

The intrinsic qualities that define the person of Zora Neale Hurston include feminist, sentimentalist, passionate, deep-rooted and a maverick. Born a black female during a time when a person's place in society was determined by the color of their skin and women were fighting for their rights. Proud of her race and gender, Hurston was indifferent to the norms of society. She is noted as one of the first black American female writers of her time and there are claims she is the pioneer of feminism. Her literary works include articles, novels, folklore, dramas, and an autobiography. The majority of her fiction is written in southern black dialect, which transports the reader back into time. Zora Neal Hurston's life is prominent through the semblance of characters and events, which she depicts throughout her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The protagonist in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Janie Crawford, a beautiful light-skinned black woman "who is unable to discover her true self until she begins to take charge of her life" (Galenet). Janie, at the tender age of seventeen, marries a middle-aged man, Logan Killicks. She marries Logan for the sake of her grandmother, who lived a painful life as a slave; raped and beaten by white men, she is determined to protect Janie from the trials and tribulations she had to endure. Janie dreams the marriage will lead to love, but the dream is shattered, until one day when Joe Starks, a handsome young man full of ambitions, enters into Janie's life. He lures her with promises of wealth and happiness; his blandishments work and Janie leaves Logan cold. The promise of wealth is kept but the promise of happiness is broken; for twenty years, Joe stifles her individuality and growth as a person. She is trapped tending a store and living a lie. The death of Joe sets her free and she finally meets the man of her dreams, Tea Cup; their life together is short, but they are the happiest years of her life.

Hurston and Janie keep their true age a mystery. The veracity of Hurston's age and birthplace has long been under scrutiny. In her autobiography, "Dust Tracks on a Road," she claims her birthplace as Eatonville, Florida; however, there is evidence to prove otherwise. An article written in the *African American Review* states, "The 'Family Record' lists Hurston's birthplace was Notasulga, Alabama, which conflicts with Hurston's life-long claim that Florida was her native state" (Bordelon). She has been known to claim her birth year as 1901, 1903 or 1910; however, records indicate her birth date circa 1891. Hurston, in an insouciant manner, informs the world through her character Janie that she is not too concerned about the issue of her age. Janie becomes the topic of discussion amongst a group of gossiping women when her best friend Pheoby Watson defends her, "The worst thing Ah ever knowed her to do was taking a few years offa her age and dat ain't never harmed nobody" (Hurston 3).

Hurston lived her childhood years in Eatonville, Florida. The town of Eatonville's claim to fame is "America's first self-governing black town" (Sailer 58). Hurston's father, John, served a term as the third Mayor of Eatonville. This part of her life is analogous to Janie's second husband, Joe. When Janie met Joe he was headed towards a town being built by colored folks, "But when he heard all about 'em makin' a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be" (Hurston 28). They arrive in the town and Joe immediately takes charge when he discovers they have no Mayor. The town is initially named West Maitland until Joe buys two-hundred acres from a Captain Eaton, hence the name Eatonville. The acreage bought is for the town to expand and build a Post Office and General Store; naturally, the townspeople make him their Mayor.

The indelible love Janie has for Tea Cup and the relationship they share closely resembles the relationship Hurston has with P.M.P. Hurston writes, "The plot was far from the circumstances, but I tried to embalm all the tenderness of my passion for him in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Wall, 750). Hurston has many love interests in her life, but P.M.P. is her one true love. He is a good-looking gentleman with an awesome physique; however, Hurston claims there is another reason she is attracted to him, his mind. Hurston proclaims, "When a man keeps beating me to the draw mentally, he begins to get glamorous" (Wall 745). Both Janie and Hurston are considerably older than their male counterparts are.

Two events depicted between Hurston and P.M.P. parallel those of Janie and