

Nature's role in their eyes were watching god

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



“ It [the tiny bloom] had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously” (13). Zora Neale Hurston, an African-American author, is known for her expressive and imaginative language. Her use of imagery, particularly of nature, is used to stimulate the audience's imagination while communicating deep significance in a novel. The imagery of nature in one of her most famous works, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, creates a unique parallel between the two sides of nature: its beauty and its devastation. Protagonist Janie Crawford's ideal of contentment is shown in Hurston's imagery of a pear tree, which represents nature's beauty. The pear tree represents Janie's idealized views of nature, as it demonstrates her naïve and romantic character which constantly seeks true love, and her idealism of the harmony in a marriage based upon love as she travels a path of self-discovery throughout the novel. “ Oh, to be . . . a tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world” (14). Hurston deliberately describes the pear tree in this fashion to show the relation between a blossoming tree, which is blooming as it grows, to the significant character changes in Janie as she marries different men in an attempt to discover happiness in a loving marriage. As the bees interact with the tree's blossoms, she witnesses perfection in nature's simple beauty, which is captured in Hurston's imaginative description. This energy, passionate interaction, and blissful harmony are ideals Janie chases throughout the rest of the novel. As the protagonist sees harmony with nature, she ultimately seeks harmony within herself, as her final husband Tea Cake brings out true love that is deeply rooted in Janie's ideals of

marriage. The devastating aspects of nature in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are shown through the hurricane, as natural disasters depict Mother Nature's most destructive elements. Hurston personifies the sea, the most destructive force of the hurricane, by comparing it to a monster that "had left its bed." As Lake Okechobee breaks through the dikes with two hundred mile per hour winds, the author describes the monster with, "he seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass and rushed on after his supposed-to-be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses along with other timbers" (189). To describe the further devastation, the sea is described as "walking the earth with a heavy heel." The imagery gives a haunting description of how nature, often thought of as peaceful, can also cause immense devastation. To expand on this description, Hurston shows the character's thoughts with, "through the screaming wind they heard things crashing and things hurtling and dashing with unbelievable velocity . . . and the lake got madder with only its dikes between them and him [God]" (186). The devastation of nature, shown in Hurston's colorful imagery of the hurricane, greatly enhances the characters' perception of God, the creator of the world. The storm that ultimately determines the direction of the novel includes the first appearance of the title as Tea Cake, Janie, and Motor Boat look up to the black sky and "their eyes question God." Hurston writes, "night was striding across nothingness with the whole round world in his hands" (185). The imagery in this scene not only personifies nature and the storm, but immediately draws attention to the importance of the title within the characters Janie and Tea Cake. The hurricane causes the characters to see

God's power through nature, and thus submit to forces beyond their control as they realize they are inferior beings. Hurston makes several references to Janie and Tea Cake's eyes, which are focused on God. As the two stand in awe of the storm, the author writes " they seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God" (187). In following passages, the book reads, " their eyes were questioning God" (186), showing the perplexity of the characters in God's plan for them as powerless human beings. It is interesting that two Christians question all that they know about God's universal love and protection through a single event, as they realize that nature's power far surpasses their own. As the storm dies down and the two characters rest after wading through floods for several miles, Janie begins to notice the anguish and pain of the world around her. The author remarks, " havoc was there [in a town of refuge] with her mouth wide open" (195). Not only do the characters submit to his almighty power, but the hurricane identifies another question of how can be God a loving heavenly father when he creates such devastation. The destructive side of nature brings about dark imagery that decides the novel's conclusion. Chaos resulting from the hurricane brings about nature's dark side as Tea Cake gets bitten by a rabid dog in an attempt to save Janie from drowning. The image of darkness is used to show fierceness and the destructive side of nature, contrasting previous descriptions of nature's divine beauty in the pear tree. To depict darkness in the scene with the dog, the novel reads, " the dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, stiff muscles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge" (194). Janie tells Tea Cake later on, " Ah don't speck you seen his eyes lak Ah did. He didn't aim tuh jus' bite me . . .

he aimed tuh kill me . . . Ah'm never tuh fughit dem eyes [of] pure hate” (196). It is interesting that Janie remarks not on the dog's fierceness, but on the hate and cruelty in his eyes. This quote relates back to the importance and significance of the title, as eyes watch God, and question the future. The mad dog's eyes that infect the love of Janie's life life, Tea Cake, causing him to die, foreshadow the ending of the novel and cause her to question God's seemingly dark plan in her life's journey to find contentment in herself and the world around her.