

Divine lessons from the novel, their eyes were watching god

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Jesus preaches that Man does not live by bread alone. From Maslows five tiered hierarchy of needs to the Freudian notion of unconscious motivation, man is naturally driven by many varying desires. Physiological needs are only the most basic, and represent only one step on the pyramid. Security, love, ego and finally self-actualization are all other significant human motivations. External influences also add another factor in determining mans motivation. Zora Neale Hurston wrote of the strong protagonist Janie Crawford and her quest for self-actualization and fulfillment. Mordecai Richler wrote of an incorrigibly ambitious, conniving, and sly protagonist Duddy Kravitz and his dreams of wealth and recognition. These two characters, although very different in their motives, are held back to different degrees by external influences that warp their wants and in the process impede their happiness. Bowing to external pressures and using others expectations to fuel ones motivation often come at an inordinately high cost. Generational differences encumber the success and satisfaction of the protagonists by altering their motivations and dreams in Zora Neale Hurstons novel of self discovery *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Mordecai Richlers account of growing up in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.

Janie leaves her grandmother and now that she is alone, she starts to appreciate and recognize her own feelings. Janie comes to the realization that she has deep resentment harboured within her towards Nanny. Once alone in the real world she is able to realize and detest the values that her grandmother had ingrained within her since childhood. Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up

because he have to, but he dont tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks.

(Hurston: 14) Nanny had didactically taught her granddaughter to seek prizes of a superficial nature; wealth, security, and status. This concern for only basic and superficial necessities occupied the scope of Nannys belief. Nannys slave mentality and dreams were imposed on her granddaughter; however, Janie was not emancipated or liberated by the dreams and wants of an older generation. The young woman never had experienced the terrors of slavery and her childhood and adolescence were in sharp contrast to the one that her grandmother had known. This imposition of foreign and antiquated beliefs prevents Janie from chasing her own dream and realizing her own success.

In marrying Logan, a relatively wealthy middle-aged black man, Janie submits to the dreams and advice of her grandmother. Taint Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, its protection. (Hurston: 15) This marriage was destined to fail as the relationship was not built on a foundation of love or trust, but rather it was nothing but a function of necessity and practicality. Janie while pursuing her grandmothers dreams is never able to blossom and achieve the balance and sexual fulfillment that the pear tree of her youth had offered. The pear tree was a manifestation of the symbiotic vision of love that Janie had; however, her grandmother saw this love as a vice and an obstacle. Dats de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! (Hurston: 23) Janie sees men and women as fundamentally different, and out of this difference is born her quest. An ideal love for Janie is found when a man could give her things that she does not have, and when she could

reciprocate and offer men things that they do not possess. This idea of a mutual codependence is one of Janie's dreams. However, thoughts and wants such as these are diametrically opposed to those of Nanny. When Janie leaves Logan for Jody, she successfully breaks away from the grip of her grandmother's slave mentality, dreams and ambitions. Janie overcomes her difficulty; however, up until this point her potential for fulfillment and happiness are encumbered by the influence and dreams of Nanny. This is such because Janie is not allowed to live her own life and make her own decisions, but rather she is trapped in the dreams of her grandmother. Only when Janie discards her grandmother's legacy of conventional wisdom can she appreciate her envisioned ideal relationship similar to that of the buzzing bees and the pear tree forever present in her heart and mind.

The story of Duddy Kravitz presents a very similar situation of generational conflict. The values instilled within Duddy since childhood by his grandfather produce a dream that is not his own. Duddy is constantly striving, searching, and starving for an end that will not elicit feelings of fulfillment, but rather set up disappointment and anguish. A man without a land is no one. This phrase becomes a mantra for the young boy. While the realization of his dreams alleviates his indigence, it causes nothing but pain and comes at the price of respect and friendship. In the end Duddy has acres of land surrounding a large Laurentien lake; however, he has no-one to share this land with. Despite the fact that Duddy has land he remains a loser. The quest to acquire the land surrounding a beautiful lake north of Montreal forced the young protagonist to scheme and act at times immorally in order to succeed.

Duddys most contemptible act was forging Virgils signature on a check to buy the last parcel of his coveted land.

Duddy took a quick look at Virgils bank balance, whistled, noted his account number and ripped out two cheques. He forged the signature by holding the cheque and a letter Virgil had signed up to the window and tracing slowly.
(Richler: 296)

This despicable act is the climax of Duddys descent into total dissolution. Duddy has isolated himself and now faces his relegation from all those that he previously had loved and who had loved him back. Although this young protagonist is utterly loathsome, he somehow educes a certain sense of pity and tragedy. The tragic element is that Duddy is steered awry by pursuing his grandfathers life long dream at all cost. Following the advice of his grandfather as gospel proved to be Duddys undoing and constituted his demise. The lesson learnt is that dreams rarely stand the test of time. Dreams and goals are not to be left for posterity as part of ones estate; rather, dreams, ambitions, desires, goals, these are all inwardly derived.

The Dave Mathews Band wrote about the fruitlessness of pursuing someone elses dreams in their song The Dreams of our Fathers. The song illustrates the dismal effects that following a parent's, a grandparent's or a family member's dream can have on someone.

Oh, Im choking, Im choking

On the smoke from this burning house

I claw and I scrape

But I cant seem to get out

But who then, who is this

Thats scratching from the ground

Oh, its my world, too

But whose gold is this Im digging out?

Living the dreams of our fathers impedes the chances of reaching feelings of fulfillment and actualization. Where and what are you fighting for, whose gold are you digging for, what are you trying to accomplish; these are all questions that arise when following someone elses ambitions and dreams. I dont want to wake up/ Lost in the Dreams of our Fathers/ Oh, its such a waste child/ To live and die for the Dreams of our Fathers. One can easily squander his existence relentlessly pursuing another persons goals. Blindly following in someone elses footsteps often offers the realization that happiness escapes those who remain blind to their own internal desires.

Ignoring ones individual dreams and in place pursuing the dreams of an older generation with little inhibition results in a meaningless existence where happiness is checked by the nearly impermeable barrier of a dream that is not ones own. What path to pursue in life is a difficult decision that must be made in accordance with many set parameters. A goal must not be entirely the pursuit ones inward desire for that poses the risk of becoming a

slave to ones own self imposed needs. As Rousseau teaches in the Social Contract a man who acts solely in his own self-interest is a slave; for he is a slave to his own uninhibited desires. However, as witnessed by Janie Crawford and Duddy Kravitz, the experience of attempting to live and succeed in the dreams of ones fathers is futilely unfulfilling and meaningless. One must strive for balance between oneself and others. Both the aforementioned novels and song show that one must be more than anything an individual with distinct goals, ambitions, and dreams. It is unfortunate indeed to follow the march of folly and end up tangled or trapped trying to live another mans dream.