

Imagery in their eyes were watching god

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Their Eyes Were Watching God

Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale is filled with beautiful imagery used to prove a point. Hurston, who has a unique writing style which is defined by strong cultural messages and the integration of myths, attempts to redefine traditional values. The main character, Janie, is a dreamer who sees and connects her whole world around her to the purity of nature. She is pious and her imagery often includes creation myths and connections to god. These mythic moments give Hurston the opportunity to show how Janie roots herself in the world, and to redefine god in an untraditional way. The spirituality of the novel demonstrates not just the roots Janie grows, but the community roots of the African American communities of the south.

Hurston knows people explain and root themselves in the world around them through creation myths because the unknown is more frightening than something inexplicable. Janie explores creation myths at two main points in the book in order to strengthen her outlook on life and her beliefs. The first moment takes place after Jody's funeral. When the narrator relays the story of how when "When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all over" (90) The man is smashed and covered in mud, and "Just like all the other tumbling mud-balls, Janie had tried show her shine" Janie throughout her life had been under someone else's control. She was beyond Nanny's gate until Logan married her and she was trapped there until she met Joe. She felt free with Joe at first, but she was still under his control and when she became too free and out there for his liking he smothered her like the angels smothered man with mud. After

Joe's death she is finally free and she connects to these mudballs. She feels like the mud has been cleaned off and her freedom can shine through. Even with Tea Cake, she still feels that shine because he is not trying to control her he wants her to live equal to him. At the end of chapter 12, the final passage plays into more biblical creation myths. Janie tells Pheoby, " If people thinks de same they can make it all right. So in the beginnin' new thoughts had tuh be thoughts and new words said" (115). In this quote, " in the beginnin'" pays reference to the bible more specifically Genesis 1: 1 where God created the Heavens and the Earth. In this passage Janie is showing how Tea Cake has given her a chance to be reborn and to start a new beginning. One of the main overarching themes in the book is the concept of rebirth and new life and this passage shows how Tea Cake helps her with that. He is her root for new life and something to build it around but her soul is still free. The creation myths give her something to believe in, and to explain the unknown. Janie wants knowledge that she can put her trust in and creation myths serve that purpose for her.

Janie's definition of God strays from the traditional, and is more significant to the experience Janie has in the novel. She interacts with God as though He is her challenger, instead of a constant all-seeing, all-controlling being. When one thinks of God in the modern world, or even that of the 1930s, one would think of church and prayer and the bible. But for Janie, nature is a direct connection to God and his power. During the hurricane, the storm itself is referred to as God, "[Tea Cake and Janie] sat in company with the others... their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God." (160)

In this passage, God is challenging them, He forces them to persevere through the storm. However, He is not a controlling figure to Janie. In the modern world, God is associated with fate, if there is an action it was previously decided by Him. To Janie, God is someone she can compare herself to. Nature is considered a beautiful, stronger than any person, and Janie has a want to be just that. To be a strong individual soul is her dream, but God will always be watching, so she forces herself to live up to the example He has set in nature. Janie expresses these views to Pheoby stating, “ Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (192). At a short glance, the phrase, “ Go to god” is symbolic of physical death, but when one considers the second part of the sentence, it can be taken as the death before rebirth of one’s free soul. Janie’s story is one of being tossed between different more traditional “ God” figures, Nanny and Joe, who decided her every move for her. When she finally broke free, she redefined her personal definition of God to be the beauty and strength of the Nature around her. She broke away from other’s control and took nature as a challenge. She goes to God, through the death of her freedom, and when she is reborn she learns to live for herself, comparing herself to only the might of God. This redefinition of God is vital to the overall message of the book, because nature, like the role of God in Janie’s life is ever changing, and she has to adapt and grow. If one does not adapt, they do not have control, and if one lets someone live their life for them, it isn’t really living. Janie learns this lesson, and she learns how to live.

With the inclusion of mythic moments and untraditional references to God, Hurston is giving the reader a glimpse of how people can root themselves in the world. Creation myths let people explain their beliefs, and others can't shut down their beliefs. For communities like the Muck and Eatonville, roots in religion and creation myths are extremely important because they become widely accepted and create a sense of community. This is especially true with the traditional view of God. In Eatonville He is mentioned frequently, because all the residents believe in His presence. If something unfortunate happens, people can take the guilt off each other by saying it was fate. By doing this, it creates a "pure" community where they are not in control. Janie breaks out of this and redefines the idea of God, He becomes a challenger and she takes that challenge and learns how to create a strong community with her equals, while still being assertive and progressive. Perhaps if the citizens of the modern world took inspiration from Janie, and stopped being passive, our global community would be stronger and would take responsibility for our own actions.