

In my view, breath,
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[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



a far more ambiguous note than did

Their Eyes Were Watching God. By Zora Neale Hurston

Abstract

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Often times we read and we get to the climax and we feel cheated because the conflict(s) are not resolved; this is how I view the novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. In this novel Sophie keeps running, the novel ends with her still running, yet, the reader cannot whether or not she finds freedom; whereas in the second novel, Janie comes full circle in search of herself and in the end she is happy because she finds her identity.

Janie and Sophie share a common thread; they are the off-springs of rape. Although Janie's mother knows who raped her Sophie's mother never saw the face of her attacker. Sophie is raised until the age of twelve by her maternal aunt and Janie is raised until she gets married by her maternal grandmother. For six years after Sophie comes to America to live with her mother life is basically good; Janie's life was miserable after she leaves her grandmother's house, the marriage is not a good match. Sophie falls in love with an older man, Joseph; and the marriage could have been a happy if her mother did not tarnish sex by constantly testing her to make sure her virginity is intact. The testing cause a rift between Sophie and her mother and after Sophie runs away to Haiti they reconcile when her mother visits Haiti. Sophie returns to her understanding husband and even though she goes into therapy to deal with her sexual demons there is no record that sex ever got better for her. Janie ends up marrying three times before she

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realizes that she can take control of her life with or without a man and still be happy. In many ways Janie and Sophie lives are parallel and there are many ways they are different.

Like many immigrant children Sophie does not know her mother and now she must go to America to live with her, leaving the only mother she has ever known, Tante Altie, In America Sophie's troubles begin; she does not like the fact that she must go to special school to learn English, nonetheless she studies hard and is on her way to college the next she appears in the novel. She falls in love with an older man and lie about who he is to her mother. Her mother finds out and decides that it is time she start testing her, a violation she performs on regularly. Being raped one would think that Sophie's mother would choose sensibility over tradition. To cope with this intrusion Sophie begins to double; to take herself to another realm each time her mother tests her. Unintentionally, Sophie begins to follow in her mother's footsteps. They deal with unpleasant situation by pretending it is not happening. To stop her testing Sophie subjects herself to severe pain, unbeknown to her mother, she took her virginity herself, Martine leaves Haiti but she could not leave her problems or tradition behind.

Most Black African nations and undeveloped, predominantly Black islands like Haiti are steep in ethnic practices, even when they immigrate to America. . Martine thinks testing is her duty towards her daughter; and finding out that she is no longer a virgin, rather than being sympathetic she throws her out of their home. Sophie runs to Joseph and marries him then realizes that she inherits her mother sexual problems, “ wincing and clenching her teeth as the large shadow of a man mounted her. She didn't

like it. She looked like she was crying, even though her lips were saying things that made him think otherwise” (210). Despite the fact that Joseph is a kind man Sophie could not enjoy sex with him and she runs to Haiti instead of facing her problems. For the first time since she left Haiti, Martine returns and she and Sophie reconcile. Sophie returns to her husband and goes to therapy seeking help with her problem; her therapist tells her that in order to for her and her mother to accept themselves and be at peace they need to return to the cane field in Haiti. Unfortunately, that day never comes for her mother. Sophie goes to Haiti again to attend her mother’s funeral but the sight of her mother being laid to rest is too much for her, she runs into the cane field and attacks the cane as if she is trying to purge herself. This is the somber end of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. It is a novel full with sadness and ends with unanswered question; no one can say with certainty that any of the characters find her “ golden fleece.”

Janie is raised by a grandmother who wants to make sure that when she is gone there will be someone to care for her. She marries Janie off to one of the richest man in the community but Janie finds no love in the marriage and her husband gives her no reason to fall in love with him. Whereas Janie’s grandmother wants her to get material things, Janie just wants to find herself, to travel and be happy. Janie meets Jody is materialist just like her husband but she enjoys Jody’s company and she loves him. All Janie needs is a simple life with a man who loves and respects her. Early into their mirage Janie finds out that man is not going to be Jody; Jody wants a “ trophy wife” and he is possessive; he tells her what to do and how to behave. Jody sees no need to treat her as an equal and with admiration; several times he

insults her before customers. Janie lost any love she has for Jody and sex becomes a chore; ultimately Janie starts to really look at Jody and sees how ugly he has become and when he criticizes her appearance before customers she told him about himself, whatever is left of the marriage diminish that day. When Jody dies Janie pretended to morn for a little while and gives it up not caring what the town thinks of her. For the first time in her adult life she is happy and free. Then tea Cake comes along and steals her heart and she is truly happy; happy enough to go work in the fields with Tea Cake not caring that she has enough money to live a life of leisure. When Tea Cake dies Janie returns to Eatonville the place where she started her quest, she is a happy widow who gets to live as she pleases; she can let her hair down whenever she wants to; and mingle with the villagers if that is her desire. When the community tries to get news about her she tells Pheoby: " Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' ' em nothing; Peoby. Tain't worth de trouble, You can tell'em what, Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me. ' cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (9).

Breath, Eyes, Memory, and Their Eyes Were Watching God are two novels from different genre; nevertheless they both depict the culture of their authors. The main characters of these novels embark on trek to discover themselves but in the end only Janie can say her journey is complete. The reader of Breath, Eyes, Memory still asks the question, " Did Tante Altie or Sophie find peace."

Reference

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