

Critiquing the critic

Business



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Priorities can control what kind of person someone is, and what actions they choose to act on. A person's priorities truly shape who a person becomes. In his early life, LeBron James lived with his single mother.

He wanted nothing more than to play basketball and give his mother a better life, and these priorities were reflected in his actions. These priorities and desire to accomplish his goals allowed LeBron James to avoid the drug game and gang life. His laser focus that came from his priorities led him to being one of the single most successful individuals in the history of sports.

Although a sports example was used, this priorities complex is visible in any and every walk of life. It applies in from how a president runs a country to how a sophomore conducts his social life.

Literary Critic, Claire Crabtree, digs into this complex and how it applies in Zora Neale Hurston's, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In Crabtree's article, "The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism, and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God,'" Crabtree is correct in stating that Janie has priorities in her life, but she is incorrect in stating the order of her priorities. In "The Confluence of Folklore, Feminism, and Black Self-Determination in Zora Neale Hurston's, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'", Claire Crabtree implies that Janie needs both love and to broaden her horizons in her life. She does this by saying, "Janie needs freedom and an expansion of her horizons more than she needs love" (Crabtree 259). When Crabtree uses the word expansion when stating that Janie needed to do that to her horizons more than Janie needed love, she is giving the word a connotation of expanding past her normal activities and exploring other paths in life.

This connotation is more fitting for that portion of the quote, as the denotation of expansion is to become larger and more extensive, which isn't quite clear enough for the reader to grasp what Crabtree is attempting to say. Although the literal definition of horizons is the line at which the earth's surface meets the sky appear to meet, Crabtree uses the term horizon to describe Janie's aspirations and dreams. By using it to describe her dreams, Crabtree stays consistent with the many Earth based metaphors throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This is proved accurate through the text of "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*", as it is repeatedly shown that Janie needs both passion and broad boundaries. Early in the story, as Janie dreams of love and what she wants in life one day and comes up with the image of, "Oh to be a pear tree – any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world!" (Hurston 16).

This shows Janie's desire for a life filled with love. The word "bloom" means a beautiful flower, but the way Janie uses it in the text, it has a connotation of being new and content and beautiful. This connotation shows Janie's desire for a feeling that she can only accomplish through true love. At this point in the story, Janie still looks up to Nanny and still looks for a mate based on Nanny's view of the ideal mate. Although Janie's view of an ideal mate changes, her goal in love doesn't necessarily change, as she dreams to be a "pear tree". The way Zora Neale Hurston uses that term, she demonstrates Janie's desire as a freshly blooming pure being that has perfect balance and fulfilment in life.

That connotation of pear tree is contrary to the denotation of a type of tree which produces pears, which would not be able to demonstrate the type of

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love Janie wants. In order to accomplish the feeling of love that she so desires, Janie needs to expand her prospects beyond the teachings of love given to her by Nanny. Conversely, in order to correctly broaden her horizons, she needs to first understand love and what kind of love she wants, further proving the implied statement from Crabtree that Janie needs love and to broaden her horizons. On the other hand, Crabtree's statement that "Janie needs freedom and an expansion of her horizons more than she needs love" (Crabtree 259) is quite incorrect in some ways. At one point in the story, during the Tea Cake portion of Janie's life, She asks God while in prayer to, "..

. Please suh, don't let him love nobody else but me... Ah been so lonesome," (Hurston 145). Her asking God to make sure that Tea Cake loves her and her only shows that expansion of her horizons alone has not gotten her the fulfillment she so badly wants. Hurston uses the word lonesome to demonstrate incompleteness in Janie's life, as she uses a connotation of being incomplete, alone and far from happiness, which varies from the denotation of feeling lonely. This usage of the word lonesome strongly shows that prior to Janie finding love, she was unhappy and incomplete, which disproves Crabtree's statement about the order of Janie's priorities, because if love wasn't Janie's number one priority, then she wouldn't feel happy and incomplete when she wasn't able to fully accomplish the feeling of love yet. Also, the connotation given to Janie's statement, "

.. don't let him love nobody else but me," (Hurston 145) of her being desperate to try to find love and wanting it more than anything, further proves that her expanded horizons alone did not get her happiness, and that

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she needed love to accomplish that feeling. Without that connotation, the reader wouldn't have realized that feeling from Janie, as the denotation would be just a request for Tea Cake not to leave her, and to stay loyal. When Crabtree uses the word "love" in her statement about the order of Janie's priorities, she sends a connotation of happiness and being complete, slightly different than the denotation of an intense feeling of deep affection. Being happy and complete is really why Janie wants love, so through Crabtree's connotation of love, she actually disproves her statement that Janie needs to broaden her horizons more than she needs love.

This also connects with Crabtree's use of the word freedom. Freedom had the same connotation of love in her article, as Janie's freedom was being happy and complete and not having to worry about who she would spend the rest of her days with, not just liberation, like the denotation of freedom would suggest. Once again, Crabtree's own use and connotation of the words freedom and love has disproven her earlier statement about the priorities of her happiness. Further disproving Crabtree's order of Janie's priorities, after Jody's death, Janie "...

starched and ironed her face, forming it into just what people wanted to see..." (Hurston 106). Zora Neale Hurston's use of the word "starched" had a connotation similar to its literal meaning, as Hurston was attempting to demonstrate that she had to hide the relief on her face that came with Jody's death, and have a "starched" or straight and joyless face. This action of starching her face came after she had already expanded her horizons, as Janie was still unhappy when she had left to Eatonville with Jody and expanded her boundaries. As Janie didn't truly love Jody, the only thing that

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would help end her unhappiness and bring her some relief would be his death, as she could now pursue what would make her truly happy, true love. Her relief that she can once again pursue her dream of love again proves that love was the number one priority in her life, not expanding her horizons.

One could also sense the relief that rushed upon Janie during her ironing her face by the connotation of the phrase, "...forming it into just what people wanted to see..." (Hurstons 106). The connotation of that phrase being forming an act of an emotion she didn't feel to please the other townspeople acts as more support to the idea that Janie was relieved that she could pursue her number one priority again, love. Furthermore, even in Janie's early days, Janie acted in ways demonstrating that love was her number one priority.

Soon after Janie married Logan Killicks, she was ready for the love for Logan to start rushing in as she thought it was supposed to. Janie was ready for that love to start as soon as possible, " But anyhow Janie went on inside to wait for love to begin. The new moon had been up and down three times before she got worried in mind." (Hurstons 28) The connotation of the phrase, " wait for love to begin" (Hurstons 28), is slightly different than its denotation of simply occupying herself until love overtook her. Zora Neale Hurston uses a connotation of Janie putting every other goal and priority aside in order to be prepared for this love she desired so greatly to finally come.

This connotation of Janie waiting acts as evidence to the fact that Janie's top priority was love, not expanding horizons, as Janie did not care about her other goals and priorities at the time because she was so excited about the

prospect of her top priority finally being filled. This idea was also proven through the connotation of the end of that quote, "...before she became worried in mind." (Hurstons 28).

Although that phrase has a denotation of becoming doubtful about an event, the connotation of it is that she became massively disappointed and disgruntled about the fact that she wouldn't be able to accomplish the thing she wanted so dearly, love. That level of disappointment can only come from falling short on one's ultimate goal. That was Janie's exact case, as the truth began to creep in that Logan would not provide her the ultimate satisfaction that love would bring her. That portion of the text works together to disprove Crabtree's theory that Janie need to expand her horizons more than she needed love. Even though Crabtree was wrong about the order of Janie's priorities, she was dead on that Janie did have priorities.

When Janie was reflecting about her blossoming relationship with Tea Cake, "She looked down on him and felt a self crushing love, so her soul crawled out from its hiding place." (Hurstons 155). The way Zora Neale Hurston uses the phrase, "self crushing love", demonstrates the connotation of a love that absorbs all of one's life and takes over their life. That connotation shows that love is the top priority in Janie's life, further proving Crabtree right that Janie has priorities in her life. Also, the fact that Hurston included the words self crushing prove that love was a top priority, as leaving those words out would've made the reader not realize the deep and intense feelings that Tea Cake caused in Janie. In relation to that, when Zora Neale Hurston, the way she used the word crawled, she shows the connotation of moving her life

direction and changing priorities, as crawling has a denotation of moving towards different things.

How Zora Neale Hurston used crawling continues to prove that Janie truly does have priorities in her life. As discussed earlier, the connotation used by Crabtree of the word love of being complete and fulfilled, proves that she has priorities of love in her life, as Janie always discussed her dreams of finding love. Also, the connotation of the word need used by Crabtree, that a need is something that must be accomplished for a life to progress further proves her point that Janie has priorities in her life. If she didn't have that connotation of need, it wouldn't have portrayed her opinion that Janie had ordered priorities in life. Overall, Crabtree made many good points in her article covering *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written by Zora Neale Hurston.

Crabtree was successful in attempting to pass on the idea that Janie had priorities in her life, although those priorities may not be in the order that Crabtree argued they were. Claire Crabtree also was correct in her statement that Janie prioritized both love and broad horizons. Crabtree's critiquing was able to shine light on the universal idea that the priorities in one's life help shape them into the person they become. By shining a light on this idea, Crabtree was able to clarify the progression and growth of Janie throughout the stages of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and show the reader how their individual priorities can decide how one's life will go., and also help potentially dictate other's lives and in turn, all of our lives as a whole.