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The themes of birth and death as archtypes in the four novels of Zora Neale Hurston

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THE THEMES OF BIRTH AND DEATH AS ARCHETYPES IN THE
FOUR NOVELS OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
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INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston was born on January 7, 1901 to John and Lucy Hurston. John and Lucy had come from Notasulga, Alabama. Of John's leaving Alabama, Miss Hurston writes:

John Hurston, in his late twenties, had left Macon County, Alabama because the ordeal of share-cropping on a southern Alabama cotton plantation was crushing to his ambition. There was no rise to the thing.¹

In answering the question, "What else was there for a man like him?" John sought a place where he could expand his ambitions. The place was the "burly, boiling, hard-hitting rugged, individualistic" town of Eatonville, Florida - built and governed by Black people.² He became a carpenter and a preacher. It was in this town during hog killing time that Zora was born. Because the mid-wife could not be reached and John was out of town, Zora's delivery was aided by an affluent white man who had happened by the house to render an act of kindness. The robust Zora was named a few days later by a friend of Lucy's whose name was Mrs. Neale.

When John got the news of his daughter's birth, he wanted to slit his throat.

It seems that one daughter was all that he figured he could stand. My sister Sarah was his favorite child, but that one girl was enough. Plenty of sons, but no more girl

¹ Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks On A Road (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 20.
² Ibid.
babies to wear out shoes and bring in nothing. I don't think he ever got over the trick he felt that I played on him by getting born a girl, and while he was off from home at that.¹

John's feelings toward Zora were to have a great effect on her throughout her childhood. She lived with the thought that her father favored Sarah over her. She claimed that it was this association between Sarah and John that made a "tiger" out of her.

Miss Hurston said that it took her a long time to learn how to walk, in fact, she was shocked into walking when, as a nine month old baby, she was surrounded by a sow with a litter of pigs. She reflected:

With no more suggestions from the sow or anybody else, it seems that I just took to walking and kept things a-going... once I found use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go."²

Darwin Turner claims that a proper study of Miss Hurston should begin with Zora Neale Hurston, the wanderer. She spent the first nine years of her life in the security of her home and family. Her life was only complicated then as she, an overtly inquisitive child, irritated most of the adults in her family. Her mother's philosophy was for her children to "jump at the sun," while her father was content with the status quo. Zora chose to follow her mother's advice which led her to an extensive "inside search."

Miss Hurston learned that the world did not "tilt under her footfalls, nor careen over one-sided just to make her happy."³ She was not

¹ Ibid., p. 35.
² Ibid., p. 40.
³ Ibid., p. 44.
satisfied with life as it was, she was a daydreamer, an inventor. She learned toughness and fortitude from that same white man who helped her into the world. The two of them conversed at the fishing hole. She would be invited along to bait his hook. She found great joy in watching the world from on top of the gatepost. The world to her was the white people she saw on their way to Orlando, a neighboring town. It was these people whom she would ask for rides "a piece of the way." She was usually reprimanded by her grandmother for her forwardness, but she never stopped. She said, "If the village was singing a chorus, I must have missed the tune."\(^1\) She already knew where her world began, she wanted to see the end. She wanted action.

Despite her longing to travel, she did find peace and serenity in the out of doors. She loved the sweet smells of Florida in the spring-time. She found that she could open up and commune with the natural wonders that Florida possessed. Of the people, she loved the tales they told of life and the living. It was these tales and her interest in nature that stirred up fancies within her.

In addition to her outgoing nature, she was an adamant reader and a good student in school. Her brilliance afforded her the patronage of two white women who continually sent her books. She was keenly interested in the Norse Tales, Hercules, Hans Christian Anderson, Robert Lewis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling. At home, she became interested in the Bible. She commented though that this reading gave her "great anguish." She commented, "My soul was with the gods and my body in the village."\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) Ibid., p. 54.

\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 64.
There was only one way to balance her life. She had to leave home, to travel, to wander.

Being a young child, traveling was out of the question. However, around her seventh birthday, she began to have visions. These visions were her awakening to the life she would lead. She knew her fate. She could never enjoy life as the children her own age did because she possessed this strange knowledge.

Her wanderings began at the age of thirteen after the death of her mother. She went to school in Jacksonville with her sister for a short time. She was the youngest student in school and it was this fact that set her apart from this group. She took refuge in her fancies where she carried on an imaginary love affair with the president of the school. She was still a voracious reader. At home, her father remarried and was financially unable to keep her in school. She left Jacksonville and went back to Eatonville to live in what she called an empty home. She did not get along with her stepmother, so for the next few months, she was shifted from relatives' homes to the homes of friends, but she found no comfort. At fourteen, she began taking jobs as a maid. She could never hold a job for too long because she placed more emphasis on reading from her employer's libraries than attending to her duties as a maid.

Her first breakthrough came when she acquired a job as maid to an actress. Thus the bonds of her parochial rural background were severed and the doors were open for the expansion of her creativity. She traveled with the actress and learned much about people, places and things. These experiences matured her. When the actress abandoned her career to get married, Zora decided to go back to school.
At seventeen, she entered Morgan Academy in Baltimore. She was sophisticated because of her life experiences, but much less financially stable than her classmates. This fact was no deterrent to Miss Hurston because her vibrant personality, as her critic Larry Neal says, "disarmed all those who came in contact with her."\(^1\) From Morgan, she entered Howard University in Washington. For *Stylus*, a campus literary magazine, she wrote her first short story "Drenched in Light." This short story brought her to the attention of Charles F. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*, a magazine founded during the Harlem Renaissance. He wrote to her, as well as many other young Blacks, to submit materials to the magazine. At the end of her sophomore year she left school and began submitting short stories to *Opportunity*. Her second story, "Spunk" won second prize in a contest sponsored by *Opportunity* in 1925. Through these channels, her work was brought to the attention of Fannie Hurst who gave her a secretarial job and Annie Nathan Meyer offered her a scholarship to Barnard. She entered as a junior. At Barnard, she was greatly influenced by Professor Franz Boaz. After her graduation, Dr. Boaz arranged a fellowship for her to study Negro folklore. She began collecting materials for her novels.

In 1933, she went back home, not to Eatonville, but to Sanford, Florida, where she could "concentrate more" and sat down to write *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. This novel plunged her headlong into her writing career. In the fourteen years that followed, she published three more novels, an autobiography and two collections of Black folklore. However, after a

successful career as a writer, she suddenly dropped out of the creative scene after 1948. Larry Neal questioned her disappearance at the apex of her career. He stated that perhaps the answer lay in an incident that occurred in the fall of 1948.

She was indicted on a morals charge. The indictment charged that she had been a party in sexual relationships with two mentally ill boys and an older man. The charge was lodged by the mother of the boys. All the evidence indicated that the charge was false, since Zora was out of the country at the time of the alleged crime, but several of the Negro newspapers exploded it into a major scandal.¹

The incident made Miss Hurston miserable and she lost hope. She had been extremely patriotic, but the scandal made her question the American legal system. Her overall reaction to the incident was that she simply ceased to care. In a letter to Carl Van Vechten, a close friend of hers, she stated:

, . . My country has failed me utterly. My race has seen fit to destroy me without reason, and with the vilest tools conceived of by man so far . . . All that I have tried to do has proved useless. All that I have believed in has failed me. I have resolved to die.²

She went back to Florida and took a job as a maid. When her employer found out who she was, the story was spread that a successful writer was now doing housework. A story in the St. Louis Post Dispatch quoted her as saying:

You can use your mind so long. Then you have to use your hands. It's just the natural thing. I was born with a skillet in my hands. Why shouldn't I do it for somebody else a while??³

¹Ibid., p. xxi.
²Ibid., p. xxii.
³Ibid., p. xxiii.
She died penniless on January 28, 1960 in Fort Pierce, Florida. A fifth novel and three short stories were in the hands of her agents. They were never published.

* * * *

_**Jonah's Gourd Vine** is the Story of her parents. After publication in 1934, the reviews of the novel predicted great success for Miss Hurston. She depicts Black life in the South replete with the rich dialect and folklore of the people. Though there was some skepticism, as far as success was concerned, with the dialect, most of the critics agreed with Josephine Pinkney when she wrote:

> The novel of Negro life is the product of a fortunate combination of circumstances. The author writes as a Negro understanding her people and having opportunities that could come to no white person, however sympathetic, of seeing them when they are utterly themselves. But she writes as a Negro whose intelligence is firmly in the saddle, who recognizes the value of an objective style in writing available to her with detachment and with a full grasp of its dramatic qualities. Considering her especial temptations, her sustaining of the objective viewpoint is remarkable. She writes of her people with honesty, with sympathy, without extenuation.

Miss Hurston possessed a craft rare among Negro writers of her time. Her artful candor earned for her a place in the world of letters.

In 1937 came _Their Eyes Were Watching God_, the story of a woman's search for the true meaning of life and of love. Larry Neal states that this novel is clearly her best. He further affirms that:

> This work indicates that she had a rather remarkable understanding of blues aesthetic and its accompanying sensibility . . . It confronts the most intimate and brutal aspects of personal catastrophe and renders them

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lyrically . . . written with a great deal of sensitivity to character and locale.¹

Miss Hurston wrote this novel to express a love she herself had felt. It was written in Haiti, under what Miss Hurston terms as "internal pressure," in seven weeks.

In 1939, Moses, Man of the Mountain was published. Around this time, several efforts by writers of many races were being made to recapture the life of this biblical character. Miss Hurston presented Moses as a hoodoo man with magical powers. Moreover, in her account, she gave a true picture of emancipation. She expressed the attitudes, fears, reactions and hopes of a people set free. Since Moses was Black, the Hebrews too were Black and the story is overlayed in Black idiom. Miss Hurston also took this opportunity to expand her thoughts expressed in chapter twelve of her autobiography entitled "My People, My People." In the chapter she questioned Negro thinking from her standpoint as a child, as a girl and as an adult. She concluded that there is no "The Negro:"

Our lives are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different, that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all, except My people, My people.²

Finally, in 1948, her last published novel, Seraph on The Suwanee appeared. Unlike her previous novels, this novel is of a region in western Florida inhabited by poor whites. The common name for these people is "cracker." Her story describes these poor whites picturesquely.

¹ Neal, p. xvii.

² Hurston, Dust Tracks. . ., p. 245.
Her characters are racially different in this novel, but she still displayed her thorough knowledge of customs and of locale.

William T. Hedden wrote the following words to describe the artistry of the novel:

Emotional expository, meandering, unified, naive, sophisticated; sympathetic, caustic, comic, tragic, lewd, chaste-one could go on indefinitely reiterating this novel's contradictions and still end helplessly with the adjective unique.1

Miss Hurston's attempt to widen her horizons proved to be highly successful.


* * * *

For the purpose of this thesis, the symbolic themes of birth and death will be discussed to account for their significance in relationship to the lives of the protagonists. Birth appears to be the ritualistic act of coming forth from one existence and venturing into another. It is an awakening or a blossoming. Death is not the physical ending of all vital functions, it becomes a state of temporary inactivity which appears to be non-life, but is a sustaining force animated by actions, thoughts and/or tradition. These themes will be analyzed novel by novel to determine their functions in the total effect of the novels.
CHAPTER I

JONAH'S GOURD VINE

Jonah's Gourd Vine is the story of the rise and fall of John Pearson. John was the bastard son of a plantation owner who rose from a plantation worker in Alabama to a preacher in Florida. John met Lucy, his wife, in Notasulga, Alabama and married her against her mother's wishes. He was forced to leave Alabama for brutally assaulting Lucy's brother and he landed in Eatonville, Florida. He prospered, with Lucy's help, to pastor of the Baptist church. But his weakness for women caused constant friction in his life with Lucy as well as his life as a preacher. After Lucy's death, he married his mistress and his prosperity declined. Their marriage ended with a divorce and he sought a new life in another town. He married again, but his seeds of evil still plagued him despite his struggles to overcome them. Finally his puilandering caused his life to end in a violent death.

* * * *

The story began as John, sixteen years old was about to leave home to avoid the friction between himself and his step-father. The author begins Chapter I by stating: "God was grumbling his thunder and playing the zig-zag lightening thru his fingers."1 This foreshadowing becomes the plot motif as John's life fluctuates between success and failure, smoothness and friction. The immediate focus of this foreshadowing is

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the violent and verbal discontentment of Ned, the father, with John Buddy, the bastard son of a white man. As Ned took his anger out on his wife, Amy, John was forced to put an end to Ned's physical abuse by violently and relentlessly striking him down. "John's fist shot out and Ned slid slowly down the wall as if both his legs and his insides were crumbling away."¹ This action tripled with Ned's already executed plans for John to leave home to work on another farm "over the creek" and John's own feelings to want to cross over to Big Creek set John on his pilgrimage. John's birth took place as he left from over-the-creek to enter into Big Creek in Notsulga, Alabama. A point of explanation is in order here. "Over-the-creek niggers," according to Miss Hurston are of the lowest class of Blacks, just like saying they are from the wrong side of the railroad tracks.² They are looked down on because they sharecrop with poor whites. "Big Creek niggers" are a little better off for they work for wealthy or prosperous whites. The children of these Blacks attend school until harvesting season.

The author prepares the reader for John's birth as he is cleansed before leaving from one side of the creek. As Chapter I ended, John stripped and carried his clothes across the creek, then recrossed and plunged into the swift water and breasted strongly over.³ Just as with the religious ceremony of baptism to cleanse one of sins so that he can

² Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, p. 20.
start anew, John is brought forth from his home, cleansed of his old life and is awakened anew and refreshed.

On the other side of the creek, John followed his mother's suggestion to seek employment with Mr. Alf Pearson, who is found out later to be his natural father. John is cordially taken in both by Mr. Alf and the Blacks on the plantation when they find out whose child he is. John gained acceptance by Mr. Alf as he dutifully carried out his chores, and by the girls on the plantation because of his stature and looks. John's primary interest, though, was to court Lucy, a "sweet little black-eyed girl."

Upon John's meeting Lucy, Miss Hurston draws on the Biblical story of "Jonah's Gourd Vine." God prepared a gourd vine for Jonah to deliver him from his grief. Just as suddenly as the gourd appeared, God prepared a worm to smote it and soon it withered. Lucy was John's gourd vine and the evil worm was John's philandering. John pursued Lucy and won her.

At this point in John's life, it looked as if he was heading for prosperity, but God the ruler of his fate inflicted him with an evil weakness - women. John's success became a situation of progression and regression as he fell victim to his weakness. At first, he did not pursue the women, they threw themselves on him, but because of his weakness, he could not resist. He called out to God for strength to overcome his weakness, but it was to no avail. Early in the story, he sought a "prayin' ground," and sent up a prayer:

O Lawd, heah 'this once mo' and again yo' weak and humble servant is knee bent and body bowed - Mah heart beneath mah knees and mah knees in some lonesome valley cryin' fuh mercy whilst mercy, kinst be found. O Lawd! You know mah heart, and all de ranges uh mah deceitful
mind - and if you find any sin lurkin' in and about mah heart please pluck it out and cast it intuh de sea uh fuhgitfullness whar it'll never rise tuh condemn me in de judgement.¹

This gesture parallels Jesus' actions at Gethsemane. Because of Miss Hurston's leanings toward the Bible for the content of her stories and because this is the first inkling that John is possessed with a special poetry of speech (which later aids his profession) it is appropriate.

After John reached a peak in his job and his courting, he was asked by his mother to move back "over-de-creek" to aid the family in overcoming their destitution. This request added more friction to thwart his success. He did not want to go, but loyalty to his mother forced him. John was not content back home. In the eloquent metaphorical speeches of Southern Black protestant preachers, it is very common to hear the statement that an individual cannot return to his mother's womb to be reborn. This statement is made at the ceremony of religious conversion. Once reborn or awakened, one has to follow his new journey and not retread ground already tread. Consequently, John's rejoining with his family does not succeed. John is forced to make a declarative break from Ned, the family and all the confusion.

With the aforementioned statement of religious conversion in mind, John did not succeed back on Mr. Alf's plantation either. This failure to succeed had to do with his relations with the people around him. At first he gained the unjust reputation of philanderer. With this and all the family confusion he encountered trying to court Lucy, he needed to flee. It must be mentioned here that his fleeing did not cause an

¹ Ibid., pp. 51-52.
everlasting break with these people because he had left a part of his heart there. Therefore, his second purpose for leaving was to test Lucy's love. As he told his brother Zeke, "Ah don't know whether she love me or not."¹

He traveled to Opelika, Alabama and stayed just long enough for him to be thoroughly sure of Lucy's love. When he returned, he courted Lucy ardently. Because Lucy was deeply in love with John, she fought her mother's disapproval of John and married him. She was hurt by her mother's decision not to attend the wedding. John consoled her by saying:

Lucy don't you worry 'bout 'yo folks, hear? Ahm gointer be uh father and uh mother tuh you. You jes' look tuh me, girl chile. Jes' you put you' 'pendance in me. Ah means tuh prop you up on ev'y leanin' side.²

This entire speech of John's is ironical because John leaned heavily on Lucy throughout their life together and after her death. Because she was his gourd vine, he looked to her for protection and forgiveness of his sins. He knew that he could always get it from her. After her death, though, his shield had gone. At first he prayed for death, but when he saw it was to no avail, he tried to live the kind of life that Lucy would approve of.

John was promoted to foreman of Mr. Alf's plantation and was put in charge of handling the supplies. Lucy began to bear John's children and she survived under the strain of awareness of John's forthright philandering. He was first involved with Melaney whom he compels to marry

¹Ibid., p. 101.

²Ibid., p. 131.
Pomp, the man who really loves her. Then he moved to Big "Oman, in the
dark corners of Mr. Alf's store until Big 'Oman left Notasulga. Where-
fore John made journeys to see her under the guise of business trips.
John was warned by the same God to whom he cried out for help in his
first flirtations. On the way home, John's horse threw him into the
river in a raging storm; John almost lost in his battle against the
elements. He was suspended between the conscious world and the realms
of the unknown.

John strode across infinity where God sat upon his
throne and looked off towards immensity and burning worlds
dropped from his teeth. The sky beneath John's tread
crackled and flashed eternal lightenings and thunder rolled
without ceasing in his wake.¹

John recovered and confessed his wrong doings to the already cog-
nizant Lucy. He explained:

Dat's de brute beast in me, but Ah sho aim tuh live
clean from dis on if you 'low me one mo' chance. Don't
tongue lash me - jes' try me and see.²

He tried to do better as he became involved in church affairs. At the
"big meeting" John made his debut as a man possessed with the phraseol-
ogy to convert others to religion. His words are replete with that
special poetry that sways people. Yet the life he lives seems to con-
tradict his preachings. He yields to his desires despite his respon-
sibilities. One deacon observed: "He done more'n de pastor. Dat boy
is called tuh preach and don't know it. Ahm gwine tell him so."³

¹ Ibid., p. 142.
² Ibid., p. 144.
³ Ibid., p. 146.
Despite his good intentions, John sunk back into his "den of iniquity" and Lucy is left alone to grapple with her responsibilities as mother and wife and her knowledge of his unfaithfulness.

John got in trouble with the law when he nearly beats Lucy's brother, Bud, to death and when he steals a hog. Bud was trying to collect a three dollar debt of John's from Lucy. Since Lucy could not pay and John was not at home, Bud took their treasured feather bed and left Lucy, great with child, on a pallet on the floor. While all of this was going on, John was engaged in his usual philandering. When he came home and found out what had happened, he sought Bud out and took out his vengeance upon him. On the way home, he remembered that his family was without meat so he stole a hog from a neighboring farm.

For the crime of theft, John is arrested and Mr. Alf intervened to have John released in his charge. He had to be bound over to a higher court for the assault. So, with Mr. Alf's assistance John escaped to avoid trial. Before he left, Mr. Alf offered these words:

John, I'm not going to ask you why you've done these things, partly because I already know, and partly because I don't believe you do.

God has given to all men the gift of blindness. That is to say that He has cursed but few with vision. Ever hear tell of a happy prophet? This old world wouldn't roll on the way He started it if man could see. Hal' In fact, I think God Himself was looking off when you went and got yourself born.¹

Not only had God perhaps looked off when John was born, but he had turned away from him because of his evil doings.

John left Alabama and accidently landed in Florida. His arrival

was accidental because when he boarded the train, he was following a friend whom he met at the station, and the friend was going to Florida. John arrived in Sanford, Florida and was told of Eatonville, the all-colored town. This knowledge fascinated him and he remarked:

Ahm coming back tuh dis place. Uh man kin be sumpin' heah 'thout folks tramplin all over yuh. Ah wants mah wife and chillum heah.¹

After a while, he sent for Lucy and the children and they again set up housekeeping. Lucy's inherent strengths emerged in this new setting. She influenced John to go into carpentry and to buy a home for them instead of renting. However, carpentry was not his destined profession. John, as he stated, was called to preach. Not only does he preach, but with the help of Lucy, he rose to State Moderator of the church.

He fell into his same mold again, though, despite his success. He was compelled even more toward philandering. He had to contend with Lucy's knowledge as well as the church's knowledge of his constant flirtations. He became involved with Hattie Tyson, the disreputable woman from Oviedo. Lucy admonished him: "You either got tuh stop lovin' Hattie Tyson uh you got tuh stop preachin'. Dat's what de people say."²

John denied his encounters. The church members tried to remind him of his duties as a husband and a preacher, but they did not have the courage. John, being fully aware of their feelings and himself feeling the guilt of his doings, resolved to come down from the pulpit. He preached a heartwarming last sermon and the congregation submitted and

¹ Ibid., p. 174.

² Ibid., p. 192.
forgave him. He did not leave the church at this point.

John's gourd vine had finally withered and he was left with mixed emotions. He no longer had to look into Lucy's eyes and see that "I-know-what-you're-doing" look. He felt free to express openly his feelings to Hattie. John is awakened as he felt this freedom. He married Hattie. However, just as with Jonah, John soon wished for death because of the absence of his gourd vine. Consequently, at Lucy's death, John was symbolically dead. However, before he got the death he wished for, he had to go through two more superficial births before he was totally communed with his spiritual and physical death.

John felt a feeling of relief upon marrying Hattie, but with Hattie, John begun to rapidly decline. It began as he was ignominiously removed from the Moderatorship of the church. It continued as Hattie could not live harmoniously with John, his children or the respected members of the church. John's position in the church declined. When John finally was able to look at his situation objectively, he confronted Hattie with the question, "Why am I married to you?" Hattie resorted again to hoodoo, which resulted in the open court divorce of Hattie and John.

After this infamous display, John lost more friends and began to sink inward and grapple with his conscience. He preached his final sermon and took up his second profession of carpentry. Alone and drenched in self pity, he called out to Lucy for help. He needed her protection against the evil around him. She can afford him none. He had to leave Eatonville. John struck out on a new kind of life, one that would help him sort out the wrong doings in his previous life and one that would set him straight, not so much in his own eyes, but in
Lucy's as well.

Into his second incomplete cycle, he was renewed in his travels, but little work and little money forced him to want to die. He stumbled upon a former member of his church, Sally Lovelace, who took him in and gave him work. They had a good relationship that eventually progressed into marriage. He set out to be honest and truthful with Sally. He called out to God to give him strength and for God to let Lucy know he was trying to walk in a straight path. He wanted Lucy to see that he could live without succumbing to evil ways.

John began preaching again and was given a Cadillac as a present from Sally. As long as he was around Sally, he was faithful. He attached himself to her so that she could keep him from evil - but she could not. She influenced him to go to Eatonville for a visit with his old friends. Against his better judgement, he did and he was propositioned by Ora, a young girl. John tried desperately not to yield, but he had little control over his actions. He yielded and became so angry with himself that he sped back home in his car and met an untimely death. He was involved in a car-train accident.

Because Lucy was the force that brought him through the first stage of his growth, her death ended the vital functions of John's life as a growing human being. The life with Hattie and with Sally were subsets of the lifeless shell that walked on the earth. God, that second compelling force seemingly turned his back on John when he succumbed to philandering so that he was without God's strength. He made a feeble try with Sally to overcome his weakness, but he lacked all of the elements to succeed.
On the day of John's funeral, the town was draped in sorrow. People from all over the state came to pay homage to this great man, even Hattie came. Sally sat among his children and made them love her.1 The preacher delivered a "barbaric requiem poem entitled 'On The Pale White Horse of Death.'"2 When he rounded out his sermon, his final pronouncement was: "He wuz uh man, and nobody knew 'im but God."3 So ended the life of John Buddy. He was brought to his birth through force and longing to live a different life. He went through the cleansing ceremony to leave his old life behind. Into the new life, he was given protection by God in the form of Lucy. He surrendered to the evil prepared for him and it was the result of this evil that caused Lucy to die. At her death, he ceased to grow, his life declined. He had symbolically come to his death. Because he was not physically dead, he lingered on enlivened only by feeble attempts to start anew.

1 Ibid., p. 310.
2 Ibid., p. 311.
3 Ibid.
Their Eyes Were Watching God is the second novel of Zora Neale Hurston, published in 1937. It is the story of Janie Mae Crawford, a woman in search of the true meaning of love. Darwin Turner in In A Minor Chord summed up the story in this way:

Having been forced to marry a much older farmer so that she will not give herself to worthless men, sixteen year old Janie runs away with Joe Starks, a charming, ambitious traveling salesman. Although Joe becomes a respected and prosperous leader in Eatonville, Florida, he disappoints her by offering wealth and prestige instead of understanding or love. After his death ends her bigamous relationship of more than twenty years, she finds true love with Tea Cake, a twenty-five-year-old gambler; but tragically she is forced to kill Teacake to protect herself when he attacks her in a delirious rage resulting from the rabies he contracted while saving her from a mad dog. Having been acquitted by a jury, she returns to Eatonville to defy the gossips who had predicted that Teacake would abandon her.

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Similar to John Buddy in Jonah's Gourd Vine, the protagonist, Janie Mae Crawford, experienced her awakening at the age of sixteen. Janie decided that her conscious life began at sixteen at Nanny's (her grandmother) gate. She was caught kissing Johnny Taylor over the gatepost. Janie's explanation of the events leading to that action will aid in fully understanding her birth.

Janie felt a certain magnetism as she, one spring afternoon, watched the blossoming of a pear tree in her backyard. "From barren brown stems

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to glistening leaf-buds, from the leaf buds to snowy virginity of bloom."¹
The how and why of this process plagued her, it "followed her waking
moments and caressed her in her sleep." The mystery of the entire
process "emerged and quested about her consciousness." In addition to
her awesome feelings about the pear tree, she was equally impressed at
the bee's activities in pollination.

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of
a 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 marriage.²

She could see and feel the wonder and ecstasy of spring. She wanted and
needed to experience the same juvenation within herself. Janie wanted
to experience love. She longed for the kind of love that was full, com-
plete and happy. The kind that transformed a young, naive virgin into a
full, complete woman. "She felt that love for her was to be like the
onset of springtime, sun-up, pollen and blossoming trees."³ Janie re-
marked:

Oh to be a pear tree - any tree in bloom! With kis-
sing bees singing of the beginning of the world!

She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting
buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed

² Ibid., p. 24.
to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her?\textsuperscript{1}

With the "golden dust of pollen" in her eyes, she saw Johnny Taylor as the momentary answer to her question. The kiss with Johnny was the ritual of her awakening. The kiss compelled her to seek out and find what love really meant. She wanted a lovelike springtime. However, the gloriousness of that compelling event was shattered when Nanny's voice called out, "Janie!"

Larry Neal in his introduction to Miss Hurston's autobiography, *Dusk Tracks On A Road* isolated four themes in the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. They are:

1. The nature of love.
2. The search for personal freedom.
3. The clash between spiritual and material aspiration.
4. Quest for more than the parochial range of life.\textsuperscript{2}

Janie's regenerative process at sixteen explained for Janie what love would mean for her, but she was to overcome many obstacles before she experienced total realization. The first deterrent was with Nanny.

Nanny saw Janie's action at the gatepost as the beginning of a chain of events that would degrade and shame Janie. Nanny's conclusions were based on the life that she, an ex-slave having to bear the master's child, had to live; and the degrading life led by her own daughter. Nanny's child born out of wedlock was Janie's mother. Janie's mother

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{2} Larry Neal, "Introduction" to *Dusk Tracks On A Road* by Zora Neale Hurston (Philadelphia, 1942).
was pitiously raped by one of her own race and Janie was the result of that union. Janie was raised by her grandmother. Nanny made it up in her mind very early that she was not going to let Janie's womanhood be trampled over like hers and her daughter's was. Nanny vowed that her granddaughter would enjoy the happiness she herself had never known.¹ She wanted a decent marriage for Janie which in Nanny's eyes meant a man with security. Since Johnny Taylor could not provide for Janie, Nanny began to condition Janie for Logan Killicks and his sixty acres.

Taint Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have baby, it's protection. Ah ain't gettin' ole, honey Ah'm done ole. Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life.²

According to Nanny, Logan could provide for Janie and secure her future.

After submitting to Nanny's discourse, Janie decided to marry Logan, but she still had questions: "Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day? Janie comforted herself with the answer that Nanny and the old folks believed - "Husbands and wives always love each other, and that was what marriage meant."

These words of consolation were the preparations for her first marriage. Janie and Logan were united in matrimony in Nanny's parlor with all the pomp and glory that Nanny and her friend Mrs. Washburn could provide. However, no one could put any garnishment on Janie's deep feelings. She thought:

¹ Turner, p. 106.
² Hurston, Their Eyes..., p. 30.
Nobody put anything on the seat of Logan's wagon to make it ride glorious on the way to his house. It was a lonesome place like a stump in the middle of the woods where nobody had ever been. The house was absent of flavor, too. But anyhow Janie went on inside to wait for love to begin.\(^1\)

After two months and two weeks, she was still waiting. As the days progressed, she began to abhor the sight of Logan. To Logan, Janie was a workhorse, not a tender morsel to be petted and loved. Nanny saw Janie as not appreciating the security and respectability of her position. She scolded Janie for her blindness. Janie learned without the help of her grandmother that marriage did not make love. Consequently, after the death of Nanny, Janie's discontent led her deeper into her own "search for personal freedom."

So, Janie waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world, she began to stand around the gate and expect things.\(^2\)

Janie's first dream was dead. She needed to break away from her mundane existence. The opportunity presented itself when Logan, one day, asked Janie to cut "seed taters" for him which was something she did not ordinarily do. His reasoning was because he was going to Lake City to buy a second mule. He replied:

Ah needs two mules dis yeah. Taters is goin' tuh be taters in de fall. Bringin' big prices. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 39.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 43.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 46.
Logan was about to place Janie in a position where all her vital forces would be smothered. All of her dreams would dissolve into the monotonous everyday activities. She could not survive under this strain.

In the meantime, Janie settled down in the barn to cut the potatoes, but because springtime was in the air, she moved out into the yard.

Down the road, she heard a whistling.

It was a cityfied, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn't belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn't need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going.  

Janie's first impulse was to run to the pump and swing the handle hard and fast so as to attract his attention - that she did accomplish, and he asked her for a cool drink. She learned from him that he was "from in and through Georgy," that he had worked for "white folks all his life," and that with his three-hundred dollar savings, he was going to "a town made all outa colored folks." He further informed Janie that his intentions were to buy in big at Eatonville and become a "big boss." Just as John Buddy felt rejuvenated by the all-colored town, so did Joe. Their feelings for the town parallel Miss Hurston's feeling for her home.

As the conversation became more personal, Joe found out that Janie was married and that her husband had gone to buy a mule for her to use in plowing. His remark was: "You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday!"  

They continued

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talking and became quite friendly. After that day, they met daily to
discuss his future as a great leader and hers of reaping the benefits.
As Janie thought of their relationship, she knew that he did not repre-
sent "sun-up and pollen and blooming trees," but he did speak for far
horizons, for change and chance."

Janie held herself back, not because of Logan, but because Nanny's
influence was still "powerful and strong," though Joe's influence was
becoming more intense every minute. Joe finally asked her to leave with
him. Janie had a great decision to make. She remembered the discourse
on the respectability of marrying Logan, and she toppled with fulfilling
her own dreams of a love like the springtime.

That night in bed, Janie attempted to talk her feelings out with
Logan, but he dominated the conversation accusing her of being unappre-
ciative of his "good treatment." The time came for Janie to make the
final decision when, the very next day, Logan summoned Janie to assist
in moving a pile of cow dung from the yard. Logan had reached the
lowest point and Janie flatly refused to comply with Logan's command.
Janie's well worshipped sun even frowned down upon them. "The sun from
ambush was threatening the world with red daggers, but the shadows were
gray and solid looking around the barn." Janie had reached the turning
point. In the resulting conversation, Logan made an extremely unjust
indictment against her: "You better dry up in dere! Ah'm too honest

\[1\]
\textit{Ibid.}, p. 50.

\[2\]
\textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.
and hard working for anybody in yo' family, dat's de reason you don't want me." Janie was crushed. Logan had accused her of things she had no control over - her family heritage. She asked herself, "What am I losing so much time for?" She made her final break. "Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good." She came upon Joe who was waiting to help her up in his wagon. She resolved:

> From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them.

With the new marriage underway, Janie and Jody (Joe's nickname) proceeded to Eatonville, Florida where Jody immediately began making a name for himself. He saw that the town needed a mayor, more land to build upon, a store and a post office. He wasted no time in getting those things. The money he used to buy the land more than doubled in a short while as Jody drove around encouraging citizens to move to Eatonville and buy land. With Jody's aggressive nature, his domineering air, and his oratorical ability, he was quickly voted into the mayorship of the town.

Janie was amazed at her husband's finesse, but because of the kind of man he was, she had to take a subordinate position. The first inkling

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1 Ibid., p. 53.  
2 Ibid., p. 54.  
3 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
of the realization of her new station in life came the night when Jody
was elected mayor. The crowd called for a few words from Mrs. Mayor
Starks. Jody took the floor and replied:

    Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't
    know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married
    her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place
    is in de home.¹

Janie was taken aback at Jody's words, but she tried to cover up. Jody
continued his ignoring of her feelings as he dictated her daily activ-
ities. Since he was mayor, he had little time to carry on the functions
of the store, so he told Janie that she would take care of that end of
his business affairs. Janie tried to refuse, but he retorted: "I god,
Ah don't see how come yuh can't. Tain't nothin atall tuh hinder yuh if
yuh got uh thimble full uh sense."² Afterwards, Jody went on to see
about the business of building and ruling the town. Janie could see
that his activities were stifling their relationship. She was not com-
fortable being Mrs. Mayor. She appealed to him by saying:

    Jody, it jus' looks lak it keeps us in some way we
    ain't natural wid one 'nother. You'se always off talkin'
    and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ah'm just markin'
    time. Hope it soon gits over."³

But it did not get over. Janie was Mrs. Mayor Starks, the clerk in the
store and post office, the hostess at home, the shining example for the
women of Eatonville to look upon and for the men to respect. She could

¹ Ibid., p. 69.
² Ibid., p. 70.
³ Ibid., p. 74.
never indulge in common things, she had to "class off." Everything that individualized Janie, Jody kept her from doing. Janie began to see her life in relation to Matt Bonner's yellow mule.

The mule was the town's jester. Matt deprived the mule of food and worked him strenuously. The mule became contemptible and vicious because of his deprivation. The life of the mule paralleled Janie's for she became the talk of the town, but the talk was in whispers. She was deprived of her own feelings and sensibility and was made to clerk the store and the post office. Instead of outwardly becoming vicious and contemptible, she became latently introverted. However, one day, the mule was liberated. Joe bought him from Matt to let him rest. Janie and the townspeople recognized the nobility in Joe's action and Janie spoke for the town. "Jody, dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. 'Tain't everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought." During the course of the mule's ordeals, Janie had developed an empathetic feeling toward him. Janie needed that same type of liberation, but she was far from getting it.

The townspeople revelled in Janie's speech to Jody. On the other hand, Jody expressed no praise because he saw the act in terms of Janie gaining more acceptance by the people he ruled. He could not stand for this because he could not share his throne. Jody and Janie began to argue more frequently, Jody always having the last word, and Janie having the last thought.

Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good. It just made Joe

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1 Ibid., p. 91.
do more. He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he had it.¹

Janie never let go of her dreams though they were far from reality. The "inside state" of their marriage suffered greatly.

The bed was no longer a daisy field for her and Joe to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was tired. She wasn't petal-open anymore with him.²

The love affair for Jody and Janie was not "sun-up and pollen and blooming trees." It became a clash between material and spiritual aspiration. Jody achieving all the wealth of material gains that he could and Janie sinking deeper and deeper into herself for she knew she had not found her dreams in Jody. Years were passing and Jody and Janie were aging right along with them. Jody took to falling into chairs from sheer exhaustion and that sprite, "cityfied" look sunk inward and protruded through his stomach. Janie noticed these things about Jody, but kept her thoughts to herself. Jody knew that he was not getting any younger, so to cover up his reality, he began to taunt Janie about her old age and unattractiveness. Of herself, Janie considered that she was twice seventeen and things were not the same, so she thought of flight but behind all those thoughts were huge question marks. The arguments between Janie and Jody left the confines of the home and drifted into the store. They lowered themselves to outwardly ridiculing their ages and impotency and the townspeople recognized it as playing the dozens.

¹ Ibid., p. 111.
² Ibid., p. 
Jody still dominated the arguments as he continuously jeered at Janie's old age until one day, Janie had had her fill. They began arguing in the store, she retorted:

Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big-bellies round here put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life.¹

Jody was totally hurt and appalled at Janie's remarks. The meek and humble Janie had made a laughing stock out of him. His pride and manhood had been trampled upon and he felt small. His immediate recourse was to furiously slap Janie and drive her away from the store. Because the hurt of her action was engrained into his sensibilities, he moved all his things from the bedroom and slept downstairs. Their life took a new turn. They said less and less to each other and from the outside, it looked as if they had mended their grievances. "But, the stillness was the sleep of swords."² Jody made new friends and allied himself with root doctors. He refused Janie's food and had old lady Davis cook for him. Jody totally rejected Janie and became suspicious of her trying to kill him. Finally, Jody's health and demeanor rapidly declined and he took to his sick bed which soon became his death bed.

Janie was deeply hurt by the actions Jody took, but she still had to live her life. She had to reaffirm the interrupted destiny of her own life, she decided to talk with him at his deathbed. She had to let him

¹ Ibid., p. 123.
² Ibid., p. 125.
know the real Janie before he passed on.

You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't half know me at all. And you could have but you was so busy worippin' de works of yo' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their minds till you didn't see uh whole heap uh things you could have.¹

Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se what's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me.²

Miss Hurston's critic, Darwin Turner terms this passage, and the previous one where Janie punctured Jody's vanity, as being aesthetically inappro- priate. He states:

Either personal insensitivity or an inability to recognize aesthetic inappropriateness caused Miss Hurston to besmirch Their Eyes Were Watching God with one of the crudest scenes which she ever wrote.³

However, because Miss Hurston wrote this novel to express a love that she had felt, perhaps these were her own feelings and she was compelled to present the truth however inappropriate it was. The suppression that Joe imposed upon Janie caused her to become an altered being. Her dreams had been almost totally dissolved by age and life style, this was her way of breaking through the shield that Jody had caused her to bury herself in. From a woman's point of view, Jody deserved the tongue lashing.

¹ Ibid., p. 132.
² Ibid., p. 133.
³ Turner, p. 108.
The life with Jody was not the revelation of Janie's childhood dreams. It was the ghost of the dreams still in her. Janie had to strive on, especially after Jody's death. The days following the funeral were days full of questions and answers, crying and lonesomeness, change and reevaluation. Janie saw her life as a "journey into the horizons in search of people," but "she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down the back road after things." She blamed Nanny for "twisting her so in the name of love."

She had found a jewel down inside herself and she wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market place to sell. Been set for still bait. When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over. Then after that some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And, the lonesomeness in the sparks make them hunt for one another, but the mud is deaf and dumb. Like all the other tumbling mudballs, Janie had tried to show her shine.¹

This was Janie's life as she saw it. Though she had been beaten to the ground, the battle was not lost. She had to continue on to her quest for more than the "parochial range of life experience."

Janie was a widow and as a result of her new state, she became quite popular in South Florida. Many suitors came to see if she was comfortable and to offer their assistance. She did not encourage any of them for she was enjoying the freedom of being unattached. Marriage was put far back in her mind. Sometimes, she even resented the way the men flocked around her, but she was always pleasant and she kept to herself.

¹ Hurston, Their Eyes... , pp. 138-139.
One day quite unexpectedly when most of the townspeople had gone to a neighboring town to a ball game, a stranger came upon Janie idly tending the store. She did not know him, but there was a strange familiarity in his face. She approved of him from the first. Vergible Woods or Tea Cake, his more familiar name, brought all sorts of joys and life to Janie.

He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom - a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God.¹

Janie was impressed by this man. He opened doors to her life that had been tightly shut for nearly twenty years. She was cautious, though, because Tea Cake was younger than she. Her caution soon turned to doubt, but Tea Cake attentively helped her abandon this thought. So it was, after a short courtship, she sold the store and left for Jacksonville to marry Tea Cake.

Janie was into her third and final marriage. She was overwhelmingly happy but this happiness frightened her. She still had some seeds of doubt because Tea Cake was a man of impulse and she was afraid that his impulsive nature would soon lead him away from her. He was gay and irresponsible, but he had a way of always winning her forgiveness and trust. "Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place."²

¹ Ibid., p. 161.
² Ibid., p. 192.
Spending only a short time in Jacksonville, they left heading South for the Everglades - 'down on the muck.' They went to live and work in a migrant farm camp. Their life together was short and happy. Janie was able to feel free to laugh with people, to express openly her love to Tea Cake. Janie was finally totally the woman of her dreams. She had come to the horizon and she had found the love that would make her feel the ecstasy of spring.

Unfortunately for Janie, her immediate happiness ended abruptly as Tea Cake died with rabies a few weeks after a terrible hurricane. Janie was forced to kill him to prevent him from slaughtering her. She was tried for murder and acquitted. She returned to Eatonville and resolved to "live by comparisons." She had answered for herself the question of "what is love?" The realization of this question constituted her birth. She was awakened by the thoughts of what the answer would mean to her. It took her a lifetime to answer it, but in answering she resolved:

"Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets and its different with every shore."{\textsuperscript{1}} She realized that her three dealings with love were different in their own right. It was the love she shared with Tea Cake that brought the springtime she dreamed of in the beginning. She knew that this was true love for her. After his death, she settled down to sort out her feelings, but her thoughts were dominated by the idea of the springtime that Tea Cake brought. Her symbolic death came with the peace of mind she felt in completing her quest. She was no longer stirred to go out and search.

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p. 284.
She had found her answers.

She pulled in her horizon like a great fish net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called her soul to come in and see. ¹

¹ Ibid., p. 286.
CHAPTER III

MOSES, MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Christian concept of Moses is a familiar one. The Christians look upon Moses as the great leader chosen by God to lead the oppressed Hebrews away from bondage. He is the man of miracles who caused several plagues to come down upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He is the man who climbed Mt. Sinai to deliver to the freed people the laws of God. He is the man who never lived in the Promised Land himself, but died on Mt. Nebo at the entrance to the rich and fertile land.

Miss Hurston prefaces Moses, Man of the Mountain with this concept coupled with another one fostered by Africans and their descendants. To them, Moses is a man with a "rod of power." He is worshipped because he had the power to go up on the mountain to get the laws of a nation, the power to talk with God and the power to command the hail, the wind, the light and the darkness.¹ Moses is a man of extraordinary power who became a living legend.

Miss Hurston fused these two ideas of Moses and presented the story of an oppressed people. She shows how their materialistic values are interwoven into their life styles. Her story is molded into an allegory with the purpose as Darwin Turner states, of "lampooning" her well loved people. Her story is of the oppressed and the oppressors - their needs, wants and desires. She flaunts human vices such as jealousy and

¹ Zora Neale Hurston, Moses, Man of the Mountain (New York, 1939), pp. 7-8.

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suspicion, as well as the virtues of kindness and sincerity. She shows how pride can be a leveler between bondage and freedom. She reveals the evils of materialism over the rewards of honesty and truth.

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Despair and agony are always components of slavery. As the story opened, the doomed Hebrews had been further suppressed by two more of Pharoah's merciless decrees. The most unbearable proclamation was the one that denied life to any Hebrew male child born.

In the town of Goshen, the oppressed tried to fashion a way out of the misery by having the women hide in rocks and caves when they were about to deliver. This concealment was not always successful for Pharoah's secret police soon became cognizant of hiding places, and they rendered Pharoah's relentless orders. Other attempts to overcome Pharoah's harsh rulings were to send delegations to Pharoah to appeal injustices. These too had failed.

Amram, a slave, and his wife Jochebed were about to have a child. Because nature was blind to Pharoah's rules, Amram and Jochebed gave birth to a son. They were able to hid him from the secret police. After 3 months of concealment and many close calls, Amram resolved to grant the baby a "merciful escape." He was prompted by fear of Pharoah and fear for his life. Amram had to take action; so together with Jochebed, he decided to place the baby on the Nile. This was a common practice for the Hebrews. Miriam was told to watch the child, but because of her fatigue, she fell asleep and loss sight of her brother. Next morning, she saw the Princess take a basket out of the water, she assumed that it was her brother. She capitalized on her assumption back
at home. Her mother burst with pride thinking that she had a son in
the palace. Amram tried to be more cautious, but he was overruled by
Jochebed, and the story spread. The pride of one woman became the pride
of a nation.

Inside the palace, pride took on a different guise. Proud was the
son of Pharaoh who was impatient for the day when he would take over the
rule. So entwined in the prestige of materialism and power, TaPhar
pityed his sister whose foreign husband's death caused her to be widowed
thus denying her a straightway to the throne and equally denying a place
for her "misfit" son. However, Moses, the son of the Princess, by law
was second in line to the throne.

TaPhar did not intend to break his neck in the chase
nor expose himself too much in battle. Just to make way
for that Moses, that little smart-aleck who was always
nosing among the papyrus rolls in the library.¹

From the beginning, the inquisitive Moses sought knowledge from
everyone in the household from servants to the high priests. He wanted
to know the how and why of everything around him. His closest friend
was Mentu, the kind stableman, who helped Moses learn the language of
animals, birds and plants. Moses sincerely expressed an interest in
knowledge and Mentu kindly obliged. One of Mentu's teachings which
afforded Moses great respect and advancement to commander-in-chief of
the army was his instruction on handling a horse in battle.

On the day of the bi-annual military maneuvers, Moses and his army
made a fantastic showing against, TaPhar's forces. TaPhar's jealously
became more vigorous. He retorted:

¹Ibid., p. 53.
You are my father's first grandson, and so he dotes on you; and you are my sister's only child and so she spoils you. Just wait until they are gone and see what I do for you. I mean to make you catch me a natural hurry, and don't you forget it.  

Moses laughed at him because his mind was far from "the palace and armies and honors and hopes of honors." Mentu had told him about a place where he could learn the secrets of men and become the greatest priest of the world. However, his new job and its responsibilities kept him from making the journey for awhile.

After the deaths of Mentu and the Princess and as a result of an arranged marriage to an Ethiopian princess, Moses had to redefine himself.

...he had found out that he was two beings. In short, he was everybody boiled down to a drop. Everybody is two beings: one lives and flourishes in the daylight and stands guard. The other being walks and howls at night.

Here again, there is an attempt by a character to redefine himself after the death of someone close. Moses decided to help others as he had been helped by Mentu and his mother. Moses realized the conditions of the Hebrews and sought to rectify their situation. Because of the power he had established over the people of court by virtue of his learnedness and his skill, he went to them with a plan to include the Hebrews in the Egyptian forces. He came upon strenuous opposition. He did not abandon his appeals for he went straight to Pharoah and asked him to lighten the Hebrew's work load and to lift the decree denying life to boy babies. He accomplished this task and became hopeful:

1 Ibid., p. 77.
2 Ibid., p. 82.
He took occasion to slip down into Goshen once or twice to see their actual conditions and to talk with some of the leaders. What he saw touched him so that he resolved in his heart to do whatever was in his power to better their condition.1

Moses reported to Pharoah, but Pharoah had closed ears, he only replied:

Egypt has no home problems that I can see, ...
What internal problems we had, got settled before you were born. Send in my nurse as you go out, and report on the Persian campaign tomorrow.2

With this comment of Pharoah's, Miss Hurston tactfully shows her readers one of the first difficulties of emancipation. The leaders have to be made aware that a problem exists. Until the leaders can realize this themselves or be shocked into a realization, all efforts toward emancipation become stagnated.

At this point in the narrative, in fact beginning with his redefinition of himself, Moses was at the developmental stage of his birth or awakening. But like John Buddy in Jonah's Gourd Vine, his actual ceremonial rebirth is a direct result of his being forced to flee. Within the palace, because Moses was constantly fighting for the rights of Hebrews, a rumor started which accused Moses of being a Hebrew himself. Suspicion was abreast. Moses became aware of this through his wife. Her substantiation was that a Hebrew woman had recently come to the palace gates and demanded audience with her brother Prince Moses. Moses was furiously angry at this knowledge. He decided to "take a walk and think things over." He thought:

1 Ibid., p. 84.
2 Ibid., p. 85.
That is the way with people. I am finding out," he was saying aloud to himself and the Infinite Expanse. 'If they do you wrong, they invent a bad name for you, a good name for their acts and then destroy you in the name of virtue."

Suspicion had taken over the minds and actions of all those who disapproved of Moses' efforts. They all stooped to rumor and gossip to destroy Moses' spirit, but it was to no avail.

Grappling with these ideas, Moses walked on and soon found himself at a Hebrew work camp. He became enraged at the treatment of the slaves and took his wrath out on a foreman whose cruelty represented to Moses all the disappointment he had found in Egypt. The foreman was whipping a slave whose exhaustion kept him from moving a rock. Moses descended upon the foreman thunderously, crushing and killing him. Recognizing the significance of his action, Moses softly replied, "I didn't mean to kill him." He and a few workers immediately buried the foreman and he bade the Hebrews not to reveal the actions of the moment.

Moses' sincere longing to stamp out the forces of evil that enslaved people was confused and distorted in the slaying. Very soon the incident backfired on Moses. Returning to the scene, Moses came upon a conflict between slaves and foreman. A change had been made, the foreman was a Hebrew. The slaves wanted to go home early to attend a Protest meeting; The foreman objected on the grounds that it would appear unfavorable if the men were able to leave when they pleased since they did have a Hebrew foreman. Moses agreed with the foreman. Moses' agreement and further comments led one slave to make a comment in full agreement with the

1 Ibid., p. 89.
other slaves that hurt Moses deeply. One slave replied:

Oh yeah! We're mighty proud to hear all of them sentiments out of you. Cause some of us was scared you was trying to get to be our boss. And since we ain't heard tell of nobody putting you over us, so far as I'm concerned, I'd rather have a enemy overseer that just beat me and sent me on home with a sore back than one of them friends that might kill me and bury me in the sand.¹

Frightened and distraught, Moses thought:

So! The will to humble a man more powerful than themselves was stronger than the emotion of gratitude. It was stronger than the wish for the common brotherhood of man.²

Not only was suspicion destroying Moses' efforts within the palace, but he was being defeated by the people whom he was trying to help.

Moses returned home only to hear from his steward that Pharoah was angry with him and that a rumor had spread that Moses had killed several overseers. Feeling overpowered by the vindictiveness of these people, Moses decided to flee. He left that evening.

Moses experienced a refreshed feeling as he left the city and he resolved to "live and talk with Nature and know her secrets." Three days later he found himself at the Red Sea. Because he was dressed in princely regalia, the shore dwellers gathered around him. He requested a boat to get across. While most of the men were scheming to overcharge Moses, a kind gentleman offered to reveal to Moses a secret about getting across without a boat. He said:

Look, you walk down the beach about two miles north

¹ Ibid., p. 95.
² Ibid., p. 95.
and you come to a narrow neck of water, where the Red Sea joins the outer sea. It ain't never very deep there at no time, and at certain times at low tide, the strait is just about dry. If a man started at the hour when the tide is lowest, before it rushes back he could be on the other side - if the man was right pert in his walking. A sort of light trot would put you across there in no time.¹

Moses hurried on down the river. He removed his shoes and his shenti and began to wade across.

   All the time the water was shrinking away before him. So Moses felt himself moving Godward with an understanding of force and time. So he walked out with clean feet on the other side.²

This was the ritual of Moses' awakening. He had left behind all the riches and prestige of his position. His sword and clothes only remained with him and in this new land they were no longer symbols of high birth. Just as Jesus washed his disciple's feet to open new doors for them, the Red Sea washed away the old Moses and presented a new Moses totally open to the wonders of nature. He resolved to leave the affairs of others alone and live his life with nature.

On the other side of the sea, in the land of the Midianites, Moses thought of his recent journey and the events that led him where he was, He verbalized his thoughts:

   You have to go to life to know life. God! It costs you something to do good! You learn that by experience, too. If you want that good feeling that comes from doing things for other folks then you have

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¹ Ibid., p. 103.

² Ibid., p. 103.
Moses began his travels. He first roamed with a caravan of nomads, but only for a short while because early one afternoon, he saw his first mountain. He described his feelings upon seeing Mt. Sinai:

"It made him feel as if he had been lacking in something vital to life all along... It was near; it was far. It called. It forbade. It was all things to his inner consciousness... It had an aura of clouds upon its brow. This sublime earth form was the living place of a god, certainly. It had peace and fury in its face."

This image of the mountain was for Moses the unreachable horizon, but he was compelled to learn the workings of this magnificent artifact of God. Moses climbed the mountain and settled by a spring of water. He began to meditate.

His meditation was halted when he saw two young ladies in distress. He forgot his resolution to mind his own business and found himself helping the young ladies. They were very grateful to Moses and they asked him to follow them home. He was graciously received by Jethro, their father and immediately befriended.

Moses stayed on and became Jethro's sheep herder. Jethro recognized Moses as a man with a quest - to learn the secrets of the mountain. He saw this quest as the same one he possessed in his young days, but because of uncontrollable forces, he was unable to complete it. He wanted to see his quest completed through Moses. Moses became Jethro's student. Through Jethro's guidance and Moses own ingenuity, he became

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1 [Ibid., p. 105.]
2 [Ibid., p. 111.]
a master of nature. While all of his studies were taking place, he also became interested in Zepporah, Jethro's daughter. They were married. Still Moses was sincerely interested in knowledge. He began to make vigils to the mountain. He practically lived on the mountain, in the desert, beside streams, feeding his mind on nature. After many months of this practice, Jethro commented to his wife.

Moses done found out something we others don't know about. Looks like he done found them secret words that's the keys to God that we all been looking for. I figure he's about ready to go to work.  

Moses had the knowledge of the Red Sea, the power to produce insects and the knowledge of the heavens. His final preparation was to talk with the great I AM to receive the orders of his mission. The great I AM told him to go down into Egypt and free the people.

Moses proceeded as the Biblical story followed, to descend upon Egypt with the plagues and soon the Hebrews were free. They rejoiced:

Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty I'm free at last! No more toting sand and mixing mortar! No more taking rocks and building things for Pharoah! No more whipping and bloody backs! No more slaving from can't see in the morning to can't see at night! Free! Free! So free till I'm foolish!  

They were numb:

They just sat with centuries in their eyes and cried. A few could express themselves like that. But the majority just sat in the doors of their dwellings staring out at life.  

1  Ibid., p. 151.

2  Ibid., p. 223.

3  Ibid.
As the freed Hebrews traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, Miss Hurston showed how the vices of jealousy, ambition, greed and prestige destroy the beauty of freedom. Many parallels have been made between the Hebrew slaves of Egypt and Black slaves of America. With the exodus, Miss Hurston "lampooned contemporary Afro-Americans."¹ Since she chose the medium of satire and a story detached from contemporary life, she remained free from harmful disapproval by her people. Instead of the Hebrews working together for the common good, they mumbled and grumbled and outwardly displayed discontent with everything. Darwin Turner saw them as:

...The Eatonville gossips "way down in Egypt land."
Bickering continually about food, water, habitat and every irritation.²

For over forty years, Moses struggled with a discontented people. He endured the bitter ambition of some and the frustrations of others. He reunited with Zipporah and Jethro along the way and found a momentary happiness and contentment. He took the young Joshua as his son and guided him as Mentu and Jethro had him. He delivered the second generation of Hebrews to the land on the other side of Mt. Nebo. At the sunset of his life, he felt relieved that he had finally delivered God's people to their chosen land. He saw that his great works were carried on through Joshua. Moses then returned to his most loved past time - communing with Nature.

He took his rod in his right hand and lifted it and

Nebo trembled. The moon in its reddest mood became to him a standing place for his feet and the sky ran down so close to gaze on Moses that the seven great suns of the Universe sent wheeling around his head. He stood in the bosom of thunder and the zig-zag lightning above him joined the muttering thunder. Fire and flame played all over the peak where the people could see. The voice of the thunder leaped from peak to plain and Moses stood in the midst of it and said "Farewell."

Physically, Moses had left earth, but his vital functions were not ended. Moses had made such an impression on the people during his life that his memory stayed in their minds. For centuries, people talked of Moses and until today, they are still fostering his legacy. Moses returned to the elements, but his legend still remained in the minds of the people. Just as Moses was awakened as he sought deliverance from the distorted values of mankind, his death was sustained by those same people and their countless generations.

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1 Hurston, Moses., p. 351.
CHAPTER IV

SERAPH ON THE SUWANEE

In contrast to Miss Hurston's first three novels, which are generally concerned with the folklore and dialect of Black people, Seraph on the Suwanee (1948), the last published novel of Miss Hurston is written about white people. Similar to the setting of the first two novels, her last novel takes place in her beloved Florida. Miss Hurston writes about white rural Florida during the first decades of the twentieth century. By turning away from Black culture, Miss Hurston makes an attempt to broaden the scope of her writing.

During the nine years that elapsed between Moses, Man of the Mountain and Seraph on the Suwanee, Black literature took on a different air. With the coming of integration, Black writing becomes more cosmopolitan. Hugh Gloster in Negro Voices In American Fiction discusses the decline of propagandist literature during the 30's. He states:

...during the 30's there appeared a literature that was chiefly realistic, historical, sociological, or proletarian, self-preening and propagandist racialism became less prevalent, as writers increasingly took cognizance of basic human and social values. As a result, more than ever before Negro fiction became integrated with the main stream of American literature.¹

Subsequently in the nineteen forty's the Black writer dissolved the boundaries of their previous writings. Zora Neale Hurston was among three Black women who demonstrated craft in depicting frustration and

¹ Hugh M. Gloster, Negro Voices In American Fiction (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 251.
alienation in America. In an effort to welcome integration, Miss Hurston chose to present white characters.

Robert Bone proclaims that writers of the forty's were caught in the web of nationalism and assimilationism. Seraph on the Suwanee is considered an assimilationist novel. He scolds Miss Hurston for abandoning Black culture and writes:

In her latest novel, Seraph on the Suwanee, Zora Neale Hurston abandons Negro folk culture, but not the rural South. Yet in this clinical study of a neurotic, poor white woman Miss Hurston writes far less forcibly of Janie and Tea Cake.¹

The suggestion that Seraph on the Suwanee is less interesting than her first two novels is not wholly true, as Darwin Turner sees it.

If the differences in race are ignored, Seraph is distinguished from the earlier novels chiefly by Miss Hurston's emphasis upon the protagonist's psychological dilemma, more specific and more realistic descriptions of locale, more lurid details in the accounts of sexual relationships, and the omission of farcical incidents and of folktales. Each of the first three heightens the dramatic or at least the melodramatic quality of the story; therefore, the absence of the exotic charm of the humor, the language and the folklore seems the only possible basis for a complaint that the novel is less interesting than earlier ones.²

In this novel, as well as the others, the reader finds influences of Miss Hurston's childhood and her keen knowledge of the characters and the province.

The main character is Arvay Henson, a white woman born in a turpentine camp in Sawley, Florida. She marries Jim Meserve, a newcomer to

town. Jim is from an affluent background, but due to the spoils of the war, he is forced to make a living by his instincts. When they are financially able, Jim and Arvay leave Sawley and settle in Citrabelle, an orange growing town in central Florida. Jim prospers very well and provides Arvay with a most comfortable life.

* * * *

Superficially, the story seems to be fairytale-like. However, the basic conflict in the story is Arvay's failure to define her role in Jim's life. Because she is unable to do this for years, she lives a tormented life full of fear and resentment. Unlike Miss Hurston's previous characters who followed the pattern of birth and death, Arvay reverses the pattern. She does not experience her awakening until the end of the narrative, thus, realizing that her entire existence through the years was one of non-life, of unfulfillment. She was sustained only because she knew deep within her that she needed Jim.

Arvay was a "delicately-made girl."

She had breasts to her bosom, but elsewhere Arvay was lean made in everyway. No heavy hipped girl below that extremely small waist, and her legs were long and slim. She had plenty of long light yellow hair .. with Gulf blue eyes.¹

To understand Arvay is to realize her basic insecurity. Arvay was caught in an entanglement of sibling rivalry much like that expressed by Miss Hurston in her own childhood. Arvay's older sister Larraine was robust and outgoing. She was favored more by her parents, as well as the townspeople, and she was beautiful. Arvay expressed her instability in this

There had been no way of knowing that Arvay was timid from feeling unsafe inside . . . They did not suspect that the general preference for Larraine, Arvay's more robust and aggressive sister, had done something to Arvay's soul across the years.1

Arvay had been further hurt by her sister after Larraine's marriage to Reverend Carl Middleton. Arvay had secretly admired Carl and felt a grave injustice when "Raine had stolen him from her. In an effort to cover her hurt, she had to make some type of declarative break.

Believing in her heart that she was secretly loved by Carl, it gradually came to Arvay that the next move was up to her. The best plan would be to get herself sent far off to some foreign land. Someday, and without doubt pretty soon, Carl would follow her there.2

At the annual revival, Arvay turned from the world and dedicated herself to the church and to missionary work. For a girl so young to give her life up this way was extraordinary. She was well sought after by the men of Sawley. "So there was a feeling of shock and loss when Arvay gave up the world."3 In spite of the loss to men, the congregation burst into "Amens" when she concluded her tearful speech. Reverend Middleton also offered his words of encouragement and sacrificed himself to the mission, but the congregation felt he could not be spared.

Two years after Arvay's religious proclamation and shortly after Larraine's second child was born, Arvay slowly began to realize that

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1 Ibid., p. 8.
2 Ibid., p. 10.
3 Ibid., p. 4.
Carl was never going to rendezvous with her in some foreign land. She began having hysterical seizures, classified in the local language as "having fits."

Sometimes they came upon her in church right after the sermon, but more often she was took down right after she got home from the service, and usually when some extra brash young gallant had forced himself upon her to the extent of seeing her home.1

Three years later Jim Meserve came to town. Jim was handsome with an aggressive look. "He was like a hamstring. He was not meat any longer, but he smelled of what he had once been associated with."2 Jim naturally had the "gift of gab" and the "nerve of a brass monkey." He was taken with Arvay. He shunned the notion that Arvay was through with the world, so he challenged her. Jim was the man to change the course of Arvay's life. He had the mental ability, the tenderness and the fortitude to conquer Arvay and the world.

Despite Jim's apparent interest in her, Arvay displayed adverse emotions. She felt that Jim only pursued her to make fun of her. She had built a brick wall of insecurity around her. Jim recognized that Arvay had a problem from the beginning and he knew that she needed help. Arvay still protested, but Jim slowly weakened her defenses. With Jim, though, Arvay was inhibited for a second reason. She was unsure of herself because of her background.

Brock Henson (her father) had never made as much as a hundred dollars in any minth in his life. The family

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1 Ibid., p. 6.
2 Ibid., p. 7.
lived in a clapboard house more than two miles east of the heart of Sawley . . . The house had been a dark ugly red when Brock Henson had moved in . . . Now it was a splotchy gray-brown. Only one room in the house, the parlor, was ceilinged overhead. In the two bedrooms and the kitchen, the rafters were bare and skinny.

Water for the household came from a well out back, and the privy house leaned a little to one side less than fifty feet from the kitchen door. A fig tree, two pear trees which bore pears that were only good for preserving were scattered far apart in the field back of the house. There was a huge mulberry tree that redeemed the very back of the unkempt garden space.¹

Arvay was a "poor cracker" in every sense of the word. Because she lived in the shadow of her older sister and she felt inferior because of her background, she could never believe that she could ever have anything or anyone. But after she noted Carl's curious way of looking at her and Jim when they were together, and Larraine's outward show of disapproval, she experienced a great deal of satisfaction. She thought that at least this was one time that she had someone to call her own even if she did not believe it herself.

Out of this feeling came a tremulous desire to take refuge in this man. To be forever warm and included in the atmosphere that he stirred up around him.²

Very soon Jim asked her to marry him, but Arvay could not believe that one simple "yes" could change everything she had been accustomed to. She still felt that the whole thing was "another hurting joke." Jim proved to her that he was not joking. He refused to be turned around when Arvay went into a spasm, in fact, he cured her of it. Further, he

¹ Ibid., p. 8.
² Ibid., p. 22.
assured her parents that he could handle her every mood. Arvay thought:

Here was the most wonderful man in all the world pumping her all up and she had been living in mental adultery with her sister's husband for all of those wasted years. She was not fitten for a man like Jim. He was worth more than she was able to give him.¹

Jim asked for Arvay's hand and the wedding date was set. They dated very frequently, but Jim noted a draw back in Arvay's emotions. He knew that Arvay needed his help and protection. Jim consulted his Black friend, Joe Kelsey, for advice. Joe replied:

Most women folks will love you plenty if you take and see to it that they do. Make 'em knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in they mouth and ride 'em hard and stop 'em short. They's all alike, Boss. Take 'em and break 'em.²

Jim followed Joe's advice on his very next date with Arvay. They went out in back of the house under the mulberry tree and began talking of Arvay's childhood and a playhouse that Brock had built for her. Arvay was talking and Jim was lustfully staring at her. In a passionate fervor, more commonly called rape, Jim stained the unstained Arvay. "Arvay knew a pain remorseless sweet."³ She had mixed emotions. Her mind became engulfed with all her old thoughts. She felt foolish. She was overcome with Jim's love. She turned to Jim with an unknown power feeling that "she must eat him up and absorb him within herself."⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 32.
² Ibid., p. 41.
³ Ibid., p. 45.
⁴ Ibid., p. 48.
When the two were composed, she excused herself to straighten her clothes. Finding that the button had been torn off her panties, she had to think of a way to sneak them into the house unnoticed. She resolved to leave them hanging on a dead branch of the tree until time came when she could sneak it in. This action symbolized the fact that she was leaving her old thoughts hanging on that tree limb until she could have a chance to rationalize the actions of the moment. Her old thoughts were "left behind, but not forgotten, to be picked up another time perhaps."¹

Back together with Jim, the two made haste at Jim's request. Jim was heading for the justice of the peace. Arvay was unaware because on the way she was grappling with the fear that maybe the whole thing was a joke and that he was going to leave her. Because of this fact, she is as shocked as her parents are when they elope.

Because of her family background and her basic insecurity, she is not ready to carry on a meaningful relationship with Jim. Instead of building a marriage with and including Jim, she builds a fortress of resentment and strikes out against him and anyone who comes into their lives.

She resented the relationship between Jim and Joe. She realized that there was a bond between them, but she could not pinpoint it, so she attempted to rationalize their friendship by saying:

Every Southern whiteman has his pet Negro. His Negro is always, fine, honest, faithful to him unto death and most remarkable. Indeed, no other Negro on earth is fitten to hold him a light and few white

¹Ibid.
people. He never lies and in fact can do no wrong. What she did not know was that Joe and Jim operated a moonshining still. They were in business together. Consequently, they were friendly towards one another because of their partnership.

Her old thoughts returned as she felt that her marriage was threatened by her sister. The constant visits of Lorraine and Carl helped to occupy Arvay's mind with piercing memories. She was afraid that Lorraine may have sensed the feelings Arvay harbored for Carl and that she would spite her by either telling Jim or attempting to woo him. These thoughts kept Arvay in mental turmoil. Her one hope was for her and Jim to move away.

This solution was spoiled with the announcement of her first pregnancy. Throughout the pregnancy, Arvay's mind was preoccupied with fear of Lorraine. She retreated inside of herself with her fears and waited. Her relationship with Jim became one of moods and quarrels resulting in the infliction of permanent scars on both of them. Jim saw Arvay as a "trifle dumb," while Arvay saw him as being an "awful sinner."

To climax these inward feelings and the rifts between Arvay and Jim, their first son, Earl, was born retarded. Arvay felt that the whole thing was the awful retribution she had feared. She reflected:

This must be the punishment for the way I used to be. I thought that I had done paid off, but I reckon not. I never thought it would come like this, but it must be the chastisement I been looking for.

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1 Ibid., p. 54.
2 Ibid., p. 62.
Another fear arose within her. She thought that Jim would blame Earl's condition on her side of the family. Jim silently resented the boy.

Both Jim and Arvay felt that their delayed move should be put into action at this point in their lives. They left Sawley and traveled to Citrabelle. Jim had to learn a new job, but because of his alertness and ingenuity, he soon began to prosper. They had a nice comfortable home and plenty of food to eat. Still, Jim and Arvay did not share the kind of relationship that they could have. Arvay deliberately sheltered the retarded child. Jim took his frustrations into bars at night. Naturally Arvay resented this so she doubled her efforts to be attentive to "her" son.

The time came when they were to have another child. Both Arvay and Jim tried to be optimistic, so Jim intervened to buy property to build a house on. He closed the deal and afterwards took Arvay to see the property. Arvay was pleased with everything but the swamp near the property. She feared for Earl, but Jim assured her that she would get used to it and that Earl was too afraid to go near it. The land was cleared; the house was built and furnished, and Jim and Arvay were blessed with a normal girl child.

Instead of little Angeline helping to mend their split, she caused a further split. Angeline was Jim's little girl. Arvay resented their relationship but most of all she resented Jim's apparent favoritism.

She thought:

Already she could see the pattern opening out. Her own childhood all over again with Angeline favored like Raine always had been, and she made ready to resist. The lines were drawn, and she had become a partisan.\(^1\)

\(^{1}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 77.}\)
Another situation came between them that Arvay could not rationalize. Perhaps because Jim was hurt over the partisan system in his family and the quarrels it brought, he took more to drinking and fighting. Arvays' fear for Jim's life made her suggest to him to send for Joe and his family to live in the shack at the edge of their property. Although she did not thoroughly understand the bond between Joe and Jim, she did know that Joe had a power over Jim. Jim displayed pleasure at Arvay's suggestion as he replied, "he's the very man I need." Jim had been experiencing some difficulties in his business. He knew that this extra business with Joe would solve all his financial problems.

Arvay was very pleased at the way Jim had taken her suggestion. She felt that she could look forward and see her happiness ahead. It was as if she had been waiting in the dark and come to a house where a light leaned out of the window and smiled.1

Arvay was as glad as Jim at the arrival of the Kelsey's, but the happiness she expected was not there. Jim was more and more involved in his business affairs and the profits it would bring. Unknowingly, Arvay chose an inopportune time to tell Jim they were expecting their third child. In a playful, but seemingly serious statement, at least it was serious to Arvay, Jim said, "You can have that baby providing you swear and promise me to bring it here a boy. Arvay sank in fear:

Arvay fled back to her old time religion. Arvay could feel no faith in her own power over Jim, so she began again to take great stock in miracles.2 Arvay crept into the Bible and pulled down the lid.

All day long during the hours that Jim was absent, Arvay went around muttering prayers for deliverance from her fancied danger.

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1Ibid., p. 79.

2Ibid., pp. 87-88.
It took her seven months to find out that Jim's remark was merely a joke. She felt foolish. Jim questioned her common sense. He became disgusted with her. He thought of leaving her but decided against it for he knew she was on the way to finding herself and he needed to be there to guide her. They mended their differences and in a few weeks, Kenny was born.

The Meserves progressed well for the next few years. However, just as Arvay had built a wall around herself and felt persecuted in her childhood, she built a wall around her husband and children. If there was any trouble she blamed other people. She began by attacking Joe and his children. Her curtness and hostility caused Joe to take his family and move to "Colored town." Arvay felt no remorse at first, but later she found that the silence left a vacancy in her days. Jim began to take long fishing trips. Upon returning from an extended trip, Jim announced that he had another family to live in the shack. They were a Portuguese family named Corregio. Arvay did not like them because they were foreigners. And later because Jim enjoyed Mrs. Corregio's seafood dinners, she accused her of trying to entice Jim.

Earl's condition begins to decline rapidly. He took to screaming and howling like a mad dog. Arvay blamed his state on the Corregio's. Jim offered the workable solution - to put Earl away. Jim mistakenly said that Earl's condition must be inherited from Arvay's side of the family. Jim verbalized the fear that Arvay has internalized for years. She lashed out against him.

"That's right, throw it up in my face!" I know that you been had it in you to say all the time. I been looking for you to puke it up long time ago. What you stay with me for, I don't know, because I know so well that you don't think I got no sense, and my folks don't amount
to a hill of bean in your sight. You come from some big high
muck-de-mucks, and we ain't nothing but piney-woods
Crackers and poor white trash. Even niggers is better
than we is, according to your kind. Joe Kelsey's word
stands higher than mine any old day. You can say it
don't but actions speak louder than words. You give him
more credit for sense than you do me. All I'm good for
is to lay up in the bed with you and satisfy your feel-
ings and do around here for you. Naw, I'll never give
my consent for Earl to be put away. Never so long as my
head is warm. Earl is always wrong because he's like my
folks. 'Tain't never nothing wrong with Angeline and
Kenny because they take after your side. But I'm here
to tell you that I'll wade in blood to my knees for him.
He's not going to be put away.1

Jim made futile attempts to remind her that love was the compelling
force in their marriage as far as he was concerned.

To escape the reality of Earl's condition and Jim's solution, Arvay
decided to take Earl and visit her mother. Arvay is rudely awakened to
the destitute circumstances back in Sawley. Her father had died and her
mother was extremely poor. Larraine and Carl along with their five chil-
dren had declined to an unrecognizable state. Realizing that Jim had
rescued her from that kind of life, she understood that she must continue
to have his protection.2 She writes Jim a letter asking his consent on
leaving Earl with her mother. Jim consented, but was careful to leave
the ultimate decision up to Arvay.

Back at home, she turned her family and Jim away from her when they
do not feel a loss at Earl's absence. She brought him back home.

Earl's derangement reached finality when he brutally attacked Lucy
Ann Corregio in the grove. A posse from town gathered and in a scene

1 Ibid., pp. 11-112.

2 Turner, p. 113.
reminiscent of a lynching, Earl is shot and killed. It was a mercy killing because Earl would have killed Jim if a shot had not caught him first. Arvay resisted the reality at first, but she relinquished and went into mourning. Jim made efforts to revive her and he succeeded to a degree.

In the years that followed, Arvay questioned her life frequently. However, her insecurity caused her to wage another battle against those around her. She accused Jim of seeking to steal the children's love when he helped Kenny enter college and helped Angeline defy her mother's objections to marriage.\(^1\) Arvay objected to Angeline marrying because she did not want her to "fall slave to nobody . . so that she be so under the influence that she can't help herself."\(^2\) Arvay made this remark to Jim based on the thoughts she had of her twenty years of marriage. She tried to define love. She thought:

> Love to her meant to possess as she was possessed. To be wrapped around held in an embrace so warm and so tight that the Booger Man, the raw-head-and-bloody-bones of lonesomeness, could never come nigh her. An eternal refuge and everlasting welcome of heart to rest and rely on.\(^3\)

Jim had told her this same thing time and time again, but she just could not come to realize it for herself.

Jim retreated to the coast to operate a shrimping business that Mr.

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Corregio helped him establish, while Arvay in her daily loneliness became more and more convinced that he was going to leave for good. Jim did leave her when he was convinced that he could not depend on her help when he needed it. Darwin Turner suggests that this is one of Miss Hurston's weak points in the novel. The situation was this:

Jim playfully seizes a poisonous snake which he holds in such a way that he cannot be bitten. But as Arvay watches in horror, Jim loses control. Although she knows that he needs her help, Arvay cannot move. After a Black man has helped Jim destroy the snake, Jim reproves Arvay for failing to understand his love.

All action and all thought in the incident are probable, but Miss Hurston failed to appraise their interrelationships. What Jim wants Arvay to realize is that, like a small boy, he grabbed the snake to impress her with his daring and, thereby, to elicit her admiration. In addition, Miss Hurston wished to suggest that, by failing to act, Arvay demonstrated to Jim that he cannot depend upon her when he needs help.1

That night, Jim reviewed his devotion to her and made his declaration to leave. He assured her that he would take her back as soon as she understood his love.

Arvay sunk into a almost catatonic state, from which she was roused only by the necessity of visiting her dying mother. Shocked into reality by a second exposure to the squalor of her family's habitat, Arvay began to understand that Jim removed her from those conditions because he loved her. Finally comprehending that his love had caused him to work for her and to face dangers recklessly in order to win her admiration, she returned to him confident that she had found her desire.2

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1 Ibid., p. 115.

2 Turner, p. 113.
She returned to Citrabelle only to get Jeff Kelsey, Joe's son, to drive her to the coast - to her Jim. She had finally realized that Jim was hers through and through that he was an "eternal refuge and everlasting welcome of heart to rest and rely upon." Arvay had finally come to her awakening, but she had to go through the ritual. Jim took her on board the "Kenny M," and they talked. Jim was attentive, but he let her do most of the talking. In fact, he let Arvay dictate the actions of their meeting. Arvay was tortured some for "she did not know it she was merely a guest on board and still parted from her husband or whether she was part of the thing." Jim offered to show Arvay the fleet but he did not proceed until he was thoroughly convinced that she wanted to see him in action. Jim got her a pair of jeans and began showing her around. After seeing the fleet, they came upon Captain Dutch Smith of the "Savannah." He had lost a man on his last trip and was very sad. Jim tried to comfort him by saying, "he'll beach up pretty soon." He continued:

That is, unless he met up with a shark. They all come to the beach sooner or later. We all do, I mean. Every man comes to the beach at last. Even if it's a shark, that's your beach, ain't it?

Jim's statement referred directly to his situation. He had lost a wife and she had come to the beach. He was not yet sure that she had met a shark or that she had finally found herself, all he knew was that she

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had finally found herself, all he knew was that she had beached up.

Jim became finally assured as he made another boyish attempt to elicit her admiration. Five o'clock the next morning he warmed up his engine to go out to sea. He wanted to cross the bar on the first tide. This maneuver is known to be quite treacherous in most shrimping circles. He steered out from shore rugged in his stance with an adventurous gleam in his eyes. When they came upon the violent waters, Jim told Arvay to go down to her berth. She did, but she constantly kept watching her husband's fearlessness. The first mate was overwhelmingly frightened and he grabbed Jim's leg in an effort to stop him from going any further. This sudden move upset the hold Jim had on the steering wheel and Jim himself began to fear for the lives of the people on board. Arvay saw what was going on and acted instinctively: "She flung the door open, leaped upon the Mate and grabbed him by his hair to pull him away from Jim's leg.\(^1\) Jim did not acknowledge the fact at that point, but he realized that Arvay had "come to the beach." She had gone through the ritual of her awakening. After twenty or more years of marriage, Arvay had finally realized that Jim was hers and her job was mothering. After all, the answer that she sought was right before her in Jim's last name - me serve.

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 him the hovering that he needed.\(^2\)


SUMMARY

The themes of life and death serve as archetypes for the novels. They are the molds around which the circumstances of the lives of the protagonists are built.

The births are a conversive beginning which lead the protagonists into a new mode of living. The protagonist in the first novel is forced into a beginning and is protected by God until he falls victim to an evil which he cannot control. The protagonists in the next two novels are challenged by a driving force and as they function in their new lives, they are compelled to learn much about living. Their conversion becomes a didactic experience. The protagonist in the last novel, at her awakening, has learned her lesson about life and love, so she sits back and reaps the benefits of her struggles.

The deaths of the protagonists come when they spiritually can no longer live, when they have completed a quest or it comes as a result of a fruitless life. In the first novel, because of the protagonist's abuse of the meaningful person in his life, he dies. In the second and third novels, death comes after the protagonists.

Miss Hurston reflects many of her childhood experiences in her stories. Her well loved Eatonville dominates the setting of the first two novels. The first novel is the story of her parents. In it, she also shows the influence of the family Bible on her plot. The second novel is an expression of a love she had felt, consequently, she fully develops the protagonist's inner feelings. The third novel, while it is a story of a biblical character, it is also an attack on the people of
her beloved Eatonville. In the last novel, Miss Hurston brings forth the experience of sibling rivalry that she felt against her older sister. Moreover, the birth-death theme in the novels parallel the actual events in the life of Miss Hurston. She experiences an awakening with the occurrence of the visions at the age of seven. She looks at life in a different perspective. As a result of the morals charge against her, her life as she had previously lived it is over. She sinks into a death-like state enlivened only by a will to exist until she is physically dead.

No writer has a way of knowing how his life is to end, but it is ironic that Miss Hurston's life compared exactly to the lives of her protagonists. Therefore, the themes of birth and death are significant as they provide the structure for the novels.
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