 1960's,
Zora was abused, neglected, and denigrated by critics primarily
because of her lifestyle and her politics rather than her artist-
ic or anthropological work. She was a woman who always spoke
her mind; and who, because she was human, was not always correct
in her judgement and artistic choices. Her critics were just plain
mean to her. That is all there is to say; no excuses can be
made. Only reparations are possible. To read Zora with as
open a mind and heart as possible is to save her. Alice Walker
writes: "We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses
away...the life we save is our own." ¹¹ Here's to saving our own
lives.
Freedom and the Fire Of Humanity:
The Fiction Of Zora Neale Hurston

"I found that I had no need of either class or race prejudice, those scourges of humanity. The solace of easy generalization was taken from me, but I received the richer gift of individualism," wrote Zora Neale Hurston, in a chapter not originally included in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks On A Road*, entitled "Seeing The World As It Is." This gift of individualism is one of Hurston's most unique and valuable characteristics as a writer. One of her most recent critics, Michael G. Cooke, asserts that this characteristic did not again surface until the 1970's, with the work of Alice Walker. Instead of presenting her characters as victims--victims of their birth, their poverty, their society, and most of all their skin color--Hurston presents her characters without bitterness, rancor, or protest. The conflict comes because her characters are human and as humans they long to be free, not merely because their skin is brown or they are born female or have little money.

The attitude and general outlook on life of her spirited, fiery fiction is not only tolerance but exultation in the differences between black and
white, male and female, poor and rich. It is as optimistic as is realistically allowable. On the other hand, reading the critical assessments of Hurston's fiction is a very frustrating experience. The widely published articles dealing with her work are numerically small; and few of those go into any depth, instead choosing to summarize, often inaccurately, the plots of her novels. This is somewhat understandable, for Hurston had been out of print until the 1970s, and her novels currently in print are still very hard to find in bookstores. Those few stores which carry them often mistakenly group them under the heading 'sociology' rather than 'literature.'

This mistaken classification seems to have originated in the minds of Hurston's early critics. Over and over her novels either are treated as anachronisms, insignificant and odd works worthy of little serious study, or are out and out discounted and dismissed because Hurston seldom chose to deal directly with the 'race problem' in her fiction. Apparently the critics, black and white, believed that because Hurston was a black writer, she could not write anything that did not directly address that one issue. Zora Neale Hurston, as those who read her with a somewhat more open mind can see, was a woman so free, so far ahead of her time and with such an eye for the timeless that these early misguided assessments were perhaps inevitable—not excusable, but inevitable. Far less excusable is the strange fact that while her novels may have somen as the protagonists, the peripheral men in the novels interest critics far more than do the main female characters.
Contrary to the impression given by a great deal of critical writing, Hurston did indeed deal with themes of oppression, repression and enslavement; indeed, those themes form a framework from which her fiction can be re-examined by a new generation of readers. Seldom, however are they presented conventionally. One of Hurston's best short stories, "The Gilded Six-Bits," begins with two sentences clearly showing how Hurston neither denied nordenigrated the circumstances her characters lived under: "It was a Negro yard around a Negro house in a Negro settlement that looked to the payroll of the G and G Fertilizer works for its support. But there was something happy about the place." 15 The close personal viewpoint makes her work radically distinctive.

In close reading, Hurston's four novels, it becomes clear that she did not deny that external forces of oppression existed. Each of these works accurately reflects the world in which her characters function, complete with its racial prejudice. The only novel in which classic attitudes of whites toward blacks are shown come in Seraph On The Suwanee, perhaps Hurston's oddest novel. In her other works, Hurston deals with prejudice from angles of unusual perspicuity. For instance, the classic scene in which the black protagonist learns he or she is black occurs in Their Eyes Were Watching God to Janie Crawford not with malice or shame, but with the gentle laughter of friends, a fairly unique treatment of the theme.

The status of the "high-yaller nigger" in the black community of the generation born just after the civil war drives Hurston's main character, John Buddy, in Jonah's Gourd Vine away from home, and to the plantation of his natural father. It dogs him throughout the novel, influencing the rest of his life in small but
terrible ways. Likewise, the "color-struck" Mrs. Turner in Their Eyes Were Watching God feels that her light brown color should earn her a whiter, and therefore righter, status. She says those darker than herself are "always cuttin' de monkey for white folks. If it wasn't for de black folks it wouldn't be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid them. De black ones is holding us back." Her solution to the prejudice she feels is the creation of yet another class of color. "Even if dey don't take us in wid de whites, dey oughta make us a class tuh ourselves." Because Mrs. Turner is darker than Janie, she accepts Janie's snubs as justified by her lighter skin, indicative of the insane injustice of her own racist assumptions.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, the racism so common and so troubling to many other writers of Hurston's era is not ignored but is presented as it was most often encountered—subtly. Much of the novel is set in all—black communities, but the effect of this apparent dodge of dealing with racial prejudice in the larger white society is not to diminish the significance of its existence, but to make it seem even more horrible when it does surface. For instance, toward the end of the novel a hurricane kills hundreds of people. In the wake of this natural disaster, the bodies of blacks and whites must be quickly buried, for obvious reasons of public health. Tea Cake is forcibly pressed into burying the bodies of the bloated and rotting dead. The men are covering the bodies quickly by dumping them into mass graves and covering them with 'quick-lime' when the men in charge stop the process and announce that the black must be differentiated from the white dead who will be placed in pine boxes rather than being buried in a trench grave. The bodies are so badly decomposed, however, that
they all look the same. "'They'se mighty particular how dese
dead folk goes tuh judgement,' Tea Cake observed to the man working
next to him. 'Look like dey think God don't know nothin' bout
de Jim Crow law.'"18

The novel in which the external forces of oppression have
the most influence is, of course, Moses, Man Of The Mountain.
In this novel alone, Hurston presents a people actually enslaved
by another; but her style again emphasizes the individual effects
of slavery rather than making generalized statements. Bearing
slavery, always with an ultimate knowledge of their forthcoming
salvation, her characters are more than mere one-dimensional
victims; they are portrayed as hating and loving, acting bravely
and being consummate cowards, in joy and boredom. In his intro-
duction to the reprinted edition of the novel, Blyden Jackson
notes that "never, in "Moses," does Hurston lose the capacity
of detachment from her material which permits her the aesthetic
distance in her stance as an artist that she must have to employ
comedy."19 The horror of slavery is neither underplayed nor allowed
to overshadow the real focus of the story, the life of the people.
A less perceptive artist than Hurston probably would have created
a monotonous portrait of the enslaved life, with vignette after
vignette of bloody confrontation between Egyptian and Hebrew.
Jackson emphasizes that Moses, Man of The Mountain "is protest
that is, beautifully, all the better protest for the protest it
is not."20

Because of Hurston's use of the individual rather than the
generalization, the main sources of oppression in her novels are
logically the characters themselves. Materialism, sexism, weak-
nesses in faith and in spirit, and passivity are the real oppressors of humanity in Hurston's novels. The chains that bind are psychic ones rather than the physical chains of slavery or the external forces of racial stereotyping by whites of blacks.

While never denying that the majority of blacks in the United States could certainly have benefitted from the economic equality for which many protest writers of Hurston's age were calling, Hurston had the clarity of vision to perceive the blindnesses that come with the value of materialism. Part of this foresight came from her familiarity with the white culture, which has long been caught in the web of materialism. A belief in faulty values is one of the most common forms of enslavement and oppression for characters in Hurston's fiction.

Instances of the lie of materialism abound in Hurston's fiction, particularly in "The Gilded Six-Bits;" but the motif is written with deft sophistication, and never sinks to the level of the simple proverb. Joe Banks earns his meager living at the fertilizer works; and on payday he brings his money home to Missie May, his wife, by throwing it playfully in their doorway. Missie May loves the money Joe brings home, more than she knows. Her love of money nearly wrecks their home, and certainly proves to be a force which ends up oppressing her life rather than giving her the freedom she thought it would provide. Otis D. Slemmons, "of spots and places," is the temptation that makes Missie May realize her own desire to find money "goin' along the road some-time."21

Slemmons, clearly a symbol of the temptation of materialism, wears what appears to be a "five-dollar gold piece for a stick-
pin," and a "ten dollar gold piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes' crammed full of gold teethes." He never allows anyone to touch the gold that he claims white women in Chicago gave him, because it is actually a gilded half-dollar and quarter. After Missie May succumbs to his temptation and her own desires to have his kind of wealth, interestingly identified as coming from white cultural sources, she comes very close to losing the real "something" that made the "Negro house in a Negro settlement happy: Joe's love.

Materialism forms Janie Crawford's chief source of oppression in Their Eyes Were Watching God. The first illustration of the enslavement that materialistic values brings occurs with the introduction of Janie Crawford's grandmother, Nanny. "Ah been waitin' a long time, Janie," Nanny tells Janie just before she announces that she wants her granddaughter to marry Logan Killicks, a black landowner much older than Janie, "but nothin' Ah been throughis too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed." Nanny wants to put Janie on a pedestal—just like the white women for whom Nanny works have been placed, or at the very least, in her own kitchen—Nanny's vision of the black woman's equivalent. Being on the pedestal is later shown in the novel to mean being both saddled like a mule and divested of any personal identity or voice.

Nanny's wishes follow Janie through two marriages; her second husband, "seal-brown...but he acted like Mr. Washburn [a white character] or somebody like that to Janie," wants to put Janie up on that pedestal her grandmother envisioned by making enough money to live like rich Southern whites. Joe Starks
tells Janie "a pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you." In both cases, Janie is made a slave to her husband's money; and particularly in Joe Stark's case, she is enslaved by his sexist notions of women as well.

When Mayor Starks notices that the men of the town admire Janie's long hair, he makes her bind it up in a headrag, so only he can possess its beauty. Her voice, tenuous and untried as it may be, he also keeps hidden from the townspeople, not allowing her to speak in front of them or even to enjoy listening to their conversations. He wants her to become a big woman by his becoming a big man. Her job is to sit on the porch of their house and mark time, or wait on customers in the store. She is his toy, his possession.

The Hebrews in *Moses, Man Of The Mountain*, and Arvay Hensen of *Seraph On The Suwanee*, are characters with a task that proves far harder than escaping to freedom; they must allow themselves to be free. The Hebrews hold a weak faith in Moses, and remain sceptical of his motives. Not long after they are led out of Egypt, they are lamenting their loss, and falsifying the memory of the conditions under which they were serving as slaves. Pharaoh's chariots begin to pursue the Hebrews as they reach the Red Sea; and the people begin to show that the slave mentality forms their real bonds, the most effective Egyptian weapon:

"I always told my husband not to bother with this mess," one woman sobbed. "I tried to tell him we was getting along all right under the Egyptians. But he was so hard-headed he had to go and get mixed up in it." ... "Couldn't that man find graves enough in Egypt to bury us all in without dragging us out here in the wilderness to die?"
"Didn't I say all along that this Moses was some fake prophet? That god he made up out of his own head--"26

The same process of doubt goes on and on through the novel, with new questions raised every time a new trial is put upon the Hebrews.

In a similar manner, Arvay Henson questions the salvation of Jim Meserve's love each time it is put to the test. She cannot seem to love Jim like anything but a 'coward' because she is enslaved by her own passivity, weakness of spirit, and nagging memory of her past. In her youth Arvay was overshadowed by her older sister Larraine, who is more conventionally pretty and well-liked, and "the general preference to Larraine....had done something to Arvay's soul across the years."27 Combined with the guilt Arvay blows out of proportion at having once been in love with Larraine's husband, Arvay really and truly believes that no man could ever love her; and thus she has very little appreciation for or understanding of the man who does, Jim Meserve. She becomes, according to Jim, a "hog under a acorn tree. Eating and grunting with your ears hanging over your eyes, and never even looking up to see where the acorns are coming from."28

A great deal of the frustration this character produces in the reader's mind comes from the fact that for over twenty years of the novel's action, Arvay belittles herself while simultaneously extolling her folk and the backwoods life.29 She also seems totally lacking in the basic understanding and communicative ability necessary to make a good marriage, and repeatedly goes seeking shelter from the freedom of the world rather than reaching out to grasp it.
Hurston's writing deals with protests far more interesting and perhaps more revealing than the racial conflict alone. These forces of oppression are often harder to overcome than racial prejudice, and they are problems that Hurston clearly feels can be discussed with an outcome of some sort, rather than endless wallowing in the unfortunate second class status of her black characters. The process of freedom, how the forces that oppress are battled and liberation is gained, are the steps with which Hurston concerns herself in the plots of her novels.

In presenting individual characters who are free from the question of prejudice, Hurston avoids a number of faults that could have crippled her artistic vision. The most obvious fate that her fiction could have suffered had she taken a more political stance in dealing with prejudice is the eventual obscurity that results when a work becomes dated. Even if she had managed to avoid using a style that would become dated in dealing with racism, as Ralph Ellison has probably done in *Invisible Man*, she would be stuck with the same as yet unanswered question that ultimately ends Ellison's novel--how to live beyond the solitude of the underground, having realized the problem of invisibility. Any answers to the problems of prejudice may themselves be fraught with biases--this is clearly the lesson that history teaches; and it is terribly strange that Hurston's critics did not take this more into account when criticizing her lack of social relevance, calling her work frivolous and insignificant. In creating characters that are lyrical "sermons" of humanity rather than sociological "lectures," to use Hurston's own metaphor from *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she transcends the limitations in vision by which so many other black writers and critics are forever bound.
Finding freedom, whether it is an escape from racism, sexism and materialism or an inscape of self-realization, is the process that shapes the course of events in a Hurston novel. Each of her protagonists, John Buddy, Janie Crawford, Moses, the Hebrews, and Arvay Henson, begins the work in a state of bondage and must proceed toward the novel's end—freedom of one particular kind or another.

Hurston's characters are often torn by discrepancies between their past and what they sense themselves to actually be. Ending the oppression of the past, being accepted by some society in the present, and achieving self-definition sufficient to ensure survival are three chief ways in which liberation comes; and each of these steps is represented in Hurston's fiction realistically. Actually, these three aspects of liberation have been implemented in a number of political liberation movements, with varying degrees of success. They seem to work best when analyzing fiction or perhaps history, and this seems clear in Hurston's work. As always, Hurston shows the struggle for liberation in intensely personal situations—even when politics is actually involved as in Moses, Man Of The Mountain. Hurston never appears naive enough to believe that her images would work as sweeping realities. It is, again, one of her chief strengths. The steps between bondage and true freedom are tricky and often costly for Hurston's characters, but the tethers must be cut in order not to live a life merely in reaction to the oppressive forces.

Each time Hurston writes about a 'crossing over,' ending the oppression or slavery of the past, she presents a scene crawling with temptations and false freedoms which make true freedom a
very difficult thing to distinguish. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Amy Crittenden instinctively feels the freedom that lies across the river and warns John Buddy against "runnin' and uh rippin' and clambin' trees and rocks and flingin' rocks in creeks and sich like. John, promise me yuh goin' quit dat." He is running from the racism and power Ned Crittenden wields over him, like Hurston's earlier image of the coon running from the hound; but he has no idea that his vision of a free place, "across the Big Creek where maybe people laughed and maybe people had lots of daughters," contains traps just as great as those from which he is running. Women are his weakness, and his irresponsible enjoyment of their company ruins a great deal of his freedom. He is free to pursue his dreams, education and Lucy Potts, but he also must wrestle with the snakes of temptation—an image Hurston uses repeatedly in this novel.

A lack of responsibility for his actions is the thread that shackles John Buddy even though he has gained external freedom by crossing the Big Creek. Lucy Potts becomes John Buddy's gourd vine, protecting him from the results of his own actions, sometimes actually resuing him, as is the case when he beats her brother and is arrested; sometimes merely warning him of what is coming, as when she tells him he will soon have to choose between preaching and loving the town's women. John's seeming inability to stay free of entanglements, to accept freedom itself, pains Lucy
more than his infidelities or thoughtlessnesses. She knows that "Dat what comes from de heart will sho reach de heart agin," and forgives John repeatedly because she knows his infidelity comes not from a lack of love but from a lack of understanding of the ways of freedom.\textsuperscript{33} He sees himself as innocent, and in a way he is right. To consciously break a promise it is conditionally true that one must understand its terms.

Unfortunately, John does not realize how important Lucy is to him until she is dead. At one point he tells her boldly, "Ah don't need you no mo' nor nothin' you got tuh say, I'm a man grown;" and a free man creates his own life.\textsuperscript{34} When Lucy dies, John loses his church and leaves town to find another gourd vine in Sally Lovelace. With Sally, he comes to understand freedom; she even gives him his freedom symbolically when she provides him with a Cadillac, in which he is eventually killed. Sally does not let him run from testing his new freedom; she refuses to accompany him to Sanford on the trip during which he falls from innocence and is killed or kills himself, it is never completely clear which happens. "In his final flight," writes Lillie P. Howard, "he is cut down. There is no hiding place for John, he has done his final crossing over."\textsuperscript{35}
When Janie Crawford runs away with Joe Starks in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the scene has the color of an escape to freedom, but Janie allows herself to be fooled by the feeling of freedom without looking closely at the characteristics of the situation. After being treated like a mule by Logan Killicks, Janie fled to freedom, thinking "the change was bound to do her good." Leaving Killick's kitchen, untied the apron around her waist and "flung it on a low bush beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and making a bouquet."  

Sitting in Joe Starks' hired carriage, she notices the seat "with him on it...sat like some high ruling chair. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them." Janie feels free enough to think her old thoughts once again, but intuits that they are going to have to be re-shapes around Joe Starks. She senses early in their relationship that Jody did "not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon." The ambivalence of her new freedom is well underscored in Hurston's last sentence of the chapter: "they...saw the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged."

Janie ceases to see Jody as a vehicle for her freedom and instead tries to make him the freedom itself. When she cannot continue to believe her own lie, she
consciously decides to live with it, saying, "'Maybe he ain't nothin' but he is somethin' in my mouth. He's got tuh be else Ah ain't got nothin'tuh live for. Ah'll lie and say he is. If Ah don't, life won't be nothin' but a store and a house'."41 Janie takes responsibility for her choice of false freedom, choosing to wait it out and find true freedom whenever she next gets the chance.

The most humorous crossing over Hurston wrote appears in Moses, Man Of The Mountain. The attitudes of the Israelites are indeed enough "to try Job's patience."42 After so many years in bondage, the Hebrews have lost any conception of what true freedom means. When Moses finally arranges for the people of Goshen to be freed, the complaints begin, revealing the shallowness of their knowledge of freedom:

'Good gracious! I was figuring on going fishing tomorrow morning. I don't want to be bothered with no packing up today. It's too much like work and I just got free this morning.'

'Looks like we done swapped one bossman for another one. I don't want nobody giving me no orders no more.'43

The infamous golden calf episode comes about in Hurston's version of the Moses legend because the people of Goshen know no other way to behave when they think, at Aaron and Miriam's urging, that Moses has died on Mount Sinnai. The celebration certainly reads like newfound freedom with "cymbals and harps and voices singing
loud and happy. "Maidens danced in ecstasy with closed
eyes and nobody looked too closely at faces. Joy was
the feeling, joy!" 44 This was the kind of celebration
that made the people feel free, and probably always
would because they did not hunger for freedom. "Here
I am," Moses says at one point, "struggling to make a
great nation out of you and you are worrying about
fried fish and cucumbers." To which the people respond,
"...it's hard to love freedom if it keeps you hungry." 45

Not unlike John in Jonah's Gourd Vine, the Hebrews
who are rescued from Egypt never internalize their free-
dom. Moses works hard at getting them to realize what
being free should mean, but he accepts the decree that
none of the Israelites who went into the desert will
see the free, promised land. Moses is a truly honest
and hard-working soul in Hurston's version of the biblical
story, who seeks to free the enslaved and guarantee their
right to equality and justice. He is also determined to
be successful in doing it. Since the people he rescued
apparently cannot fulfill his dream, Moses accepts the
fact that he must simply wait until all of the old are
dead and only the younger generation, who are comfortable
with freedom and hunger for it, survive. This does not
mean that they do not lapse into the old slave/master
mentality, however:

The people had missed the whole point of his
forty years of work. He loved freedom and jus-
tice with a fierce love and wanted Israel to be
free and just. All that he had done to them and for them was intended to bring them to this viewpoint. And here they were wanting to be like other halted people that they touched along the way. They despised their high destiny. They misunderstood him so far that they even offered him a crown.

Moses finally consoles himself with the fact that he did deliver the Israelites from the horror of serving against their will, even if he failed to make them love freedom as much as he had hoped. The Hebrews do learn to rally around their cause, their new land and the promises therein. The end of the book does suggest that generations down the line, distances in time away, freedom will come for these people who are more concerned about "fried fish and cucumbers" that the joys of freedom. The ultimate goal Moses has in mind seems to be a kind of reversal. Initially perceived as a "radical," "he would have the common people talking about equality." He wants the people to progress so much towards freedom that those who do not love freedom and equality as much as he does are the radical ones. The status quo would then be freedom, the errant enslaved. In this respect, Hurston has endowed her Moses with a great deal of the rhetoric of the recent civil rights movement—something quite interesting to note.

Arvay Henson's problem is not like the Israelites'; she serves Jim Meserve quite freely, seeing him on the same plane as God. Her problem is closer to Janie Crawford's: she lacks any definition of her identity.
Unlike Janie, Arvay lacks a voice, without which she lacks worth, and the ability to imagine freedom. Perhaps the most frustrating thing about Arvay is the fact that she does not have the slightest idea that anything is wrong with her understanding of the marriage contract or that she is enslaved by her own notions for so long a time. She believes she loves Jim as much as she can, and places his love in a category of things over which she has no control. She does not search for freedom in any real way at all until Jim actually does leave her, forcing her to return to Sawly and re-examine her ties to it.

Upon re-examination, Arvay realizes that she must indeed try to understand herself. She sees the house she grew up in as it is:

an evil, ill-deformed monstrous accumulation of time and scum. It had soaked in so much of doing-without, of soul starvation, of brutish vacancy of aim, of absent dreams, envy of trifles, ambitions for littleness, smothered cries and trampled love...the house had caught a distemper from the people who had lived in it.

After Lorraine and Carl are each revealed as the pitiable souls they are, the only thing left of Arvay's imagined fine heritage is the awful house. It stands between her mulberry tree, under which "her real life had begun," and the freedom to be herself, whoever that might be, loving Jim not as an elevated demigod or as a man who took pity on her, but truly as a husband. Her first step towards finding herself is to
burn her house, her heritage, and the nagging guilt that had
dogged her life until that point. It is also, of course, a matter
of burning her last shelter from taking the responsibility of her
own freedom. This is, perhaps, the most important aspect.

Many of these characters are wounded souls—sometimes maimed
by themselves as in Arvay Henson's case, and sometimes by others,
as is more nearly Janie Crawford's case. The distinctive thing
about these characters is that they must heal themselves, must
discover what freedom is for themselves. We must help them, just
as no one person ever holds them completely enslaved, except them-
selves. The real test, the point at which these characters seem
most interesting then, is the state of living in freedom. What
is the nature of the state into which they have crossed over?
Hurston's portrait of a woman who has successfully freed herself
forms the most interesting illustration of this state.

Hurston's portrait of a free woman is one of her most impor-
tant legacies to later writers, readers and other freedom-seekers.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, she presents a woman who goes
"tuh de horizon and back" on her quest for both an identity and the
freedom to function as that newly discovered self. Although all
of her novels deal with characters in search of one kind of freedom
or another, it is in Their Eyes Were Watching God and Janie Crawford
that Hurston was most successful in creating a character who cuts
her chains and emerges from the process alive and well. Further-
more, the future looks good to her, containing a purpose and many
memories to sustain her. Janie Crawford is able to bear life it-
self—and this makes her free. It is this rare artistic represen-
tation that prompted Alice Walker to write, "I became aware of my
need of Zora Neale Hurston some time before I knew her work existed"
and also to declare that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and one of Hurston's folklore collections, *Mules and Men*, would be two of ten possible books that Walker would take to a desert island for life.\(^{50}\)

Walker, and other perceptive critics, recognize that Janie Crawford's tale is not primarily a love story, although *Their Eyes* includes one of the most tender, vital and functional romances ever put on paper, but rather the story of a woman who goes in search of herself and is successful. From the story's beginning it seems clear that Janie Crawford's life has not been one of mere reaction to circumstance, but the quest of an archetypal hero.\(^{51}\) The time structure of the novel is the most distinctive clue that this story is about Janie's journey to freedom. All the events of Janie's life are being told by Janie to her best friend, Phoeby, and the novel begins and ends on Janie's porch during the course of just one evening. To critics who have read Hurston's work as a simple romance, this beginning and ending are puzzling flaws, inexplicable devices. Reading Hurston's novel as Janie's tale of her personal quest makes this technique an integral method of revealing Janie's final status. Missy Dehn Kubitschek asserts in her insightful essay on Hurston that Janie "discovers her own soul only through the art of storytelling, thus intimating the artist's responsibility to, and dependence on, the larger community."\(^{52}\)

The freedom Janie has lain claim to at the end of the novel is different from Janie's earlier idea of freedom. The young Janie, sixteen and searching, hears what the narrator calls a "flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again... the singing had nothing to do with her ears. The rose of the world was breathing out smell," while she was sitting under a blossoming pear tree.\(^{53}\) The tree, young as Janie, "called her to come and
gaze on a mystery." \(^{54}\) In her youth, Janie perceives the mystery of the tree to be the sexual mystery:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch, creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid.

After a while she got up from where she was and went over the little garden field entire. She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers. A personal answer for all other creations except herself. She felt an answer seeking her but where? When? How? \(^{55}\)

The mystery symbolized by the tree image is bound to sexuality; at sixteen, the beginning of the quest for a free identity intertwines with sexuality. Both are new experiences; both shape the coming course of events. But sexuality is not the whole mystery Janie hears calling as she looks into the tree, for tree imagery occurs in different contexts throughout the course of the novel, suggesting a parallel between Janie's maturity and the tree's. After returning from the 'Glades, the death of Tea Cake and the trial, Janie "saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches." \(^{56}\) Another striking use of this tree imagery occurs in the description of Nanny after she sees Janie kiss Johnny Taylor, underscoring the differences between the lives of the two women.

Nanny represents what Janie could have become, had Janie been more passive in her search for an identity. Accepting the white standard of life as the right standard, Nanny simultaneously becomes incapable of Janie's resilience, resourcefulness, and
capacity for love. The result of this enslavement becomes apparent to Janie just after she takes her first step toward an identity separate from Nanny's:

The old woman's voice was so lacking in command and reproof, so full of crumbling dissolution, --that Janie half believed that Nanny had not seen her. So she extended herself outside of her dream and went inside of the house. That was the end of her childhood.

Nanny's head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by a storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered. The cooling palma christi leaves that Janie had wound about her grandma's head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman. Her eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted. Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension.

Nanny's appearance comes from more than mere disappointment in Janie's actions, or Janie's new consciousness of her own youth. Janie becomes aware as she looks at Nanny that she must go "tuh de horizon and back" to find the power, the resolution and the self-realization that Nanny has denied herself. Nanny sees herself and all blacks as "branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways...Ah was born back dere in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and do." Although she wants Janie to discover "what a woman oughta be," her materialism blinds her to the truth; and thus, "her eyes didn't bore and pierce," and she pays little attention to Janie's dissenting voice. Voice matters little to Nanny; it would not protect Janie from becoming a "spit cup" for men. Only land, wealth and conventional white values yield safety in Nanny's sight.

Not unlike many of Hurston's contemporary critics and writers, Nanny is protesting against being the mule of the world. But her
protest does little to prevent Janie from falling into the same trap, offering very little in the way of a positive solution to the problem she accurately defined. Janie, like Hurston's technique as an author, defines and solves the problem, by less direct but more revealing means. As Hurston writes in the opening paragraphs of the novel, Janie is going to create a new life for herself by re-interpreting reality: "women forget all the things they don't want to remember and remember all the things they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth" and the reality. 60

Love is the major way Janie accomplishes living and being free; in fact, it is integral to the self-realization process in three of Hurston's four novels. It is not, however, responsible for the total realization, particularly in Janie's case. She is only fully defined after Tea Cake's death, when she sits chatting with Phoeby; only then has she assumed a full role in society and found purpose in living. Love leads Janie to freedom in two ways—as a nurturing force which in and of itself sets her free and equal and as a prod that keeps her from settling for less than real freedom, or what her grandmother believed in, for instance. Because love functions for Janie in both roles simultaneously, it has been called over and over by critics the single most powerful theme in the novel.

Janie's vision of what love should be, conceptualized in part at sixteen under the pear tree, keeps her searching for a love that is based on equality, and understanding, allowing her full participation as a woman and person. The lack of love and the thinness of her identity that she finds with Logan Killicks prods her into flight with Jody Starks. "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh," Logan tells Janie just before she
runs away, a summation of everything wrong with their marriage. Janie realizes that Jody speaks for "far horizon" rather than the freedom symbolized by "sun-up and pollen and looming trees" that she seeks; but hoping to make the best of the situation, Janie goes with Jody. After Jody's death, the promise of love tolls her away to Tea Cake's side. There she learns what being free is like; and even after his death she remains free, never to return to being someon's property, never again to feel placeless or voiceless. Love leads her to freedom, but it also turns on Janie. It has two sides as Tea Cake's fate symbolizes. His unlikely end, going mad after being bitten by a rabid dog, parallels the flip side of Dionysian joy—destructive frenzy. Love leads her to freedom, but Janie realizes that freedom is possible with only the memory of love.

It is the stuff of this memory on which Janie lives in freedom. With Tea Cake, the only completely healthy love Janie finds in the novel, Janie's soul is both tested and released to create a liberated life. Early in their marriage, Tea Cake disappears, leaving no mention of his whereabouts, taking the money Janie brought with her as security. Thinking that Janie enjoys being "high muckety-muck," Tea Cake throws a party with the money and doesn't tell Janie about any of it until he returns home. He thinks his behavior and the people that he associates with are "too cullud" for Janie, whose second husband tried to live in the white Southern standards. He explains the difference to Janie:

"Dem wun't no high muckety mucks. Dem wuz railroad hands and dey womenfolks. You ain't usetuh folks lak dat...Before us got married Ah made up mah mind not tuh
let you see no commonness in me. When Ah git mad habits on, Ah'd go off and keep it out yo' sight. 'Tain't mah notion tuh drag you down wid me."

"Looka heah Tea Cake, if you ever go off from me and have a good time look dat and then come back heah tellin' me how nice Ah is, Ah specks tuh kill yuh dead. You heah me?"

"So you aims tuh partake wid everything, hunh?"

"Yeah, Tea Cake, don't keer what it is."

"Dat's all Ah wants tuh know. From now on you'se mah wife and mah woman and everything else in de world Ah needs."62

With this embrace of their culture, Janie and Tea Cake begin to establish a living relationship unlike many common in that culture. In Maria Wolff's words, "affirmation, not protest, is Hurston's hallmark."63 With Janie, playing neither mule nor useless lady on a pedestal, the two begin to re-define the marriage by embracing their culture rather than transcending it. This acceptance coupled with the flexibility of non-sexist roles which they create anew give their relationship its distinctive strength. At times it seems indestructable, with both partners blooming in hard living conditions, weathering trials of the everyday and the extraordinary with the fortitude their declared love provides. With Tea Cake, Janie seeks to integrate the reality of her existence with its ideal image, and she is extraordinarily successful.

The ability to love self, and another who is an equal, and the general culture in spite of all their collective faults seems to define one aspect of being a free woman; another important aspect is the possession of a free voice. Throughout Janie's life, one of the most damaging things to her soul was the discounting or out and out silencing of her thoughts. Nanny disregards her wishes in marrying her to Logan Killicks; Killicks never
never wants to "change words" with Janie; Jody never allows his wife the opportunity to choose whether to speak. And since Janie is described early in the book as "full of that oldest human longing---self-revelation," stifling the words to express her freedom is as good as stifling the freedom itself.

Each of the three crucial stages through which Janie progresses is marked by something Janie says. The first stage in reversing his control over her voice occurs when she talks back to Jody Starks. 64 Secondly, Janie defends herself after shooting Tea Cake to the people of Belle Glade, who believe that she is guilty, and Janie is obliged to make her position understood. "They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks.... "She was in the courthouse fighting something and it wasn't death....It was lyingthoughts....She made them see how she couldn't ever want to be rid of him. She didn't plead to anybody. She just sat there and told...." 65

Thus, when Janie comes back into Eatonville after being tried and acquitted by everyone in Belle Glade, she functions in a unique and necessary way---she becomes the mouthpiece for the horizon, the freedom-speaker, the storyteller. At first the fact that Janie would return to Eatonville at all seems a bit strange. After the community forgives her and is reconciled with their feelings about the shooting, Belle Glade seems the logical home for Janie. Barring this, perhaps because of the memories the place would continue to stir in her, her childhood home would be a likely second place to live. But Janie returns to Eatonville---an entirely black town---to live presumably for the rest of her life.

The answer, of course, lies in the fact that the people of
Eatonville still believe that Janie Starks was "what a woman oughta be and do" and do not know what freedom Janie Woods has achieved. Rather than returning to Nanny's and Logan's hometown, Janie goes to Eatonville because much of her freedom comes from embracing the black culture in all its variety. To move back into a mixed community missing the solidarity and joys Janie first sensed in the all-black culture would probably force Janie to struggle with more external oppression than she cares to. Because the childhood community probably never held her in esteem after she ran off with Jody Starks, she has nothing to prove to them. They had most likely written her off as a freak, and would not listen to her opinion with respect.

In Eatonville, however, Janie has a rapt audience to whom she may relay her quest; and telling her story integrates the joys of freedom with its costs. This integration takes place in a number of other Hurston works, as well. Until the costs of freedom are met, both the responsibilities and the temptations, the freedom is not unconditional. Moses himself in Moses, Man Of The Mountain, must reconcile his love for the freedom found outside Egypt with the Hebrews who are still enslaved there. Because he is free, with all the power and insight that comes with that state, Moses must return on a mission of liberation away from his family and the life he has grown to cherish. It is for a similar reason that Moses kills Aaron before he reaches
the promised land. Aaron had grown into a man who would have subordinated the people of Goshen once again; and Moses had to follow the decree to kill him because Moses loved freedom, in all forms.

Although she is still a troubled character at the end of *Seraph On The Suwanee*, Arvay Henson attains a level of liberation at which she can at least make a free choice, and she finds a place in which she truly feels free. Admittedly, Arvay is one of the least successful of Hurston's characters artistically, although she is not, as Alice Walker has suggested, a completely uninteresting and unsympathetic character; but her quest for freedom and identity is far less interesting than Janie Crawford's because she is a humorless character, more passive, less articulate and of more limited imagination than Janie.

The very choice that Arvay makes at the end, although it is her own, is objectionable to many feminst critics who have revived Hurston primarily because she presents a seminal, capable, liberated woman in Janie Crawford. Briefly, Arvay decides after returning to her childhood home and finding that she had been lying to herself for years, that she will return to her husband, Jim Meserve, who left her because of her apparent inability to love him freely. After the two are finally reconciled, Hurston ends the novel in the following way:
The few hours left of the darkness passed away with Jim held in her arms. Jim was hers and it was her privilege to serve him. To keep on like that in happiness and peace until they died together, giving Jim the hovering that he needed.

A breeze of dawn sprang up, and the boat rocked gently with it.... The sunlight rose higher, climbed the rail and came on board. Arvay sat up...and met the look of the sun with confidence. Yes, she was doing what the big light had told her to do. She was serving and meant to serve.

Taken out of context and with no regard to Arvay's character, this conclusion would make even mild-mannered feminists scream; and they have done exactly that in certain articles. But Arvay both accepts this role and chooses it for herself; and taking into account Arvay's near pathologically disturbed personality presented at the novel's beginning, it is a step in the right direction. Jim Meserve has changed, too; it is not as though Arvay has been brainwashed into happiness. Jim has developed as new a perception of Arvay as she has of him. Apparently Arvay is free enough to be able to imagine happiness and is actively enjoying her life for the first time when she accepts serving as her place in life. She is truly doing what she wants to, not living in reaction to the desires of her husband or the needs of her children or governed by her guilt and other neuroses, and this is important. It separates her from Nanny in Their Eyes Were Watching God who wanted a "platform to preach from" and never got one. Nanny was not happy; she simply endured. Arvay is happy at
the end of *Seraph on The Suwanee*, a significant distinc-

tion.

The same objection has been raised by critics to Hurston's short story "The Gilded Six-Bits." It is true that had Missie May not both had a child that looked like her husband and served him hand and foot while waiting for him to come back to her, Joe Banks probably would have abandoned her—which some critics write would be a good thing for Missie May. Given the characters and the depth of their love, however, it would be a shame to see this happen. Again, Hurston treats each situation separately, carefully writing about two individuals in specific situations rather than presenting proto-typical protest characterizations. This approach is both troubling, as in Arvay and Missie May's case, and enlightening; without Hurston's personalizing style, Janie Crawford might be simply a hell-raiser in search of a place that would accept it. Sherely Anne Williams describes Janie (and Missie May and Arvay, too) in the preface to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* when she writes, "It isn't the white man's burden that Janie carries; it is the gift of her own love." 68

It is with the gift of love that Zora Neale Hurston gives her characters freedom, and that freedom frames her novels. Freedom is, of course, a theme that is uniquely strong in black culture; and from black culture Hurston directly and indirectly fueled her creative fire.
She is always at her very best when writing in or about black culture, and her work preserves that culture's vitality, richness and sense of soulfulness. The values which lie at the base of black culture—and freedom is certainly one of these values—are as true and as compelling as any ever delineated in American fiction. For the student steeped in the bleak, non-functional values presented by other American writers of this decade, the system of values Hurston presents seems balanced, healthy and hope-renewing. But most of all, it makes the reader, like Phoeby Watson after hearing Janie's tale, grow "ten feet higher from jus' listnin' tuh you Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'." And with the growth comes the desire to go'tuh de horizon and back' in search of the freedom that Janie found.
Notes


5. Walker, p. 5.


17. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 211.


23. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 32.

24. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 47.

25. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 49.


29. For a further discussion of this topic, see Lillie P. Howard, "Marriage and Zora Neale Hurston's System Of Values." CIA Journal, 21 (1977), 256-68.


32. Hurston, Jonah's, p. 28.

33. Hurston, Jonah's, p. 196.

34. Hurston, Jonah's, p. 204.


36. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 54.

37. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 54.

38. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 55.

39. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 50.

40. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 55.

41. Hurston, Their Eyes, pp. 118-119.

42. Howard, Zora Neale Hurston, p. 123.

43. Hurston, Moses, Man, p. 224.

44. Hurston, Moses, Man, p. 284.


47. Hurston, Moses, Man, p. 191.


49. For an excellent discussion on this, see Missy Dehn Kubitschek, "Tuh De Horizon And Back: The Female Quest In Their Eyes Were Watching God," Black

53. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 23.
54. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 23.
56. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 20.
58. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 31.
60. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 1.
61. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 52.
65. Hurston, Their Eyes, p. 275.
66. Hurston, Seraph, p. 311.
Bibliography


Bone traces the writing Hurston did during the Harlem Renaissance, and critiques "The Gilded Six-Bits" with insight and perceptiveness. Particular attention is paid to the place that Eatonville holds in the influences upon Hurston's career.


A fairly good reading of Their Eyes Were Watching God, although it could be closer. "Through Tea Cake's death, Janie experiences the divine emotion, for her highest dream...has been 'mocked to death by time.' Like all men, she can only watch in resignation..." Of course, Janie is a woman, and the author fails to recognize the distinction Hurston makes between men and women. Bone is more on track when he writes, "it is still better to live on the far horizon than to grub around on shore. Janie does not regret...the price which is extracted in the end."


Featured in this collection of critical pieces is an essay by Hurston's biographer, Robert Nemmeran, that accurately and briefly sums up Hurston's life and describes in detail some of Hurston's activities during the Renaissance. Briefly mentions Wallace Thurman's fictional portrait of Hurston as Sweetie Mae Carr, an unflattering one. Although all of this essay appears in Hurston's biography in a more complete form, it is nice in this edition because it is accurate, condensed, and can be read in contrast with other views of her work mentioned in the collection.


An examination of the relationship between the two women, and their fate
in the intervening years since their deaths is summarized. Burke writes in praise of Hurston, "the little girl on the gatepost is a key to the Hurston personality, child and adult, for it was this openness, this eagerness for opportunity, this questing hopefulness and stoic resilience which insured her survival."


This perceptive survey book discusses Hurston's fiction as folk culture presented in artistic structure. Notes Janie Crawford grows up "not from without but from within," thus, creating a new black woman character. Presents a portrait of Zora that praises her irreverence. An open minded critic who overlooks Zora's faults at times. Also notes the similarity of Nella Larsen's and Hurston's end.


Although this collection of criticism has very nice, big photographs of each author discussed including Hurston, the portrait presented of Hurston's work is warped by Davis' racial politics. "in short," he writes of Their Eyes Were Watching God, "this is another good-will novel dramatizing the racial philosophy of Zora Neale Hurston—a racial philosophy which present-day black writers would consider incredible." Again, more attention seems to be paid to Hurston's life than her artistry.


This well-selected edition contains and essay by Hemingway on Hurston's use of folklore, "Are You a Flying Lark or a Setting Dove;" and includes sections on Afro-American Literary History, a short section of figurative language, folklore and extensive and very interesting section on the theory and practice of teaching black literature. Provides a framework to build a course which includes Hurston and other writers without presenting "trendy" ideology.

Hurston is mentioned in the section of folk culture, in essays by Sterling Brown and Arna Bontemps, and in Hugh Gloster, Ernest Daiser and Nick Aaron Ford's essays on fiction. Hurston is both commended and chastised for not writing conventional protest literature. A good variety of viewpoints; but essays written by and about black women writers are sadly lacking. Sources for the essays are lacking as well.


Hurston is mentioned several times in this book in connection with the Harlem Renaissance and extensively discussed under the heading of Folk realism during the depression. The discussion is thin, however; although Gloster does note Hurston "presents Southern folk life without shame, rancor, or protest."


Another anthology of essays on black writers, tracing the history of the black writer. No essays deal exclusively with Hurston, but she is mentioned in connection with other artists.


An easily accessible collection of essays on black writers, including Hurston, by Hurston's future biographer. Excerpts crucial information into one volume excellent for reference.


The most complete and accurate biography to date, even though the author says the definitive biography is yet to be written, by a black woman, this one is very good and crucial to any research on Hurston.


Thoroughly discusses all Hurston's fiction, mentions her non-fiction. This is not terribly well-written, but it does include some good insights into her work, particularly the short stories and *Moses, Man Of The Mountain*. Not a partic-
ularly good analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*


"A flawed man is obviously less forgivable in the Hurston world than a flawed woman," Howard writes here. Many of the opinions expressed in this essay are not repeated in her later book, and is a decent thematic study of Hurston's works.


Because this discussion includes only works written from 1940 to 1950, Hurston's major works are left out. *Seraph On The Suwanee* is read as Hurston's homage to Sigmund Freud, and depicts Arway as a woman "Finally overcomes her neurotic condition...known to clinical psychologists as the hysterical female." It is a male-centered reading of Hurston's work, and a very odd one at that; Hughes fails to adequately substantiate his hypothesis.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave.* New York: The Feminist Press, 1982.

This book is a wonderful, essential reference for any teacher or student of Black Studies because it thoroughly covers a much neglected topic—the situation and life of the black American woman. Black feminism, racism, social science issues, creative life, black woman's literature, and several bibliographic essays on every aspect imaginable make this presentation as broad and accurate as possible. One of the most valuable things contained is a wide variety of course syllabi for interdisciplinary and literature courses. Hurston is well covered in several essays, notably Lorraine Bethel's "This Infinity of Conscious Pain: Zora Neale Hurston and The Black Female Literary Tradition."


Includes exceptionally little detail of Hurston's activities, particularly in the 1930's; but a fine description of the workings, rise and demise of *FIRE!* magazine. Not particularly helpful in a discussion of literature, but a decent source of history.

Deals well with the puzzle of why fame was allowed to only one black writer at a time. Also examines the prestige of violence over love as a theme in novels, "as for the derision of love as less important, somehow, than war or violence, that is plain craziness, plain white craziness we do not even need to discuss." The article concludes with "we should absolutely resist the superstar one-at-a-time mentality that threatens the varied and resilient flexible wealth of our black future, even as it shrinks and obliterates incalculable segments of our history."


Kubitschek sees Janie Crawford as the hero of her own story, strong and on the trail of the epic quest. She defines the mythic hero's departure, odyssey, and return to the community to which she left. Well-written and insightful.


Well-researched and presented, this article deals with the conflict between Black men and Black women in Hurston's fiction and her autobiography. Lupton sees Their Eyes Were Watching God as "a record of Black language and black talking... (and) a symbolic work, a novel rich in myth and metaphor." She also notes the two sides of Tea Cake, as a "pollen-bearing bee, and a mad dog." Notes the difference between Janie and Arvey is that Janie sees herself as part of a community and Arvey is in her own private sphere. The fact and theme of menopause is also discussed in relation to the two characters. Only women have developed menopause is also discussed in relation to the two characters. Only women have developed "a state having nothing to do with their works."


Negro World magazine is one of the first places Hurston ever published work. She had several poems printed there in 1922, reprinted in this work and not anywhere else, so far as I have seen. Her poems were not conventional protest poetry, common in the magazine at that time. "The Emperor Effaces Himself" is a satire on Marcus Garvey, and quite a vicious one, too. This book deals exclusively
with Hurston's very early work, leaving off after this short story appears.


McCredie reads Their Eyes Were Watching God as one woman's struggle for articulation, the search for a voice. She divides this search into several phases, and is very perceptive in doing so. However, she underestimates Tea Cake's importance in the scheme of Janie's life, and does not deal adequately with the fact Tea Cake goes mad.


Perry discusses several of Hurston's early short stories, written for the Opportunity magazine contest, and "Sweat," which appeared in FERRY magazine. Perry admits that Hurston's conversation is somewhat stilted when dialect is not being used, and she uses narrative rather than action; but still calls Hurston's short stories successful with a "preconceived effect' faithfully adhered to and achieved."


Rosenblatt commits the common error in examining Their Eyes Were Watching God of assuming the men and not Janie Crawford at this story's prime focus. He begins the discussion by calling Janie "a full-fledged hero whose heroism consists largely of resilience;" and ends with Janie's love of Tea Cake—"an unreal achievement." Hurston is one of only three female authors discussed.


An excellent, concise introduction to the complete works of Zora Neale Hurston. Begins with a biography and goes on to summarize and comment on all Hurston's books, fiction and non-fiction alike.


Fourteen contemporary black women writers are interviewed in this book, with fascinating results. Many of them acknowledge their debt to Hurston and reveal their opinion of her. The ways in which she has affected modern writers
are interesting, and this is a very thought-provoking compilation.


No authors are specifically discussed in this pamphlet, but it was helpful in structuring this paper and selecting material to be included.


Turner analyzes Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen and Hurston, calling her "the wandering minstrel," and spends ten of thirty pages on Hurston discussing her colorful life, often inaccurately. Moses, Man Of The Mountain is called "Miss Hurston's most accomplished achievement," but goes on to say the novel "does not comment significantly on life or people." The tone of this book is unsubstantiated with Hurston's work. This chapter does present some valid criticisms; however, they are encrusted in sexism and bias.


This book does not deal with Hurston directly; it analyzes more recent black women authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall. It is extremely helpful as a source for black feminist's perspectives on black women's writing—particularly helpful knowledge when dealing with Hurston. The chapter entitled, "Giving Birth To Self," was very helpful in writing this paper, although it has not been directly cited. Also, it is just good reading and has a very good bibliography.


Walker is one of the modern black writers who is instrumental in reviving Hurston for modern readers; and this book of 'womanist' prose contains two valuable introductory essays on Hurston, as well as mentioning her in many other essays. Walker, in 1973, went to Hurston's grave and placed a headstone there; the process of which is chronicled in this book. Although almost all the essays are reprints,
this book is invaluable for research and makes excellent reading.


A definition of the goals of many major American liberation movements and asserts that these goals illuminate humanity better in fiction than in fact. A fairly perceptive reading of this novel, with one minor displacement in the sequence of events that may change reader's perception. Walker still chastises Hurston for not dealing with racism, but tempers this with high praise for her "novel of sexism."


This small volume of short stories contains none by Hurston, but begins with a particularly helpful introduction. Divisions in the text include growing up black and female, the intimidation of color, black vs. white women, the black mother/daughter conflict, reconciliation, and the black woman and the disappoint-ment of romantic love. Classification of stereotypes and a little feminist theory are the highlights of this brief introduction to contemporary black women writers.


A study of the differences between living and listening to life-tales. This is an excellent article, unbiased and honest. "The test inspires the reader," Wolff writes, "to formulate his or her own personal image of it." Concentrates on the differences between living as a woman and as a man as Hurston describes on the first page of the novel. Notes the different stages that Janie progresses through in becoming aware of her own life and identity.


A fairly perceptive work particularly interested in the feminist aspects of Their Eyes Were Watching God, and also fuminates on just why Hurston was treated so harshly by critics, without any conclusions. Ten pages are devoted to Hurston.