

ZIMMERMAN, KATHERINE ANNE, M.A. *The Sounds of Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: Blues Rhythm, Rhyme, and Repetition.* (2013) Directed by Dr. Noelle Morrissette. 86 pp.

Although many critics have noted the blues themes, characters, and settings in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, none addresses the way Hurston recreates elements of blues music in her novel. This thesis aims to establish the ways Hurston uses blues musical techniques in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, arguing that scholarship fails to address three critical components of blues music that Hurston weaves throughout the text: rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. The thesis argues that Hurston's use of blues music in the novel developed from her initial, focused research on sounds. Hurston's understanding of music evolved from her dedication to sound studies; her use of the rhythm and rhyme of blues music allowed her to capture the vernacular of the South on the page. My analysis shows how the blues of Hurston's novel not only manifests thematically, as others have argued, but that the vernacular prose is lyrical; it rhymes, moves, and sounds like a blues song.

THE SOUNDS OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S  
*THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*:  
BLUES RHYTHM, RHYME, AND  
REPETITION

by

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A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Greensboro  
2013

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: SOUND-ART

It is evident that the sound-arts were the first inventions and that music and literature grew from the same root. (Zora Neale Hurston, "Folklore and Music")

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. (Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*)

Zora Neale Hurston's use of blues music in her most popular novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is strikingly evident from the opening lines. However, the field of research that examines the interrelationship between literature and music although growing, is narrow.<sup>1</sup> Although there are many critical works dedicated to Hurston's use of blues music, particularly as a theme, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, none addresses the way Hurston recreates the rhythm, rhyme, and repetition of blues music in her novel. This thesis extends the current scholarship to address the ways Hurston uses blues musical techniques in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

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<sup>1</sup> One might argue that the interrelationship between literature and music is more present in African American literature rather than American literature overall. However, I contend that this relationship is present in American literature in general and has yet to be explored in depth. For example, the musicality of Faulkner's work has not been sufficiently documented.

As other critics, such as Houston Baker, Angela Y. Davis, Adam Gussow, A. Yemisi Jimoh, and Maria V. Johnson, have observed, the two main blues themes notably present in the novel are: one, physical and mental abuse, of which the female protagonist Janie is a victim, and two, the sexual awakening and needs of its characters. As Carol Batker explains, “thematically, the majority of classic blues [songs] are concerned with gender and sexuality...lyrics celebrating heterosexual women’s subjectivity...and blues about men’s infidelity or physical abuse of women” (202).<sup>2</sup> Jimoh’s, Baker’s, and Davis’s respective readings of Janie as a blues character, a literary blues singer, and a sexually free blueswoman “situate Janie within a particularly female literary Blues philosophy” (Jimoh 109). Moreover, Gates calls Hurston’s novel a “speakerly” text, “whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition” (72). Before recording equipment and transcriptions existed, music and stories were passed down orally from generation to generation; they were a performative inheritance. Still, even after Edison created the cylinder phonograph in 1877, songs continued to be passed down orally because the instrument was too bulky to use in the field and also not widely available or affordable. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published in 1937, was obviously past this time, but the sounds and music Hurston creates on the page make the

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<sup>2</sup> Although blues themes often addressed heterosexual women’s subjectivity, blues music, though not as often, also addressed homosexuality. As Davis states, “One of the most obvious ways in which blues lyrics deviated from [the 1920s and 1930s] established popular musical culture was their provocative and pervasive sexual - including homosexual - imagery” (3).

novel a performative piece and thus places *Their Eyes Were Watching God* within an oral tradition.

I contend that Hurston's use of blues music in the novel developed because of her initial, focused research on sounds, as well as her appreciation of the oral tradition of storytelling and the dialect in which the stories were told. As the epigraph to this study shows, Hurston believed that music and literature grew from the art of sound, and she used sound as a narrative structure to frame *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Her understanding of music evolved from her dedication to sound studies; her use of the rhythm and rhyme of blues music allowed her to capture the vernacular of the South.

Current scholarship has not gone beyond the ways Hurston uses blues music to construct the characters, plot, and settings of her novel. To date, Maria V. Johnson, in her article "The World in a Jug and the Stopper in [Her] Hand': *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as Blues Performance," has conducted the most comprehensive analysis of blues musical influence in Hurston's novel. Adam Gussow adds that Johnson "has elucidated the multiple ways in which Hurston's novel functions as a *blues* novel" (255) more than any other critic. Still, Johnson's analysis is not exhaustive.

I argue that scholarship fails to address three critical components of blues music that Hurston weaves throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Twelve-bar blues is the most common form of blues; the stanzas in this form consist of three lines where the singer repeats the first line

and improvises a third, rhyming line, known as the AAB rhyme scheme. Each bar traditionally contains four beats which creates a steady, solid meter. Though most critical work that addresses Hurston's thematic use of blues music in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* mentions the AAB rhyme scheme, none shows how Hurston recreates rhyme, as well as the steady rhythm of the lines, in both the characters' vernacular and the prose narration in the novel.<sup>3</sup> Steven C. Tracy notes that "blues singers most often sing relatively short bursts of text," which create a simple rhythm (83) and Cathy Brigham argues that "the novel's narrative structure" is "a talking frame" (404) to which characters respond. Though these critics acknowledge the rhythmical, lyrical, and oral aspects of the novel, they do not discuss how Hurston recreates these musical elements in the novel.

Expanding the current discussion, this analysis will show how Hurston successfully captures the *sounds* of a southeastern dialect; she does so by employing the structure, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme of blues music, thus asserting *Their Eyes Were Watching God's* function as an oral text that captures vernacular culture.

To illustrate how Hurston uses blues techniques, I situate her work within blues discourse by first discussing other aspects of the blues evident in Hurston's novel, and I go on to show how Hurston's initial dedication to the study of sound enabled her to successfully interlace her fiction with music. Section I gives a

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<sup>3</sup> W.C. Handy, considered to be the "Father" of blues music, typically wrote in the standard twelve-bar format and AAB rhyme scheme. His most famous song "St. Louis Blues" serves as a perfect example of this structure and can be seen in Appendix A.

brief biographical sketch to demonstrate how Hurston's personal and professional lives influenced her work, and thus how her use of blues music is purposeful; this section reexamines and compiles biographical aspects of Hurston's life in a new way through this focus. Section II discusses the history of blues music, blues in literature, and recognizes work done by other critics in these areas. Section II also briefly discusses spirituals, an earlier African American music form that influenced blues, indicating blues developed from an oral culture premised on sound. Blues music is known for its rhythm and rhyme, but essentially what makes the blues "blue" are the wounded, vulnerable, and sexual characters.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, section III discusses Janie as an abused singer of the blues and how, like the subjects of blues songs, the characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* have sexual needs. In section III, I also argue that Janie is a traveling blues woman, an attribute other critics have not considered. My analysis in section IV takes the current research a step further and shows how the blues of Hurston's novel not only manifests in the ways others have argued, but that the vernacular prose is lyrical; it rhymes, moves, and sounds like a blues song.

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of the blues, see Baker's section "Defining Blues" on pages 4-5 in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. He notes that blues characters often see their troubles as self-induced. Additionally, Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* provides a thorough look at the formation of blues culture and the role of women singers as agents of cultural critique.

## CHAPTER II

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Zora Neale Hurston was a vivacious and often contentious woman who won many admirers and made many enemies. Behind the facade was a woman who, despite her quick tongue, intelligence, and boldness, could succumb to self-doubt and “frequently [hid] behind masks” as Hemenway notes in his groundbreaking work *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (24). Still, Hurston, who regularly entertained people at her apartment, was known to have a commanding presence. Yet even with her liveliness and brilliant writing, her self-doubt prohibited her from a successful career during her lifetime, partly owing to her inability to withstand criticism and work collectively, but also owing to the fact that she “died prior to the affirmation of Afro-American literature culture in the 1960s” (Hemenway 3). Both Hurston’s own personal limitations and the slow acceptance of African American literature as a genre contributed to her battles with confidence and her limited commercial success during her lifetime. Although Hurston did achieve some fame and considerable respect during her years in Harlem, she was unable to sustain this success and establish a long career.

Because of her vivacity, Hurston’s pursuits and accomplishments fascinated her fellow Harlem Renaissance artists as well as her audience. Despite this interest, Hurston’s talent was not widely recognized until she

published *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937.<sup>5</sup> The publication of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Mules and Men* earlier in 1935, generated interest among Hurston's admirers (both fellow artists and readers) who wondered about her Florida beginnings and how she established herself as a writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Owing to this interest, Hurston wrote her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* in 1942. Oddly, the book reads like fiction and reveals very little about the private Hurston. Hemenway states that "*Dust Tracks* can be a discomfiting book, and it has probably harmed Hurston's reputation. Like much of her career, it often appears contradictory" (276). Hemenway's exhaustive research fills a much-needed biographical void. This thesis relies heavily on Hemenway's work but emphasizes the biographical information that is pertinent to my blues analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Before Hurston published fiction, she completed a B.A. in Anthropology from Barnard College in 1929. As a folklorist, Hurston studied sounds, including local dialects, by traveling extensively, researching, cataloguing local practices, and listening to the people of the South and Caribbean. With her use of blues music, the information she gathered while traveling, and memories from her childhood in Eatonville, Florida, Hurston expertly captured the settings, cultures, and sounds of these peoples on the pages of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

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<sup>5</sup> Even then, it was not until 1973 when Alice Walker rediscovered Hurston, whose last years and death in 1960 went mostly unnoticed, that the general public began to appreciate her work.

As Robert H. Cataliotti observes, “Hurston drew upon the tradition of...blues...to formulate an integral part of [her] fictional representations of black life in America” (74). The characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* exquisitely perform Hurston’s rendering of the Southern vernacular.

Besides her works that capture the habits and culture of the local peoples, Hurston was an authority on African American folk music.<sup>6</sup> Hurston’s dedication to her craft set her apart from her contemporaries. She even “once sold hot dogs in a Washington park just to record accurately how the black people who bought them talked” (Hemenway xv). Hurston meticulously studied sounds, folklore, and speech, “immersing herself in the lives of the people who lived it, by what anthropologists call the participant - observer technique” (Hemenway 118).<sup>7</sup> However, Hurston’s desire to use vernacular in her work was not always supported. As part of the Harlem and New Negro Renaissance movements, one of its leaders, and coincidentally one of Hurston’s mentors, Alain Locke, cautioned Hurston against her use of vernacular and advised her instead to focus on the aesthetic black art of the New Negro movement.<sup>8</sup> Locke’s publication *The*

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<sup>6</sup> Hurston “assisted Alan Lomax in his collecting and recording for the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1935” (Batker 199).

<sup>7</sup> “Participant observation is conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons. Its purpose is to obtain data about behavior through direct contact and in terms of specific situations in which the distortion that results from the investigator’s being an outside agent is reduced to a minimum” (Kluckhohn 331).

<sup>8</sup> Hurston straddled the New Negro movement (when she arrived in New York in 1925) and the Harlem Renaissance. The dates of these movements are not fixed, and though anthologies will list the end date of the New Negro movement as 1919 and the start of the Harlem Renaissance as the same, the ideas of each movement blended into one another.

*New Negro*, which was considered the “racial manifesto of the era” (Hemenway 39), identified New Negroes as “a new soul for black America” (Hemenway 39) and described the movement’s aesthetic as one “which felt art must fight social battles and compensate social wrongs” (Hemenway 39). His views extended to music as well:

Locke’s attitude toward black American music reflected the ambivalence of many of the Renaissance writers and artists toward the music of their people. On the one hand, it was the one art form within black culture that had retained the vigor of the culture’s historical realities. It furnished evidence of race identity and race consciousness. On the other hand, it was the target, like the culture as a whole, of racist characterizations such as “savage,” “primitive,” and “undeveloped” (Davis 150).

Locke took advantage of the young Hurston before she had developed her own voice, and thus Hurston initially became a leader in the New Negro movement. While leaders of the movement encouraged artists “to be aware of folk origins, one was expected to do so with the future of the race in mind...the elite artist articulating for the inarticulate race” (Hemenway 39). Thus, the leaders of the New Negro movement did not consider vernacular language or music to be a part of the movement’s vision.<sup>9</sup>

Part of the New Negro movement’s wish to restrict the use of vernacular stemmed from the first public performances of spirituals; spirituals were not

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<sup>9</sup> The movement’s views, which drew attention to African Americans’ contributions, drastically changed in the 1940s, at which time black writers were “prompted to abandon the question of racial inequality and to write on purportedly universal topics, as the publishing houses and reviewers for prominent publications encourage[d] them to produce what the publishing industry view[ed] as ‘raceless’ writing” (Jimoh 92).

performed and recorded in the vernacular in which they were originally composed. This was partly because “at the end of the nineteenth century, for many African Americans, dialect was associated primarily with the lower classes...it was undoubtedly a reminder of antebellum life or of the poverty some of them had endured - something to be avoided or, even better, forgotten” (Graziano 264). Singers also avoided the use of dialect because it was associated with minstrelsy and coon songs, both which employed vernacular and which often were deemed a negative reflection of race. Moreover, spiritual performances by the Fisk Jubilee group, the most popular touring quartet, featured a “repertoire [that] was the standard white ‘art’ repertoire of the day, designed to show how much these former slaves had benefited from higher education” (Brooks 280). The New Negro movement strove to further the reception of black art; its leaders advised against the use of vernacular in order to separate the black art of the movement from a time in history when vernacular purportedly indicated little or no education.

Although Hurston initially helped to advance Locke’s idea of “pure art,” she soon developed her own, distinct voice and resisted the movement’s demands. She began to “reject bourgeois values and identify with folk” (Hemenway 39). Hurston’s ideas did not align with the ideology of the New Negro movement and she was uncomfortable with the demands of Locke and the movement’s other leaders. Essentially, Locke used Hurston and other artists for his own propagandistic purposes; Hurston and others were “shown off and exhibited and

presented in scores of places to all kinds of people. And [they] heard the sighs of wonder, amazement and sometimes admiration when it was whispered or accounted, that here was one of the 'New Negroes'" (Bontemps 6). The movement set this group of artists apart from other African Americans and targeted them as the voice and vision of African America's future. Hurston's interest in folklore and vernacular complicated the rigid views of the New Negro movement. She accentuated aspects of folklore that some African Americans not only wanted to move past, but to forget and dismiss. Once Hurston officially rejected the ideas of Locke and the New Negro movement, her work flourished and her characters' vernacular became musical.

True to her vision and the type of writer she sought to become, Hurston's published fiction (novels and short stories) feature the vernacular for which she is now famous. Interestingly, one of the ways in which Hurston pushed back against the movement was to argue that spirituals should be performed in their original vernacular. She expressed these feelings in her article "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in which she distinguished between the "genuine" spirituals and "neo-spirituals," the latter of which are songs "sung by the concert artists and glee clubs and are the works of Negro composers or adapters *based on* spirituals...all good work and beautiful, but *not* the spirituals" (Cunard 224). Hurston defined "genuine spirituals" as "Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects. There never has been a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience

anywhere” (Cunard 223-4). Hurston states further that “this is no condemnation of the neo-spirituals. They are a valuable contribution to the music and literature of the world. But let no one imagine that they are songs of the people, as sung by them” (Cunard 224). Hurston strove to find her own voice, and in turn, to bring the vernacular voice of a people she believed forgotten to current literature and art. Hurston did not want to simply represent an earlier time by using vernacular; she believed vernacular was a musical part of folklore, an art that still belonged in African American art and that current artists should use in their works.

Hurston’s critics targeted another aspect of her work as well; they argued that her work “distorted the reality of black life in America,” a “complaint that would follow her the rest of her career” (Hemenway 218). Critics focused on her folklore collection *Mules and Men*, published in 1935, but extended the criticism to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as well. Hurston’s portrayal of insular black communities and her exclusion of racial conflict confused, and at times angered, critics because she had “deliberately chosen not to deal with the resentment of the black community” (Hemenway 220) towards the white community. Hurston offered two reasons for her decision to exclude mention of the white community: one, she was “determined to prove that black people did not devote their lives to a morose discussion of white injustice” (Hemenway 220) and two, she emphasized black culture to show that black folklore and art were “not solely

product[s] of defensive reactions to [white] actions.<sup>10</sup> She felt that black culture manifested an independent esthetic system that could be discussed without constant reference to white oppression” (Hemenway 221). Hurston’s exclusion of white injustice offended those who were confronting racism and thus became a source of contention between her and other African Americans who were actively addressing white injustice in their own work.

Despite critical reviews of her work, Hurston persevered with her intent to use black folklore and language in her work, and the result are writings that capture a southeastern dialect and, especially in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, employ the techniques of blues music to sustain the vernacular presence.

Hurston, “in both her scholarly and her creative work, affirmed the vitality and integrity of black folk culture, of which the blues was an integral part” (Davis 123).

Hurston uses the successful combination of “the map of Florida on her tongue” (Hemenway 9) and her experience in blues jooks (blues music

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<sup>10</sup> Though Hurston may not seem to address white injustice in her books, there are three scenes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, albeit brief, that illustrate African American oppression at the hands of whites. The first describes Nanny’s views of the white man which were formed during her slavery past: “Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up” (*Their Eyes* 14). The next two instances of white oppression both occur in the wake of the hurricane. The first describes white occupancy on a bridge: “So they reached the bridge at Six Mile Bend and thought to rest. But it was crowded. White people had preempted that point of elevation and there was no more room” (*Their Eyes* 164). The second occurs when the hurricane has subsided and Tea Cake is forced to help clear dead bodies: “Hey, dere, y’all! Don’t dump dem bodies in de hole lak dat! Examine every last one of ‘em and find out if they’s white or black.” “Us got tuh handle ‘em slow lak dat? God have mussy! In de condition they’s in got tuh examine ‘em? Whut difference do it make ‘bout de color? Dey all needs buryin’ in uh hurry.” “Got orders from headquarters. They makin’ coffins fuh all de white folks. ‘Tain’t nothin’ but cheap pine, but dat’s better’n nothin’. Don’t dump no white folks in de hole jus’ so.” “Whut tuh do ‘bout de colored folks? Got boxes fuh dem too?” “Nope. They cain’t find enough of ‘em tuh go ‘round. Jus’ sprinkle plenty quick-lime over ‘em and cover em’ up.” (*Their Eyes* 170-1).

establishments) to create sound on the page.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Hurston was known to be a perfect mimic (Hemenway 22), a talent that allowed her to authoritatively recreate the southeastern drawl. Her dedication to studying sound, music, and folklore indicates that her use of blues music to create rhythm, rhyme, and repetition is indeed intentional.

Hurston's commitment to her research makes *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a musical read, one whose rhythm literally moves the reader through the pages. Although Hurston began to write fiction during her college years, her first interest as an adult was anthropology. In 1935, eight years after she initially began the research, Hurston published her anthropological findings in *Mules and Men*; she also drew from her childhood memories to retell the tales in the text. Hurston's intensity, tenacity, and dedication to accurately retelling folklore are readily apparent in this work.

What is more important, though, are the details in *Mules and Men* that reappear as themes, plots, and characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, indicating that *Mules and Men* served as a trial run for what would become Hurston's greatest literary achievement. The blues music she heard in the jooks

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<sup>11</sup> Definition from the chapter "Harlem Slanguage" in the compilation of Hurston's short stories *The Complete Stories*. "Jook: a pleasure house in the class of gut-bucket. The houses originated in lumber turpentine and railroad camps of Florida. Now common all over the South, even in the towns. They are the cradle of the Blues, and most of the dance steps that finally migrate north" (228).

of Florida, the singing she studied in New Orleans,<sup>12</sup> and the “lies”<sup>13</sup> she retells in *Mules and Men* all influenced *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Arnold Rampersad, in the forward to *Mules and Men*, states that “almost certainly, there would have been no *Their Eyes Were Watching God* without the process of growth and maturation that resulted first from *Mules and Men*” (*Mules and Men* xvi), especially because *Mules and Men* aptly illustrates the “interrelationship between Zora’s fiction and black folklore” (Hemenway 203). But therein also lie two of the criticisms of *Mules and Men*. First, although readers are expected to treat *Mules and Men* as nonfiction, the text reads like fiction. This is partly because the publisher, Lippincott, asked Hurston for considerable revisions to eliminate the technical jargon he believed would confuse and dissuade the average reader. Lippincott wanted the manuscript to be less scientific (which went against Hurston’s intention) and more readable. Second, as previously mentioned, the text distorts a contemporary reality by celebrating black life to the exclusion of representing hardship and racial inequality. In an era “when black intellectuals stressed the similarities between races, Hurston proudly affirmed the cultural differences” (Hemenway 162). The reception for *Mules and Men* was mixed. Some valued a black author preserving black folklore, its people, and history, but others felt that the text treated its contents too lightly.

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<sup>12</sup> Frank Boaz, Hurston’s mentor at Barnard, asked Hurston to study the special “musical ability” (Hemenway 128) of the black people in New Orleans.

<sup>13</sup> Lies were the stories told in lying sessions, or storytelling sessions, in which “traditional tales [were] perpetuated” (Hemenway 172). Storytellers were encouraged to embellish their tales.

Despite these criticisms, Hurston's commitment to accuracy is apparent in *Mules and Men*. Hurston strove to become an intimate member of the communities she studied, and she did so because she was "accepted by virtue of race and her sympathy with communal ways" (Hemenway 167). Furthermore, Hurston dedicated her time to learning sound. Her resolve is particularly apparent in the following response to Alan Lomax, with whom Hurston collected music in 1935. When Lomax inquired how Hurston learned songs, she replied:

I just get in the crowd with the people and if they sing it I listen as best I can and then I start to joinin' in with a phrase or two and then finally I get so I can sing a verse. And then I keep on until I learn all the verses and then I sing 'em just like them. And then I take part and I try it out on different people who already know the song until they are quite satisfied that I know it. Then I carry it in my memory...I learn the song myself and then I take it with me wherever I go (Hemenway 168).

Hurston's works are successful because of her dedication to fully understanding, learning, and voicing sound, music, and dialects.

Though Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* lacks significant discernible biographical details, it illuminates her approach to learning. The opening of her chapter "Research" states: "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose" (*Dust Tracks* 143), an apt summary of Hurston's intensity. Even more indicative of Hurston's dedication to her research are the sounds she uses in *Dust Tracks* to describe mundane settings. For example, when describing miners, Hurston writes: "The log on the carriage coming to the saw. A growling rumble. Then contact! Yeelld-u-u-ow! And a

board is lad shining and new on a pile. All day, all night. Rumble, thunder and grumble. Yee-ee-ow!" (*Dust Tracks* 147). Hurston describes the rhythmic songs the workers sing, the pounding of hammers to keep a beat, and the workers relaxing in blues jooks, where "songs are born of feeling" (*Dust Tracks* 149). Especially apparent in this example is how Hurston brilliantly recreates the sounds of the mining graveyard so that they are readable on the page. Moreover, Hurston writes all of these scenes in vernacular; the rhythm of the words she uses and the musicality of voices stem from her dedicated research. Although not all her works were well received during her lifetime, Hurston's perseverance makes her work distinctive and readers not familiar with the southeastern dialect are able to hear its sounds. Hurston was determined to preserve African American folklore and to show her audiences, and critics, its dynamic, living artistic value. Her perseverance paid off and the result is the musicality of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

### CHAPTER III

#### HISTORY OF BLUES MUSIC AND THE CURRENT DISCOURSE

Though the critical discussion regarding the interrelationship of literature and music is still developing, authors' use of music in literature has a rich history. The nuances of African American music include unusual (non-western) harmonies, rhythms, moans, improvisation, and unconventional timbre, attributes that set it apart from standard white music. It is this essence that Hurston pulls from blues to create the sounds of dialect and the rhythm of music on the page. By using blues, Hurston successfully recreates the southeastern vernacular so that it is readable on the page. Little research, however, has been done to show how authors employ the actual techniques of music in their works, and, as I argue, none has been done to show how Hurston employs these techniques in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

As it stands, the critical discussion focuses solely on musical themes, settings, characters, and ideologies found in literature. There are several notable monographs on which the current discourse hinges and which I will discuss briefly in this section in order to contextualize my analysis and illustrate the ways my analysis extends the current conversation. First, though, I offer a brief history of blues music to supplement the later discussion of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is essential to understand blues music in order to comprehend how

Hurston replicates the blues themes and sounds in her novel. The following analysis focuses on blues music history, but also includes a brief history of spirituals for two reasons. First, spirituals are one of the musical predecessors of blues. Before they were commercially recorded, spirituals were not written in standard notation but transmitted orally and thus the sounds of spirituals highly influenced blues music. Second, as discussed in Section II, Hurston's interest in blues music grew out of her interest in spirituals; she fought to preserve the integrity of their sound. Hurston's struggle to maintain spirituals' authenticity indicate that sound was her primary focus, and from this focus stemmed her interest and use of music in her work.

African American musical genres often appear to blend and, at times, even occupy the same space.<sup>14</sup> This is due, in part, to the similarities between some of the genres and the ways they informed and influenced one another. When blues music first emerged as a recognized form, Burnim and Maultsby argue that it was part of multiple musical contexts:

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, blues was generally performed alongside other types of folk and popular music. Most blues performers born in the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth had eclectic repertoires that might also include ragtime pieces, older social dance songs, ballads, versions of popular songs, and even spirituals. Those born after 1905 increasingly came to identify themselves as blues singers and often concentrated on this genre exclusively (83).

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<sup>14</sup> In their introduction, Burnim and Maultsby create a chart that illustrates the evolution of African American music. It is an extremely useful visual aid and can be seen opposite page 1 in *African American Music: An Introduction*.

Thus, when musicians first began to play blues music, it was not yet an established genre, but recognizable to audiences because of its similarities to its musical predecessors. Blues performances necessarily included other types of music as well to allow audiences to acclimate to the new sounds. By slowly introducing blues to audiences, performing musicians established blues as a genuine genre and eventually, it became one on which musicians could solely focus.

Blues predecessors are spiritual songs, field calls, work songs, and folk quartets. As Burnim and Maultsby explain:

The basic melodic resources of the blues seem to be largely derived from the field holler, a type of solo unaccompanied work song found in the rural South, characterized by great melodic, timbral, and rhythmic freedom and forceful delivery. To this one could add as influences the more individualized and improvisatory forms of religious vocal expression, such as moaning, chanted prayer, and preaching. Most blues singers throughout the twentieth century were exposed to both farm work and the church and had plenty of opportunity to listen to and participate in these vocal genres (82).

During slavery, the “oppressiveness of the American system prohibited slaves the use of their native languages” (Lawrence-McIntyre 379) and thus, African Americans began to write and sing songs in English. Blues, an indigenous African American musical form, evolved from the spirituals and work songs which captured the *sounds* of slavery. African Americans transformed and recreated these sounds — the moaning, rhythms, and melodic preaching — in music. The sounds of spirituals influenced musicians who recreated them in blues music.

The act of transcribing and recreating sounds that were part of an oral culture preserved the sounds of African American music.

Spirituals have been called many names: Negro folk-songs, the Sorrow Songs, Jubilees, work-songs, and the rhythmic cries of slaves.<sup>15</sup> Spirituals are a “type of sacred song created by and for African Americans that originated in oral tradition” and which “until the late 1860s, were orally transmitted and, as such, existed only in performance” (Graham). The spirituals captured the daily lives, tribulations, and concerns of slaves; they were a means of communication and self-preservation. As Paula Bennett explains, “slaves sang of their lives, their hopes and expectations, their fears, their faith, their humor, and their anguish” (263). Burnim and Maultsby distinguish between the folk spiritual, which grew out of slavery, and the arranged spiritual that was performed in concert halls to white audiences (Hurstun makes this distinction as well, referring to them as “genuine” spirituals and “neo-spirituals”). Folk spirituals, which predated arranged spirituals, were not transcribed, and thus, not standardized. The structure of these spirituals, since not confined or defined by western notation, consisted of sound and rhythm. Burnim and Maultsby note that “early description of spirituals uniformly document the singing as accompanied only by

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<sup>15</sup> List of terms compiled from three sources: Bennett, Keyes, and *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Melva Costen lists in her article "African American Spirituals" the additional names used interchangeably for Spirituals: Slave Songs, Negro Slave Songs, Negro Spirituals, American Negro Spirituals, Cornfield Ditties, Black Spirituals, Jubilees, Minstrel Songs, Afro American Spirituals, Spirituals, and African American Spirituals (61).

handclaps and footstomps, which provide a percussive element reminiscent of drumming” (55), indicating that rhythm determined the form of the songs.

After emancipation, groups began to publicly perform arranged spirituals, at which time some of the songs were transcribed and consequently changed.<sup>16</sup> A great deal of scholarly research addresses the limitations of transcriptions, and these limitations are ultimately the concerns Hurston also had with the performances of arranged spirituals. Burnim and Maulsby state:

Before the invention of sound recording, the only means of preserving music was a notational system devised for European music. Musicologists and folklorists who tried to notate African or African American music had to omit or modify its distinctive characteristics: blue notes, rhythmic complexities, overlapping of leader and chorus, melodic embellishments, and timbre. At best, these notated versions approximate the music; at worst, they distort it (36).

The first transcribers of spirituals in the 1860s and 1870s confessed to the restrictions of notation and the resulting flawed transcriptions. In 1867, William Francis Allen, Lucy McKim Garrison and Charles Pickard Ware were the first to transcribe and publish spirituals in their collection *Slave Songs of the United States*. In their introduction, Allen et al. acknowledge the limitations of transcriptions and confess that their collection of songs are “faint shadow[s] of the original[s]” (iv). Ronald Radano adds that “the surviving transcriptions ultimately amounted to little more than discursive fictions that offered a partial

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<sup>16</sup> These are the dates of the first compilations published. However, earlier transcriptions did exist. Allen et al. refer to the letters of Miss McKim of Philadelphia that contained partial, incomplete transcriptions as early as 1862. However, access to these documents is limited.

sampling of African American musical practices” (508). Additionally, James Weldon Johnson, one of the most revered and prolific African American musicians, writers, and scholars, published his own collection of Spirituals titled *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* in which he attempted to correct other collections that featured “four-part standard arrangements of spirituals [which] do not reflect the original way these pieces were performed” (Graziano 265). Johnson gives two reasons for the inaccuracy of earlier transcriptions. One, “generally speaking, the European concept of music is melody and the African concept is rhythm” (J. Johnson 18) which the Western European notation cannot capture, and two, earlier transcriptions did not attempt to transcribe the “bizarre Negro harmonies” (J. Johnson 37). Johnson endeavored to correct both of these limitations in his collection. Clearly the arranged spiritual compositions and resulting performances differ from the oral compositions sung in the field.

The loss of sound and style were not the only changes spirituals sustained. As discussed in Section I, John Graziano notes that performing groups avoided the use of dialect in order to counteract stereotypes. It was these changes that concerned Hurston and which she strove to overcome in her works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She replicates the sounds of dialect in order to reintroduce vernacular to both African American and white audiences. As I argued in section I, Hurston believed that these sounds were an art that deserved to be preserved and performed.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, “the term ‘blues’ began to be applied to a new type of song emerging from Black communities” in the South (Burnim and Maultsby 79). One way in which blues music differed from earlier African American music was in composition; blues songs are more often than not sung by a solo performer as opposed to earlier forms that were sung collectively. Though Hurston studied both spirituals and blues music, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Janie’s solo story, indicating that Hurston modeled her novel on the blues musical form. In particular, “in contrast to the Spirituals, Blues emphasizes a more singular form of expression than the expression found in the communal Spirituals” (Jimoh 26). Spirituals were based on a call by a leader and a response by the group. Also called antiphony, the “singer or instrumentalist makes a musical statement which is answered by another soloist, instrumentalist, or group...it was this structural component that supplied the greatest degree of textual, melodic, and rhythmic interest” (Burnim and Maultsby 54). Although blues is frequently a solitary performance, “it has always been most often found in situations where an audience is present” (Burnim and Maultsby 83), maintaining the group collective of early African American music.

The blues also differs from other African American musical forms in several other ways. Blues lyrics differ from their predecessors: the lyrics are “realistic (as opposed to idealistic), non-sentimental, and serious (as opposed to light or frivolous)” (Burnim and Maultsby 84). These attributes, “combined with the concentration on the self and a willingness to delve into sadness, deep

feelings, emotions, and confessions, are probably responsible for the appellation of *blues*” (Burnim and Maultsby 85). Furthermore, when “most blues singers are asked, ‘what is the blues?’ [they] do not respond with a structural definition; instead, they usually reply that blues is ‘a feelin’” (Keyes 14). These examples explain why transcriptions could not and did not accurately represent the key characteristics of both blues and spirituals. Standard notation could not capture “feeling.”

Hurston’s belief that blues music is “feeling set to strings” (“Folklore and Music” 185) is one Angela Davis also shares. In her book *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Davis argues that the blues embody the oppressed past and the emotional reaction of slaves:

The blues represent experience as emotionally configured by an individual psyche, historically shaped by post-Civil War conditions and the emancipation of the slaves. These conditions are often simply designated as “the blues.” The emotional responses to them are also called “the blues.” “The blues” therefore designates both feelings and the circumstances that have provoked them (112).

Gussow adds that “black southerners evolved blues song as a way of speaking back to, and maintaining psychic health in the face of, an ongoing threat of lynching” (xii). Both Davis and Gussow suggest that blues music evolved as a way to contend with a painful past. Alternately, Daphne Duval Harrison, whose book *Blues Queens of the 1920s* predates Davis’s and Gussow’s texts, does not

consider blues as a reaction to the past, but as a way for the African American community to reclaim their past through indigenous music:

The blues are a means of articulating experience and demonstrating a toughness of spirit by creating and re-creating that experience. Two qualities highly valued in the black community, articulateness and toughness, are thus brought together in this art form. Fluency in language is considered a powerful tool for establishing and maintaining status in the black community (65).

The African American music of slavery provided a means of dealing with painful situations (physical and mental) and, with the music's *reaction* to and sometimes embodiment of suffering, a record of *white* oppression. Harrison's assessment allows for the African American community to reframe the suffering of slavery in African American terms, without the mention or presence of white oppression. It is this kind of "omission" that Hurston creates in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and it is this "omission" that critics disliked. The insular African American communities Hurston depicts have control over their lives partly due to the relative absence of white oppression. Janie displays a toughness of spirit by not claiming her grandmother's slavery past and her mother's violent rape. Her "fluency in language," her song, allows her to create a position within the communities where she lives.

Lyrically, blues music differs from other musical genres in another distinct way: the use of double entendres. In his essay "'That Evening Sun(g)': Blues Inscribing Black Space in White Stories," Charles Peek argues that one of the

features of blues music is the use of sexual double entendres. He adds that “scholars note that ‘as a communication system, the blues, as had the spiritual earlier, spoke in code — a semantic code that now included euphemisms for sex such as Bessie Smith’s ‘deep sea diver,’ ‘black snake,’ and so on’” (135).<sup>17</sup> The implicit sexual undertones were masked by the explicit content, allowing musicians to commercially record and perform blues.<sup>18</sup>

*The Development of Discourse:*

In recent years, as the discussion concerning the interrelationship of literature and music has grown, scholars have produced new theories that read the interrelationship in a new way. Due to the scope of this thesis, the following analysis of monographs is not exhaustive; I only discuss texts that specifically examine blues music. Arguably, Houston Baker’s book *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, published in 1984, launched the critical conversation as it exists today. Baker describes blues music as an expressive

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix B for the song titled “Bumble Bee,” sung by Memphis Minnie, an example of a song that uses sexual double entendres.

<sup>18</sup> The use of double meanings is not a trait particular to blues, though the use of sexual double entendres is. During slavery, spirituals allowed African Americans to communicate with each other; spirituals relayed messages about meeting times, displaced family members, and means of escape. Consequently, slaves were forced to communicate in coded messages to ensure their safety. In some songs, the lyrics of spirituals hid their real meaning and “allow[ed] for multiple meanings for what is said, yet also allow[ed] a space for what is not said - yet said - to be filled with unspoken, an at times unspeakable, ideas” (Jimoh 10). Spirituals provided a means for communication and they did so in songs seemingly about faith. As Lawrence-McIntyre notes, slaves “necessarily tempered the actual language for safety’s sake” (382). Christianity provided this tempering and “bec[ame] a safe, yet powerfully resonant means through which enslaved Africans tell their stories in music” (Jimoh 23). For example, “Satan” refers to slave-master and “heaven” to the free north and Canada (Lawrence-McIntyre 389). Masked safely under the guise of faith, spirituals allowed slaves to share their stories and insure they were heard.

culture and the blues voice as distinctly vernacular. He argues that, together, the conditions of slavery and the rhythms of African-American blues form an “ancestral matrix” of which “indigenous American creativity” is born (Baker 2). Baker strives to “demonstrate that a blues matrix (as a vernacular trope for American cultural explanation in general) possesses enormous force for the study of literature, criticism, and culture” (14). Using his blues matrix theory, Baker reevaluates “moments of Afro-American discourse” (13) and literary criticism, including an analysis of Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a “blues artist par excellence” (14).

Baker, like Hurston, recognizes the importance of sounds found in blues music. He states that in a blues performance, the “singer draws into his repertoire hollers, cries, whoops, and moans of black men and women working in fields without recompense” (Baker 8) and also, that the “blues unequivocally signified a ludic predominance of the vernacular with that sassy, growling, moaning, whooping confidence that marks the finest performances” (Baker 12). Baker’s inclusion of the vernacular, whoops, and moans acknowledge the integral role these sounds play in blues music. Hurston’s use of music and sounds to reproduce dialect indicate she recognized this importance of musicality in vernacular as well.

Baker lays a solid foundation for further inquiry into the interrelationship of literature and blues music. To illustrate a trajectory of the discourse’s development, this section looks at critical works that follow Baker’s in sequence.

These texts are specifically monographs in which the authors present new cultural and literary ideologies; they are not simply historical compilations, like Burnim and Maultsby's work.

Angela Y. Davis examines the work of three female blues singers - Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Her work is an invaluable supplement to analyses which read Janie as the female blues singer of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. During the 1930s when these women performed, blues music "was designated 'low' culture" (Davis xiii) due to the sexually explicit lyrics of the songs which portrayed working-class black life. Blues lyrical content "addressed urgent social issues and helped to shape collective modes of black consciousness" (xiv). In particular, Davis looks at the ways in which the three singers' "performances illuminate the politics of gender and sexuality in working-class black communities" (xv). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Davis's analysis is her discussion of blues lyrics that "fail to respect the taboo on speaking publicly about domestic violence" (25). This failure is one of the reasons Davis reads blues lyrics as feminist; the words acknowledge the abuse of women in the private home which blues, in turn, performs in the public sphere. Although violence and the subjection of women are common blues themes, these three singers are among the first *females* to sing of these subjects. Hurston encompasses these themes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, positioning Janie as one of the female singers who illuminates the brutality of women's subjectivity.

Davis's feminist reading of blues lyrics, however, places her in the minority. Most critics believe that blues women condoned sexual abuse. Indeed, and as Davis acknowledges, "women's blues have been accused of promoting acquiescent and therefore *antifeminist* responses to misogynist abuse" (Davis 25, my emphasis), and this judgment was due in large part to the fact that although the lyrics illustrated abuse, they also rarely indicated that the woman chose to change her situation and leave the abusive environment. Davis contends, however, that the lyrics are feminist because they made the taboo subjects of abuse, sex, and women's sexuality a part of popular music culture. Thus, Janie can also be read as a feminist protagonist.

Davis also argues that "women's blues are such an important source of insight about African American historical consciousness precisely because they do not attempt to eradicate the memory of an era of relatively egalitarian gender relations" (121). Davis notes:

The conditions of production under U.S. slavery — which required women to perform virtually the same labor tasks as men — established a distorted form of gender equality between African women and men. While this equality was in the first place an indication of the severity of oppression under slavery, it also led to gender politics within the slave community that were radically different from those operating in the dominant culture (121).

Davis contends that this gender equality created within the African American community during slavery continued into the Reconstruction and Harlem Renaissance eras and was evident in blues women's performances and lyrics.

Davis's claim can be extended to Hurston's portrayal of Janie who works alongside her three husbands. Logan expects Janie to work a mule next to him in the field. However, Janie leaves him before he can force her to do so. Joe, though he does not treat her as an equal, expects Janie to work with him in the store. However, contrasting both Logan and Joe, Tea Cake does not expect or wish Janie to work alongside him in the muck; Janie chooses to do so.

Like Davis, A. Yemisi Jimoh, in *Spiritual, Blues, and Jazz People in African American Fiction*, reevaluates the current discourse discussing the interrelationship of literature and music. Jimoh strives to "investigate many of the African American intercultural issues that inform a more broadly intertextual use of music in the making of character and theme in fiction by black writers in the United States" (4) from black-face minstrelsy to the Civil Rights movement. Jimoh highlights historical and cultural African American moments not often addressed in scholarly work and attempts to "refocus, expand, and redefine discussions of African American literary and musical culture" (19).

As other critics do, Jimoh acknowledges the importance of blues music in literature. However, Jimoh states that "blues is *the* prevalent musical aesthetic philosophy that informs African American fictional characters and themes" (18, my emphasis). She further stresses that blues music "illustrates the post-enslaved cultural expression of a people negotiating the modern world on terms that purport to be different from those encountered while enslaved, yet the terms are not substantially different" (23). Thus, blues music helped African Americans

navigate a society in which they were still struggling to establish a new, emancipated identity. Blues music was a way for African Americans to express their concerns and negotiate a place in society, but unfortunately one in which they were still not treated equally. Jimoh extends her conclusions to the way Hurston uses blues aesthetics to characterize Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She argues that the characters in the novel use verbal riffs to communicate, which she defines as moments when the author “introduces a literary text, through the speech of a character, a brief, subtle musical fragment” (38). Jimoh’s choice of the phrase “verbal riffs” (riff is a musical term) acknowledges Hurston’s use of sound and vernacular, both which create rhythm within the novel.

An evocative text, Adam Gussow’s *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition*, offers a new perspective on the emergence of blues music as a response to the horrific violence African Americans experienced daily in the South. Although women’s subjection, as noted, is a common blues theme, Gussow extends the violence to both genders; he addresses what current analyses lack, which is “a discussion of the highly visible role lynching plays as a plot element and structuring trope in blues literature” (122). He traces the influence of “lynching’s inflicted terror in both the blues lyric and blues autobiographical tradition” (11); investigates the “connections between southern violence and blues’ emergence during the 1890s” (12); and offers “a new theory of what [he] calls ‘abandonment blues’, blues songs in which female singers

bemoan the loss or absence of their men” (14). In his final chapter, entitled “The Blade Already Crying in My Flesh,” he offers a new reading of Hurston and how the characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* embody blues violence.

These texts look at the interrelationship of literature and blues music in a new way. Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the subject of many critics’ analyses (a basic search in the MLA database yields one hundred and fifty articles), only a small percentage examine Hurston’s use of blues music in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to establish characters, settings, themes, and ideologies. These four texts are central to the blues literature discourse, yet do not fully discuss the extent to which authors, and Hurston, use blues techniques in their works. They do not consider how Hurston’s use of blues music informs her characters’ language or the musicality of her prose. In the following sections, I aim to fill these gaps in the discourse.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLUES OF *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

In the previous sections, I have illustrated the intent and intensity of Hurston's approach to research, and provided context on the history of African American music that will allow us to understand Hurston's use of blues music in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. More importantly, though, and what the following sections argue, is what Hurston does with this knowledge. Hurston drew upon her field work and her linguistic, musical, and cultural understanding of blues music to shape her fiction. Hurston's use of blues music in her novel is both thematically and stylistically instrumental in shaping plot, character, and language. Though I do not wish to merely reiterate what other scholars have noted, a brief account is necessary in order to show how Hurston renders her knowledge of blues. Therefore, the following section offers an analysis of the blues characters, tones, and themes in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The final section of this thesis discusses musical techniques of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that have not been fully considered as of yet.

As I argued in the introduction, the two main themes of blues music notably present in the novel are: one, physical and mental abuse, of which the female protagonist Janie is a victim, and two, the sexual awakening and needs of its characters. It is immediately apparent that Hurston intended for *Their Eyes*

*Were Watching God* to resound as oral art, one indication being the narrative structure that she chooses. Janie Crawford, the female protagonist of Hurston's novel, recounts her tale to her friend Phoeby through the oral act of storytelling. Houston Baker describes this act as "Janie's lyrical, autobiographical recall. She can, indeed, be interpreted as a singer who recapitulates the blues experience of all black women treated as 'mules of the world'" (58). The "mules of the world" refers to the hardships and abuse black women suffered at the hands of both white America and black men.<sup>19</sup><sup>20</sup><sup>21</sup> Tracy, who studies the poems of Langston Hughes, relays Hughes's description of the blues as "usually sung by one man or woman alone"; they are 'songs folks make up when their hearts hurt'" (79). In addition, Cataliotti observes that "classic Blues were usually performed by a female singer" who "remained the dominant personality in the performance" (75). Davis adds that blues "music was presented by individuals singing alone, accompanying themselves on such instruments as the banjo or guitar" and that

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<sup>19</sup> Janie's grandmother describes to Janie the role of the African American woman: "Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (*Their Eyes* 14).

<sup>20</sup> For further reading, see Julie A. Haurykiewicz's article "From Mules to Muliebrity: Speech and Silence in 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'" in which she addresses Hurston's portrayal of voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and how Janie's voice grows by expressing her ideas and emotions. Haurykiewicz discusses the silencing of voice that is associated with mule imagery in the text. Mule imagery is often important in blues music.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Gussow also discusses mule imagery in his book *Seems Like Murder Here*: "After Emancipation, black working-class bodies were 'worthless' in white eyes apart from the labor that could be extracted from them; one could always hire another black laborer to replace the worked-to-death, or murdered, body one had been exploiting. Fresh mules, on the other hand, required a cash outlay" (210).

this singer was usually a “female figure accompanied by small and large instrumental ensembles” (5).

The above quotations all indicate that blues is a solo performance, often by a woman, and thus situates Janie within blues ideology and oral culture. Blues can be performed in different contexts such as on a public stage, in private, for intimate audiences in the jooks, and in commercial recordings. Furthermore, as briefly mentioned in section II, Davis explains that with the lyrics of their songs, blues women “fail to respect the taboo on speaking publicly about domestic violence” and that “blues as a genre never acknowledges the discursive and ideological boundaries separating the private sphere from the public” (Davis 25). By singing of her private fights and distresses to Phoeby, Janie brings her private life into the public sphere.

For further thematic context, Daphne Duval Harrison’s *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* includes a subject index of blues themes, many of which Hurston uses in her novel. Those that Hurston does use and which Harrison lists in her index are: betrayal or abandonment; death; departure; dilemma of staying with man or returning to family; disease and afflictions; infidelity; loss of lover; love; men; mistreatment; murder; other woman; poverty; promiscuity; sadness; sex; traveling; unfaithfulness (291). However, although implied in some of the themes she does include, Harrison fails to specifically mention abuse, jealousy, longing, women’s subjectivity, and violence; these omissions are an oversight. Because these themes are closely related, they often occur simultaneously in the

novel. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston captures the tradition of the blues woman's solo performance as Phoeby, Janie's "kissin'-friend for twenty years," listens to Janie's song (*Their Eyes* 7). "From dat standpoint," (*Their Eyes* 7) Janie conveys her woes, her blues, to Phoeby.

Janie's life has not been easy. The child from her mother's rape, she is born into an abusive world. The first time Janie exhibits any sexual interest in a boy, her grandmother, Nanny, arranges for her to marry local farmer Logan Killicks in whom Janie has no interest. Nanny believes happiness is a product of monetary comfort, which Logan can provide; she advises Janie that love comes second to material comfort. Still, Janie believes love is the most important aspect of a marriage and seeks Nanny's advice after two months because she does not yet love Logan. Nanny replies "If you don't want him, you sho oughta...Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road and....Lawd have mussy! Dat's de very prong all us black women gist hung on. Dis love!" (*Their Eyes* 23). Thus, Janie's first relationship mars her expectations of love and her hope for "things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree" (*Their Eyes* 24).<sup>22</sup> Because of her need for love, Janie leaves Logan to seek her sexual awakening with the first handsome man, Joe Starks, who walks down the road and invites her along. With this decision, Janie

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<sup>22</sup> Later in my analysis, I will examine in more detail the importance of the pear tree in Janie's life and how it embodies her expectations of love.

embodies several blues themes: betrayal, abandonment, and departure.

Unfortunately, Janie's second marriage leaves her similarly dissatisfied.

Joe is a "citified, stylish dressed man" who makes Janie yearn for more than her current situation (*Their Eyes* 29). He woos her, a desire denied Janie with her arranged marriage to Logan, and makes her long for him. Eager for "sweet things and pear trees," Janie follows Joe to the newly founded, all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. But her fascination with him is short-lived because the couple fails to communicate and consequently never fully understands the needs of one another. Joe, like Nanny, places more emphasis on material things than on love and to him, Janie is his pretty possession; he does not treat her as an equal, and he eventually abuses her:

Janie was a good cook, and Joe had looked forward to his dinner as a refuge from other things. So when the bread didn't rise, and the fish wasn't quite done at the bone, and the rice was scorched, he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store (*Their Eyes* 72).

This passage simultaneously demonstrates the control Joe exerts in his marriage, the physical and mental abuse he inflicts on Janie, and illustrates Hurston's portrayal of blues violence.

Hurston accurately depicted domestic abuse partly due to her research for *Mules and Men*, during which she delved into the lifestyle of the Florida jooks, the lives (sometimes abusive) of the people who frequented these venues, as well as the violent fights that often occurred on the premises. The jooks housed the

frustrations of its customers; the oppression and abuse African Americans suffered at the hands of white America manifested into violence as they let go of their inhibitions when not in the restriction of a white society. As Gussow puts it, Hurston came to understand the vitality of blues culture as “a survival tool in the face of Jim Crow proscriptions designed to silence and kill — was inseparable from the bodily pain that blues people regularly inflicted, or threatened to inflict, on each other” (201). Hurston relays the violence of blues in Janie and Joe’s abusive relationship. Although Joe physically abuses her, Janie voices her disgust at his treatment of her. She retaliates with words (though these are in *reaction* to Joe’s physical abuse):

“But Ah’m uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat’s uh whole lot more’n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ‘tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ‘bout *me* lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (*Their Eyes* 79).

Rather than just accept her abuse, Janie responds. Still, like the blues women of which Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday sang, Janie does not immediately leave the abusive environment.

Janie’s marriage to Joe eventually takes its toll; she is “beaten down” (*Their Eyes* 76), Joe strikes her again, and before long, he dies from kidney failure. After a suitable mourning period, Janie meets her third husband, Tea Cake, and unlike her first two, this marriage is based on love, longing, and desire. Tea Cake has no possessions, no money, no home. He simply offers

Janie love. Coincidentally, Tea Cake is a blues musician who plays both the guitar and piano. However, Janie is not finished singing her blues song and again she is the victim of abuse:

Before the week was over [Tea Cake] had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her assured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss (*Their Eyes* 147).

This passage portrays women's subjection, a common theme in blues music. Still, Janie loves Tea Cake; she looks past the abuse because he is her "pear tree." After just two short years, the pair flee a hurricane. One dire moment finds Janie facing an angry dog. Tea Cake defends her but is bitten. He eventually displays signs of rabies, and Janie sees "a changing look come in his face. Tea Cake was gone. Something else was looking out of his face" (*Their Eyes* 181). Tea Cake attacks Janie and she is forced to defend herself and kill the only man she has ever loved. Janie endures Tea Cake's abuse so she can enjoy her sexual awakening with him, only to have to end their love with another act of violence. After over two decades and endless heartache, Janie returns to Eatonville alone to tell her tale to Phoeby. Thus, she concludes her song; Janie's search for love and the abuse she suffered are over.

Amidst the heartache and abuse, the characters exhibit sexual desires. Sexuality is a prominent theme in blues and blues music is "often read as centrally concerned with expressing desire, with establishing African American

women as sexual subjects” (Batker 200). Harrison counters Batker and explains that blues “introduced a new, different model of black women - more assertive, sexy, sexually aware, independent, realistic, complex, alive” (111). M. Johnson adds, “the novel’s focus on love and relationship, Janie’s pursuit of sexual satisfaction and self-fulfillment, and Hurston’s celebration of female sexuality are themes, in particular, of vaudeville blues” (401). Though in blues songs the sexual desires of the characters are often relayed subtly through double entendres, Hurston illustrates sexuality not with this technique but through an equally subtle one: metaphor. Janie equates her idea of a perfect love to a pear tree. A closer analysis shows that Janie’s pear tree is not just “sweet love,” but is also a symbol for her sexual desires:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze...she saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid (*Their Eyes* 11).

This passage, rife with sexuality, illustrates Janie’s sexual awakening, and in this moment she mistakenly concludes that sexual gratification *is* a marriage. Her deduction proves false for her first two marriages. She feels no sexual attraction to her first husband Logan, and learns that “marriage did not make love” (*Their Eyes* 25). When she meets Joe, Janie “pulled back a long time because he did

not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees” (*Their Eyes* 29), but she runs away with him because he represents change.

Janie’s marriage to Tea Cake redeems her expectations of love. He *is* Janie’s pear tree and blues sexual awakening. Janie quickly succumbs to her attraction to Tea Cake and thinks to herself that he “looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom - a pear tree blossom in the spring” (*Their Eyes* 106). Theirs is a “self-crushing love” (*Their Eyes* 128). Janie finally fulfills her sexual desires. During their courtship, Tea Cake “kiss[es] her breath away” (*Their Eyes* 107) and after Janie displays jealousy for the first time (when Tea Cake pays attention to a much younger girl with whom he works on the muck), they quickly reconcile their differences:

They wrestled on until they were doped with their own fumes and emanations; till their clothes had been torn away; till he hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible; kissed her until she arched her body to meet him and they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion (*Their Eyes* 137-8).

As the sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace of the bee’s sting, Janie arches to meet the love embrace of her husband. In her marriage to Tea Cake, love and sexual satisfaction finally merge.

As seen in the above examples, although abuse and sexuality are the prevailing themes, at times, blues themes occur simultaneously. The above scenes all illustrate the following themes Harrison indexes in *Black Pearls: Blues*

*Queens of the 1920s*: betrayal or abandonment; death; departure; disease and afflictions; infidelity; loss of lover; love; men; mistreatment; murder; other woman; poverty; promiscuity; sadness; sex; unfaithfulness (291) as well as jealousy, longing, women's subjectivity, and violence. Janie, abused and seeking her sexual awakening, abandons Logan, experiences subjection at the hands of Joe who enforces strict gender roles, and lives in poverty on the muck shelling beans with Tea Cake. In her marriage to Tea Cake, though he never cheats on her, Janie feels betrayed and suspects Tea Cake of infidelity. When Janie leaves Eatonville to join Tea Cake on the muck in the Everglades, he leaves her alone for two nights to gamble and celebrate with local workers. During this time, she believes he has abandoned her, which is, of course, what she did to Logan when she left him for Joe. Culminating the blues themes is the final scene of Janie and Tea Cake's marriage - when, in self defense, Janie kills Tea Cake after he is afflicted with rabies. Janie embodies all of these blues themes in the "song" she sings to Phoeby in her oral account of her suffering.

Though critics have addressed these themes, none has thoroughly discussed Hurston's depiction of traveling as a blues theme in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harrison lists traveling as a theme in her index).<sup>23</sup> I argue that Janie should be considered a traveling blueswoman. Although many critics mention the three distinct moves Janie makes from her childhood home, to Eatonville with Joe, and to the muck with Tea Cake, none defines Janie as a

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<sup>23</sup> At the time of submission, I have not found an argument for Janie as a traveling blues woman.

traveling blueswoman. Eileen Southern notes that, “the early anonymous singers of the blues were often wanderers who carried their sorrowful songs from one black community to another, some of them sauntering down the railroad tracks or dropping from freight cars” (336). Dubek describes Tea Cake as a “traveling bluesman” (121), but fails to also apply this attribute to Janie. Additionally, Tracy Bealer surmises that one of the reasons Janie chooses to leave Logan is because Joe’s “promise of novelty and travel” (316), but again, like Dubek, she attributes travel to Joe, not directly to Janie.

The figure of the “black blues singer at the railway junction” (Baker 7) is one found in both literature and songs. The train station is a “polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between (ever *entre les deux*), the juncture is the way-station of the blues” (Baker 7). The junction and train are key tropes and crucial components of blues music; they provide rhythm for the songs and movement, physically and creatively, for the blues musician. The energy of the “locomotive’s drive and thrust” (Baker 11) aids the musician in his composition. Furthermore, the promise of travel was seductive; leaving instilled excitement among “individuals whose ancestors had been chained for centuries to geographical sites dictated by slave masters” (Davis 19) and during which time, “travel was the risky prerogative of runaways and fugitives” (Davis 67). Enabling blues composition are the actual sounds that come from railroad stations which musicians recreate in blues songs: “rattling gondolas, clattering flatbeds, quilling whistles, clanging bells, rumbling

boxcars, and other railroad sounds” (Baker 8).<sup>24</sup> Janie’s journey in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* takes her to three distinct settings; the promise of change and sexual awakening, like the train’s promise of freedom, seduces Janie as she takes a train to each of these new settings. I thus contend that Janie is a traveling blueswoman.

“Travel themes are ubiquitous in early women’s blues” (Davis 66). One of the blues singers Davis examines, Ma Rainey, “sings about women who were forever walking, running, leaving, catching trains, or sometimes aimlessly rambling” (66). This movement is due, in part, because African Americans had become more mobile since emancipation. For those who did leave, Davis further explains, particularly for women, travel was “associated with the exercise in autonomy in their sexual lives” (67). Certainly this is the case for Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie seeks sexual awakening, and she does so by leaving one man for another, all of which involves traveling to a new place. The blueswoman was “considerably more mobile than the women they sang to and for but equally inclined to live out their pressured freedom as a search for fulfilling sexual love” (Gussow 3). “For women especially, the ability to travel implied a measure of autonomy, an ability to shun passivity and acquiescence in the face of mistreatment and injustice and to exercise some control over the circumstances of their lives, especially over their sexual lives” (Davis 74). Of

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<sup>24</sup> Please see Appendix C for an example of a song with railroad station sounds in the lyrics. Often, as the above indicates, the sounds are replicated instrumentally (such as whistles and bells, and with bass notes composed to sound like the rumbling of a train).

course, not all African Americans could travel. Women particularly (of all ethnicities), traveled infrequently because of the expectation that they were in charge of duties which kept them tied to the homestead. This domesticity, however, did not necessarily apply to blues women, hence their tendency to travel more than the average woman. Janie is much like the blues women entertainers who, Davis notes, “disengaged themselves from the usual confines of domesticity. Although most of them did marry, few actually bore children and built families as the center of their lives” (72). Throughout the entirety of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, not once does Janie mention a desire to have children. Indeed, Janie’s desire for marriage is based solely on her desire for love and sexuality, not a family. In addition, Janie’s mother was absent from the time Janie was born and left Janie to be raised by her grandmother, limiting Janie’s exposure to a family unit. Furthermore, besides her mother’s rape, there is no other mention of Janie’s father. Janie’s desires are fulfilled not through familial duties, but through her travels and her search for love and identity outside the realms of the homestead.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston both wonderfully embraces the sexuality and roaming qualities of blues music and at the same time, horrifyingly illustrates the abuse of the blues. Her settings, situations, and characters are raw, wounded, angry, violent, and sexual. These are the well known themes of blues songs that Hurston weaves effortlessly into Janie’s story.

CHAPTER V  
THE RYTHM, RHYME, AND REPETITION IN *THEIR EYES*  
*WERE WATCHING GOD*

Zora Neale Hurston studied vernacular sounds by traveling extensively, researching, cataloguing local practices, and listening to the people in southeastern America and the Caribbean. Through her use of blues music and the information she gathered while traveling, Hurston expertly captures the settings, cultures, sounds, and language of these peoples on the page. Hurston uses these elements to shape Janie's story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* exquisitely perform Hurston's impressive reproduction of the vernacular of the South. As Cataliotti observes, "Hurston drew upon the tradition of...blues...to formulate an integral part of [her] fictional representations of black life in America" (74). In an essay titled "Folklore and Music," Hurston states that "the Negro blues songs, of which Florida has many fine examples, belong in the lyric class; that is, feelings set to strings" (185), indicating her belief that blues music was emotive and that sounds and words create feeling.

It is in this sense that Hurston's research is evident in her prose; the vernacular she writes is lyrical. As Klaus Benesch notes, Hurston "embed[s] her experience of black *oral* culture in...*literary* form" (627). Yet her vernacular is

more than just lyrical prose. It is strikingly musical, rhythmical, and more purposeful than simply representing a local dialect. Hurston uses her knowledge of blues music and her submersion and acceptance, into blues jook life to capture sounds on the page. She not only recreates the sounds and rhythm of blues music in her prose and characters' dialogue, but on several occasions, she replicates vernacular rhymes. Gussow acknowledges that "Hurston's profound engagement with blues music and blues culture — as pioneering folklorist, cultural anthropologist — has often been invoked but never explored in sufficient depth" (233). Still, Gussow does not attempt to conduct this analysis. Though critics have focused on the ways Hurston's novel embodies blues characters and themes, they have not discussed the way *Their Eyes Were Watching God* reads, sounds, moves, and rhymes like a blues song. Hurston's rendering of blues music eloquently captures southern dialect. The remainder of this analysis will illustrate the numerous occasions Hurston's prose and vernacular mimic a blues song, showing how Hurston uses blues music techniques to accomplish this feat.

Hurston states that "it is evident that the sound-arts were the first inventions and that music and literature grew from the same root" ("Folklore and Music" 184). She places literature in the same canon as sound and music, which clearly indicates her penchant for musical texts. Henry Louis Gates Jr., who first coined the term "speakerly text," states that Hurston designed her novel "to 'emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the illusion of oral narration'" (72). Maria J. Racine expands on Gates'

idea and says that “Hurston creates this ‘speakerly text’ by fusing ‘black poetic diction’ with ‘a received but not yet fully appropriated standard English literary tradition’” (283). Benesch adds that “Hurston’s use of ‘Black English’” which is “verbal play and rhetorical improvisation dramatize[s] the oral-aural orientation of the black community of Eatonville and demonstrate[s] their linguistic virtuosity” (628). All three observe that there is a unique quality to Hurston’s text. All three, without explicitly stating such, recognize that Hurston creates the musicality of her text because of the way she employs southeastern vernacular and sounds.

Though still minimal in quantity, in more recent years, critical work has emerged that reads the interrelationship of music and literature in a new way, including the works I discuss in section II. The blues was of way of putting the pain into words and recording it for others to hear; blues was a release. Ralph Ellison described the blues as “an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism” (78). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Gussow reads Janie as Tea Cake’s blues apprentice; she eventually inherits his violent nature when she kills him in self-defense. Yemisi Jimoh also explores the way in which Hurston uses blues aesthetics to characterize Janie. Jimoh speaks of the musicality of the characters and

suggests that Hurston “place[s] musical phrases in [her] characters’ mouths” which she terms “verbal riffs” (38).

Though all these critics note the “blues aesthetics” of the novel and some remark on it in new ways, none points out how Hurston’s vernacular moves beyond this point to mimic the rhythm and rhyme of blues. Indeed, the only critic even to mention, albeit briefly, this aspect of Hurston’s novel is Maria Johnson. Johnson’s sole reference to Hurston’s use of blues rhyme is to mention the “traditional blues couplet ‘sung’ by Janie to Phoeby” (407): “Some of dese mornin’s and it won’t be long, you gointuh wake up callin’ me and Ah’ll be gone” (*Their Eyes* 115). If placed in the common AAB rhyme structure of the twelve-bar blues song (explained in detail in the introduction), the stanza would read as follows<sup>25</sup>:

Some of dese mornin’s and it won’t be long  
Some of dese mornin’s and it won’t be long  
You gointuh wake up callin’ me and Ah’ll be gone

Johnson refers to the second and third lines as the “couplet.” Clearly Hurston’s vernacular mimics the rhyme of a blues song in this line, but it also follows the steady rhythm of the blues as well. The first line (repeated for emphasis in my example), boasts a steady ten syllable beat, and the second rhyming line, an

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<sup>25</sup> To reiterate: Twelve-bar blues is the most common form of blues; the stanzas in this form consist of three lines where the singer repeats the first line and improvises a third, rhyming line, traditionally known as the AAB rhyme scheme.

even twelve syllables. The balance of syllables create solid downbeats (which in music are accented beats). Downbeats generate a steady meter and rhythm.

M. Johnson points out the one, well-known, “traditional” blues rhyme that adheres strictly to the couplet structure. In fact, these lines are “featured in numerous blues songs” (Cataliotti 105). Cataliotti notes that “one of the earliest recorded usages of a variation on this line can be found in pianist/vocalist Leroy Carr’s ‘Shady Lane Blues’ recorded in 1934” (115) and publicly available while Hurston was writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. M. Johnson does not mention the several other passages that are not as commercially recognizable, but are also blues couplets. The rhymes and rhythm of Hurston’s prose and vernacular, though more loosely formed than the three line stanza, is still so distinct that it warrants extensive analysis. I contend that Hurston accomplishes this rhythmic musicality in two ways: first, through repetition of words and sounds and second, with the AAB rhyme scheme common in blues. The examples of the latter provided below illustrate both the rhythm and rhyme of blues music. Though individually these techniques are common in many music genres, their combination is a characteristic of blues music.

*Repetition:*

Music is built on rhythm. In western notation, compositions are set to a time signature which “indicates the meter of the piece” (Rastall).<sup>26</sup> Meter “functions as a dynamic temporal framework” (London) that provides structure to the piece. Repetition is one of the ways rhythm and meter are created. Repetition can include repeated notes (tones), words (sounds or accents), as well as repetitive beats, by which I mean the length or the duration of beats. Specifically in twelve-bar blues, as in the example above, the first and second lines of the three line stanza are identical; the second line is a repeat of the first. This repetition gives structure to the stanza. Even if not an entire line, one “device that often occurs in the blues and that links it to the African tradition is the use of repeated short melodic-rhythmic phrases or riffs” (Burnim and Maultsby 88).

However, two clarifications need to be made. One, there is a difference between the terms “rhythm” and “meter.” As Robert Pinsky notes in *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*, “rhythm is the sound of an actual line, while meter is the abstract pattern behind the rhythm” (52). Of course, the focus of this analysis is on the rhythm of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, but in order to understand the rhythm that Hurston creates, it is necessary to look at the meter she uses as well. Both are responsible for creating movement in a piece. The second clarification

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<sup>26</sup> Although earlier forms of African American music (such as the early spirituals) were not written, sung, or composed in standard western notation (and thus why there were limitations with transcriptions), blues music, especially the blues that Hurston would have heard commercially recorded and publicly performed, would have been written in western notation.

is that “repetition can be thought of as the ultimate in like sounds,” so ultimately “rhyme, however we define it, is a matter of unlikeness as well as likeness” (Pinsky 79). In my discussion of repetition, I focus on the similarity between like sounds that are repeated. In the second section, I examine rhymes, which occur in varying degrees of likeness, as opposed to just the repetition of similar sounds.

Though repetition is expected in a structured song, for example with the chorus which is the section of text and music repeated after each stanza or verse, its presence in fiction can be surprising. Indeed, repetition is more expected in poetry than in prose, for in poetry, the refrain is “a phrase or verse that recurs in intervals, especially at the end of a stanza” (Clark). For sounds, one of the ways to establish repetition is with alliteration and consonance, techniques Hurston employs often. For example, Hurston writes: “Steel and stone all crushed and crumbled like wood. The mother of malice had trifled with men” (*Their Eyes* 169). Here, Hurston uses alliteration in steel/stone, crushed/crumbled, and mother/malice/men and consonance with the sounds “st,” “cr,” and “m.” Both techniques create rhythm in the line.

Repetition in dialogue and prose narration creates movement in the text. Repetition pushes the lines forward. Repetition creates a cohesive structure built on similarity and expectations. Repetition of sounds creates rhythm because the passage hinges on likeness. Hurston uses all of these elements of repetition in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She uses repetition to create rhythm by

“worrying the line” which “in literature is a type of slant repetition; it is not mere repetition but repetition with some alteration of the phrase, an alteration that will impress on the readers’ mind the importance of the idea being conveyed” (Jimoh 37). The following examples analyze lines that illustrate the rhythm of blues; they are solid, “short beats of text” (Tracy 83). These lines are rhythmic in their repetition and demonstrate the “verbal riff” aspect Jimoh elucidates in her text (38). A riff is a repeated phrase, and in music, the riff “appeared in the accompaniments of many early blues, being particularly suited to their repeating structure” (Robinson). Jimoh states that “riffing, unlike worrying the line, is a subtle echoing effect that is used within a text to resound and often reformulate an important concept or key idea found within the narrative” (37). Repetition not only creates rhythm in the text, but also emphasizes the importance of the passage or the content of the dialogue.

To conceptually present the examples that follow, this section is organized as follows: first, with examples of repeated words and sounds, including examples of alliteration, and second, with examples of inversions. Several times, Hurston uses inversions, or chiasmi, turning phrases within her prose and dialogue; this repetitive reflection is another way she creates rhythm.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* begins with Janie’s return to Eatonville. Janie hastily left Eatonville with Tea Cake, leaving no explanation for her disappearance; the towns’ residents are curious, yet hesitant to approach her. The residents remain in the background, watching Janie reenter their lives. At

first they speculate as to where she has been and why she has returned alone; they gossip, their “words walking without masters” (*Their Eyes 2*). Here, Hurston illustrates the unpredictability of gossip by mimicking its wayward pattern with movement in the lines. She achieves this by using alliteration to set a pace and creates downbeats with the “w” sound. To accentuate the apprehension of the townspeople, Hurston writes: “But nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody even thought to swallow spit” (*Their Eyes 2*). Hurston, here, with the repetition of the whole word “nobody,” not just sound, again creates movement in the line and the reader is propelled forward through the text. Additionally, the words “moved” and “spoke” which follow “nobody” are monosyllabic, which creates a steady beat and draws attention to the timid townspeople.

Hurston uses repetition to develop relationships in the novel; repetition draws attention to the scene and causes pause. In one of the first examples in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston uses repetition to develop intimacy. The one person in the town Janie does talk to and confide in is her best friend Phoeby. It is their relationship that creates the narrative frame of the novel and allows Janie to tell her story. When Phoeby urges her friend to quell the gossip in town and address the residents, Janie replies that it is not worth the trouble and that regardless, Phoeby can relay Janie’s words to the town because Janie’s “tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (*Their Eyes 6*). Here, Janie bequeaths her story to her friend. By doing so, Janie participates in the oral culture and Phoeby is the recipient of this oral inheritance. Phoeby replies to Janie’s suggestion with

rhythm: “If you so desire Ah’ll tell ‘em what you tell me to tell ‘em” (*Their Eyes* 6). As in the first example, this line moves because of the repetition of the word “tell” and the likeness in “m” sounds. Note, that Janie, by placing her story “in [her] friend’s mouf,” “place[s] [a] musical phrase” (Jimoh 38) in Phoeby’s mouth, a verbal riff. Furthermore, Hurston’s choice to write “I” as “Ah” visually captures the dialect on the page and the southern drawl easily translates audibly. Additionally, Hurston lengthens the duration of the word “I” by writing “Ah” and creates a pause in the middle of the line. As a result, the latter part of the line picks up tempo after the break.

Though a different form of intimacy, repetition can also create tension, as in the case between Janie and her grandmother, Nanny. When Nanny announces that she has arranged for Janie to marry Logan Killicks, the two women exchange the following words:

“Janie, youse uh ‘oman, now, so--”

“Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain’t no real ‘oman yet...”

“Yeah, Janie, youse got yo’ womanhood on yuh” (*Their Eyes* 12).

The rhythm of the two characters’ dialogue could easily be the lyrics of a blues duet. The repetition of “‘oman” is a “verbal riff.” The alliteration of “Naw, Nanny, Naw,” adds movement to the line. Hurston creates a solid downbeat by using a name at the beginning of each line, which gives the dialogue a steady meter. She builds additional movement with the interruption of the speaker at the end of each line; the enjambed line keeps the beat flowing into the next line. This

interruption creates friction in the lines and between the two characters, revealing their disagreement on the subject of Janie's marriage. Furthermore, the entire passage is a solid, short, even thirty syllables. Remarkably, many of the following examples' in this section have a total number of syllables that are divisible by five. Hurston's meter is consistent. Though she creates rhythm in the lines through the sounds she uses, because her meter is also steady, she adds another layer to her rhythm and a foundation for her sound.

Hurston continues to create tension through repetition which heightens opposing views. As mentioned previously, Janie seeks Nanny's advice soon after she weds Logan and expresses her desire for love be part of her marriage:

“But Nanny, Ah wants to want him sometimes.  
Ah don't want him to do all the wantin” (*Their Eyes* 23).

Janie's thrice repeated verbal “want” riff contains the characteristic repetition of the blues. Hurston also conveys Janie's mood with this repetition. The line whines and betrays the young age of the speaker. Notice too, that both “short bursts of text” (Tracy 38) are ten syllables each, which enhances the rhythm of the lines, and is consistent with the meter Hurston establishes in the prior example. Janie and Nanny's conversation continues and Nanny explains how love confuses things: “*Dat's* just what's got us *uh* pullin' and *uh haulin'* and sweatin' *and* doin' from can't *see* in de mornin'” (*Their Eyes* 23, emphasis mine). Read aloud, the line flows and by ending five words with the consonance “in,”

encourages the speaker to pick up the tempo and move the line along. Nanny's explanation is a perfect example of a verbal riff; the recurrent sounds of "uh" and "in" nicely illustrate the repetition common in blues music. The back-and-forth, the push-and-pull between the "in" sounds and the other words in the line build a steady rhythm. The result is a playful sound, one that creates a rapid pace for the speaker. Furthermore, the line can be divided into five short lines of five syllables each (twenty-five total), which is, again, a purposeful, divisible pattern. I have italicized what would be the beginning of each line to emphasize this division. These lines are a beautiful piece of metered dialogue.

In the following example, Hurston uses repetition to develop the strain of Janie and Joe's marriage. During one of Joe's rants where he tries to establish a gender hierarchy and enforce strict gender roles, he utters what could be considered the most rhythmical and musical line of the novel: "Somebody got to think for women and *chillun and chickens and cows*" (*Their Eyes* 71). The alliteration of the sounds "ch" and the hard "c", causes the line to pick up tempo after "women" and although horribly degrading, the line is rhythmically and lyrically beautiful. The choice of the simple "and" to cause interruption creates a line with perfect iambic meter. Obviously, Hurston could have chosen other animals to insert into this line, but because she chooses chickens and cows and repeatedly uses both the "ch" and the hard "c" sounds, her dialogue has a steady downbeat. Pinsky, describes the use of iambic pentameter as "potential[ly] attracti[ve] and potential[ly] monoton[ous]" (101). This description aptly applies to

Hurston, especially in the above example. Because of her specific choices in sound and meter, which dictate her choices in animals, Hurston intentionally creates rhythm and movement.

Janie is understandably hesitant when after two failed marriages, she starts to have feelings for a younger man. She dismisses Tea Cake's flattery because he only gives it at night and insists that he would not feel the same way in the morning when the romance of night has dissipated. To prove her wrong, he visits early one morning and through the use of repetition, Hurston relays Tea Cake's intent to win Janie's affection and trust: "you need tellin' and showin', and dat's whut Ah'm doin'" (*Their Eyes* 107). Here, the repetition isn't the same word, but the same end sound - "in" - as seen in earlier examples. Hurston, by following the "in" sound with "and," creates a pause in the line, a place for the speaker to catch breath. These pauses keep the line moving rhythmically forward. Pinsky observes that "the stress on a syllable in English is not inherent in the sound, but relative. A syllable is stressed or unstressed only in relation to the syllables around it" (12). The same reasoning applies to the above quotation. The words Hurston chooses determine the breaths and the pace of the line. Because she interrupts Tea Cake's speech with "and" and uses the same consonance, "in", the words slide into one another. This sets the pace of the line and creates the underlying iambic meter that gives rhythm to the line.

To again draw attention to feeling, Hurston employs repetition. Part of Janie's hesitation in courting Tea Cake is due to the stories that spread through

the town gossips. Before Janie, a woman, Mrs. Tyler, left with a younger man named Who Flung, only to return betrayed and penniless after he deserted her. Desperate to return home, she resorts to begging: “She had stood on the streets and smiled and smiled, and then smiled and begged and then just begged” (*Their Eyes* 119). Here, Hurston uses the repetition of blues music to write Mrs. Tyler’s blues song. Broken by an unfaithful man, Mrs. Tyler literally has to sing her woes to beg for a ride and money home. In contrast to the earlier examples, the hard consonants of the words “smiled” and “begged” slow the line down rather than speed it up. These words are heavier than the preceding example of “in” sounds which easily slur together and thus increase the pace of the line. Furthermore, Hurston uses polysyndeton, or the use of several conjunctions, to establish the rhythm of the line. By choosing to repeat words and to break the line up with the conjunction “and,” Hurston slows the line down and by doing so, brings attention to Mrs. Tyler’s plight and the ponderous words lend a sadness, a blues to her situation.

Hurston again relays emotion through repetition as the hurricane brews. Having already established the immediacy of the approaching storm, Hurston reinforces the danger in repetition and, as with the above example, with polysyndeton: “Louder and higher and lower and wider the sound and the motion spread, mounting, sinking, darking” (*Their Eyes* 158). Hurston, by using the repeating end sound of “er,” speeds the tempo of the first part of the line and consequently relays the urgency of danger and the delicacy of survival. The line

builds in crescendo, relaying the panic that those facing the storm feel. The sounds, the loudness of the storm, come alive in this line partly due to the pacing of the line which increases with the conjunction “and.” In this example, Hurston combines the rapid, lighter “er” syllables with harder, longer sounds ending in “ing.” The effect is to highlight the approach of the storm with the lighter first half of the line and relay the precariousness of the situation in the latter half with the thicker “ing” sounds which slow down the line. As the storm unfolds, Hurston continues to use repetition to indicate the severity of the storm: The wind, “rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses” (*Their Eyes* 162). Here, the length and structure of the line increases after each use of “rolling.” By indicating more destruction with added length, Hurston paints the intensity of the storm. As the damage increases, the threat to peoples’ lives do as well. The lines mimic this increase.

The second repetition technique Hurston uses is inversion, used in both writing and in musical composition. There are several uses of inversion in music, one of which is melodic inversion, where the “melody follows the shape of the original in mirror image” (Whittall). In fiction, inversion is the “reversal of the normal order of words, typically for rhetorical effect” (New Oxford American Dictionary), also known as chiasmus. Hurston uses inversion to emphasize scenes and context, but also to create a rhythm with the “turn” of the words.

The first chiasmus occurs on the first page of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Describing women's hearts and strong-willed memories, Hurston writes, "Now, women, forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget" (*Their Eyes* 1). The latter part of the phrase, though not exact, mirrors the first part. By using an inversion, Hurston makes the reader pause to consider the implications of the phrase. With this repetition, Hurston emphasizes that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a woman's story. The words reveal there are hardships that characters will want to forget, but also that they will share memorable experiences. Interestingly, this phrase is set up in opposition to men's dreams of which men are not in control and that mock them for their wishes. In contrast to men's lack of control, Hurston, after the chiasmus, states that for women, "the dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly" (*Their Eyes* 1), indicating that women are the more practical sex and take control of their desires. In setting up this binary between sexes, the reader is made aware that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a woman's, Janie's, story and that despite what may follow, including antiquated gender roles, the story revolves around Janie gaining control, searching for her desires, and obtaining both.

Joe's ambition sets Janie and himself apart from the other residents in the town of Eatonville. The other residents both admire and resent the Starks for their difference, but they are also not sure how to behave "when one of [their] own color could be so different it put [them] in a wonder" (*Their Eyes* 48). Here,

Hurston uses another inversion to illustrate the town's reaction: "You keep seeing your sister in the 'gator and the 'gator in your sister, and you'd rather not" (*Their Eyes* 48). Hurston uses a chiasmus here to create pause and highlight the confusion of the town. By emphasizing the confusion, Hurston allows the reader to consider the town's perspective and understand that their hesitation is because even though they recognize the Starks as members of the African American society, their middle-class standing alienates them from the other members of the town.

Hurston uses inversion to call attention to Joe's anger and admonishment. Following his statement that "somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows" (*Their Eyes* 71), he continues to berate Janie and says, "When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" (*Their Eyes* 71). Here, the chiasmus draws the reader into the abusive monologue that Joe unleashes on Janie. The reiteration of his gendered tirade emphasizes Joe's ridiculous expectations and need for Janie's submission.

To heighten the devastating and widespread destruction of the hurricane, in addition to simple repetition, Hurston also uses an inversion: "Houses without roofs, and roofs without houses" (*Their Eyes* 169). This line illustrates the disarray of the Everglades after the storm and the loss for the survivors. The inversion allows the reader to experience the destruction twofold.

*Rhythm and Rhyme:*

Hurston's text is unarguably musical and her use of repetition and inversion are impressive; they make the novel rhythmical. However, even more impressive are the passages this section discusses that adhere more closely to the blues couplet structure and illustrate Hurston's use of both the rhythm and rhyme of blues music.<sup>27</sup>

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* opens with blues rhythm and rhyme. The opening paragraph reads:

For some they come in with the tide.  
For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight,  
Never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes  
Away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time (*Their Eyes* 1).

Though obviously not adhering to an exact, structured, even meter throughout, the passage is still rhythmical. The first line is exact iambic meter which sets the pace for the following lines. Hurston keeps the passage moving with the long "i" end rhymes of tide, sight, eyes, and Time. From the beginning, Hurston sets the musical tone of the novel.

Hurston emphasizes child innocence by using a blues couplet. Janie grows up unaware of her ethnicity. She is the only African American in a school with all other white children and assumes that she is the same. Upon seeing a photograph of the class one day, Janie exclaims:

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<sup>27</sup> When it is visually useful, I have set off the lines (even if they are shorter than five lines, at which length, MLA requires that the quotation be centered).

“Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn’t know  
Ah wuzn’t white till Ah was round six years old” (*Their Eyes* 8).

Here, the words “know” and “old” form a couplet. Though the meter wavers from an exact meter, the couplet is still extremely rhythmical, partly because of the alliteration with the “w” and “wh” sounds that appear in both lines. Hurston continues the blues rhyme of this scene just a few lines later:

“Dat’s where Ah wuz s’posed to be,  
but Ah couldn’t recognize dat dark chile as me.  
So Ah ast, ‘where is me? Ah don’t see me” (*Their Eyes* 9).

Hurston draws attention to the child’s confusion through the use of repetition. By repeating the word “me” and the long “e” sound, the lines increase in tempo and the pace stresses Janie’s surprise, and embarrassment, at causing a scene. The passage crescendoes and the reader can hear Janie’s voice escalate with the repeated question. Additionally, the repetitive like rhymes of “be” and “me” draw further attention to the content and therefore, to the repetition.

Hurston expresses the awkwardness of first meetings and courtship with rhythm and rhyme. When Janie meets Joe for the first time, he sees that she is young, beautiful, and assumes she is single. He asks after her parents and Janie replies:

“Dey dead, Ah reckon. Ah wouldn’t know ‘bout ‘em ‘cause mah  
Grandma raised me. She dead too.”  
“She dead too! Well, who’s *lookin’* after a *lil* girl-chile lak  
you?” (*Their Eyes* 28, emphasis mine)

In this passage, there are two speakers, which lends to natural repetition (as seen in the earlier scene between Janie and Nanny). Here, Joe both repeats Janie's verbal riff and rounds out the couplet with the too/you rhyme, thus combining the rhythm and rhyme of blues music. Additionally, the rhythm of the line hinges on the use of the word "dead" three times; this repetition moves the dialogue forward. Again, Hurston creates space and pace with the use of the longer "Ah" instead of "I." Also, with the successive consonance of the letter "l" in "lookin," "lil," "girl-chile," and "lak," Hurston creates a lilt to Joe's speech which conveys his flirtatious intentions. Moreover, Hurston's lines are again divisible into five syllables (each line is fifteen syllables long), which I have italicized to emphasize the downbeat.

One of the improvements Joe makes to Eatonville is to give the town artificial light. He throws a light unveiling party and a big feast for the ceremony:

"Seem lak all de rest uh y'all put tuhgether oughta be able tuh scrape up two mo.'

Tell yo' womenfolks tuh do 'round 'bout some pies and cakes and sweet p'tater pone" (*Their Eyes* 44).

Although not the same number of syllables, the above two lines are of similar length and the alteration between hard consonants and soft sounds propel the lines forward. Additionally, the lines form a couplet with the slant rhymes "mo'" and "pone." Hurston continues the blues one line later with a perfect rhyme: "The

women got together the sweets and the men looked after the meats” (*Their Eyes* 45). Following so closely to the previous rhythmical example heightens the overall rhythm of this passage.

Hurston highlights the comedic interaction of Eatonville’s two talkative characters, Sam Watson and Lige Moss, with the use of blues rhythm and rhyme. Sam and Lige often hang out on the front porch of the store Janie and Joe own. They argue in a goodnatured manner and provide a rhythmic background noise to the store. During one conversation (Hurston blends the two voices so it is not apparent whether Sam or Lige is talking), one refers to John the Conqueror as a man who is “worth his salt”:

“He wouldn’t dig potatoes, and he wouldn’t rake hay:  
He wouldn’t take a whipping, and he wouldn’t run away” (*Their Eyes* 67).

This line, which I split to emphasize the rhythm and rhyme, forms a couplet. Hurston stresses the rhythm by dividing the line evenly in four places, all of which begin with the words “he wouldn’t.” Her use of isocolon, or successive verbal constructions of the same length, creates a steady pattern and structure to the line. This generates an easy flow to the phrase through repetition. Hurston creates downbeats with the repetition of “he” and forms a couplet with the rhyme of hay/away. Additionally, the stresses of these two lines are iambic, save for the heavy word “potatoes.”

Hurston again emphasizes Janie's apprehension towards Tea Cake, this time with both rhythm and rhyme. When Janie first meets Tea Cake, he teaches her to play checkers. Janie banters with him, in part because she likes him, but also in part because she does not know or trust him. After a game of checkers, she says:

“It’s all right tuh come teach me,  
but don’t come tuh cheat me” (*Their Eyes* 96).

Once again, Hurston's dialogue rhymes and there is a persistent rhythm to the vernacular she pens with her emphasis on the consonance “t” in the words “right,” “tuh,” “teach,” “tuh,” and “cheat.” Also, Janie sings a warning of cheating and gambling, both common themes in blues.

Tea Cake woos Janie by teasing her and playing these games with her in which Joe did not allow her to engage. The first time he speaks with her in the store, when he leaves, he tosses his hat at her feet. Janie tosses it back, laughing, and Tea Cake notes:

“Even if she had uh brick  
she couldn’t hurt yuh wid it” (*Their Eyes* 98).

This couplet not only rhymes, but each line has seven syllables. The duration of the lines and syllables are identical. The above couplet is a perfect example of the “short bursts of text” (Tracy 83) blues singers often sing. Additionally, the

hard sound of the consonant “d” appears at the beginning, middle, and end of the phrase, creating symmetry.

Janie and Tea Cake continue their courtship, bantering flirtatiously. On Tea Cake’s second visit, he tries to impress Janie by boasting that he will acquire a boat for her. Hurston encapsulates this banter in a blues couplet:

“Ah’d git dat ship out from under him so slick  
till he’d be walkin’ de water lak ole Peter befo’ he knowed it” (*Their Eyes* 101).

Tea Cake woos Janie by talking in slant rhyme. Again, the line break is to emphasize the rhythm of the second line. The combination of the alliterated phrase “walkin’ de water” followed by the hard “d” sound of “knowed,” which slurs into “it,” creates obvious downbeats. The hard consonants of “Ah’d,” “dat,” “under,” “de,” and “Peter” heighten the accented beats and the lines create a verbal swagger.

Janie’s skepticism of Tea Cake persists and Hurston draws attention again to her hesitance through blues rhythm and rhyme. There are twelve years of age between Janie and Tea Cake (Janie is older) and Janie believes that Tea Cake will not truly commit to her. Tea Cake tells her that “You got me in de go-long” (*Their Eyes* 105), but still, Janie does not believe that he will stick around. Tea Cake bets her that he will, but then says he bets she is not the betting type. Janie teases him by using a couplet:

“Ah’m born but Ah ain’t dead.  
No tellin’ whut Ah’m liable to do yet” (*Their Eyes* 106).

Hurston again forms the rhythm of blues around the repetition “Ah’m,” which structures the meter of the line. Furthermore, Hurston breaks up each line in the middle with the rhyme “but” and “whut” and these rhymes create rhythm with this division. The sound “Ah” occurs three times, a perfect example of a verbal riff.

Janie and Tea Cake’s blues persist outside of Eatonville and Hurston continues their song with more blues couplets. Eventually Janie and Tea Cake move down to Jacksonville, Florida to pick beans and live happily together on the muck. After Tea Cake, as noted earlier, abandons Janie for two days when they first arrive, he returns, with the promise to win back the money he “borrowed” by gambling. Tea Cake assumes that where he has to go to gamble is not the kind of place that Janie would like, but assures her that he will not be gone long:

“so it ain’t no place for you tuh be,  
But ‘twon’t be long befo’ you see me” (*Their Eyes* 125).

Here, as with the example before, Tea Cake sings his goodbyes in a perfect rhyme. Furthermore, each line has the same number of beats and although the meter slightly wavers, these lines are mostly iambic. The result of these beats and meter is a rhythm that rocks easily back and forth and creates a push-and-pull motion between the words. In this scene, Tea Cake is begging for Janie’s forgiveness and he succeeds in obtaining it, in part, because he sings to her.

The motion of the words betray Tea Cake as a seductive bluesman and persuade Janie to forgive Tea Cake's errant ways.

Despite the happiness of the couple, Hurston uses blues to create a bleak setting. As mentioned, Tea Cake abuses Janie, but Janie also suspects him (falsely) of infidelity, and their relationship suffers its ups and downs. When the hurricane hits and Tea Cake is bitten by the dog, Janie desperately searches for help:

“How kin Ah find uh doctor fuh yo’ face in all dis mess?”  
“Ain’t got de damn doctor tuh study ‘bout. Us needs uh place tuh rest”  
(*Their Eyes* 167).

This couplet contains twenty-five syllables. The solid, divisible lines generate short, purposeful beats to the “bursts of text.” Hurston again uses repetition to emphasize meter. In the first line, the sound “f” appears several times in the words “find,” “fuh,” and “face.” In the second line, the alliteration of the phrase “de damn doctor” gives intentional flow and meter to the line.

In one of the few instances where white and black worlds collide Hurston draws attention to the tension by using blues music to relay conflict. Before Janie and Tea Cake are allowed to return home, Tea Cake is summoned by white guards to help bury the victims of the hurricane. While working, the guards order:

“Hey, dere, y’all. Don’t dump dem bodies in de hole lak dat!  
Examine every last one of’em and find out If they’s white or black!”  
(*Their Eyes* 170).

Hurston easily could have ended the first line with “like you’re doing,” but she chooses purposefully to form a blues couplet with the rhyme dat/black. Also note the way the vernacular is emphasized in the first line. The intentional alliteration of the consonant “d,” gives the line a steady beat with the words “dere,” the phrase “don’t dump dem bodies,” “de,” and “dat.” If read aloud, the passage consists of a steady, rhythmic thirty syllables (“every” has three, but only two are usually pronounced in speech).

Quite evidently, Hurston beautifully composes her novel to mimic a blues song. In doing so, she develops the story and its characters; the readers are drawn close and care about Janie’s quest for love. Her hurt, her wounds, and the abuse she suffers are all the more poignant due to the intimacy of the blues song. The audience listens, enraptured, to Janie sing her blues. Hurston’s mastery of these techniques makes for an especially musical read.

Even more impressive is the skill with which Hurston scores the musicality of the vernacular. The characters’ conversations are bright, pulsating. The conversations rhyme, move, sing; they are sounds on a page. The way in which Hurston pens the vernacular captures the drawl common to the southeastern region of America. Hurston makes her research of culture and people available

to her readers by composing authentic dialect. The conversations beg to be performed aloud and even readers not familiar with the region's dialect can hear the Southern drawl. In this sense, Hurston accomplishes what transcribers could not in standard notation: she accurately represents the nuances (sounds, rhythms, timbres) of African American music.

The musicality that Hurston pens is vigorous and reticent at the same time. Because the blues couplets are metered and move the text forward, it is easy to get caught up in the rhythm of the lines. The novel's subtlety can (and has) gone unnoticed, but the rhymes are thoughtfully chosen and the rhythm beautifully arranged. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is wonderfully musical. Hurston proves to be an accomplished anthropologist, writer, and musician with this novel. Janie is a classic blues singer whose story not only encapsulates the themes of blues music but whose performance *is* a blues song.

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## APPENDIX A

### ST LOUIS BLUES

1

I hate to see de ev'nin' sun go down,  
Hate to see de ev'nin' sun go down,  
'Cause my baby, he done lef' dis town.

Feelin' tomorrow lak I feel today,  
Feel tomorrow lak I feel today,  
I'll pack my trunk, make ma get away.

St. Louis woman wid her diamon' rings  
Pulls dat man roun' by her apron strings  
'Twant for powder an' for store bought hair  
De man I love would not gone nowhere.

#### CHORUS

Got de St. Louis Blues jes' as blue as ah can be,  
Dat man got a heart lak a rock cast in the sea.  
Or else he wouldn't have gone so far from me  
(Dog-gone it!) I loves dat man lak a schoolboy loves his pie,  
Lak a Kentucky Col'nel loves his mint an' rye,  
I'll love ma baby till the day ah die.

2

Been to Gypsy to get ma fortune tole,  
To de Gypsy done got ma fortune tole.  
'Cause I'm most wile 'bout ma Jelly roll.

Gypsy done tole me that you wear no black,  
Yes, she done tole me, "Don't you wear no black."  
Go to St. Louis, you can win him back.

Help me to Cairo, make St. Louis maself,  
Git to Cairo find ma ole friend Jeff,  
Gwine to pin maself close to his side,  
If ah flag his train, I sho' can ride.

## CHORUS

3

You ought to see dat stovepipe brown of mine,  
Lak he owns de Dimon' Joseph line.  
He'd make a cross-eyed o' man go stone blind.  
Blacker than midnight, teeth lak flags of truce,  
Blackest man in de whole St. Louis.  
Blacker de berry, sweeter is the juice.  
About a crap game he knows a pow'ful lot,  
But when work-time comes he's on de dot.  
Gwine to ask him for a cold ten-spot.  
What it takes to git it, he's certainly got.

## CHORUS

A black-headed gal make a freight train jump the track.  
Said a black-headed gal make a freight train jump the track,  
But a long tall gal makes a preacher ball the jack.

## EXTRA CHORUS

Lawd, a blonde-headed woman makes a good man leave the town,  
I said a blonde-headed woman makes a good man leave the town,  
But a red-headed woman makes a boy slap his papa down.  
O ashes to ashes and dust to dust,  
I said ashes to ashes and dust to dust,  
If my blues don't get you my jazzing must (Peek 145).

## APPENDIX B

### BUMBLE BEE (COLUMBIA VERSION)

Bumble bee, bumble bee, please come back to me  
Bumble bee, bumble bee, please come back to me  
He got the best old stinger any bumble bee that I ever seen

He stung me this morning, I been looking for him all day long  
He stung me this morning, I been looking for him all day long  
Lord, it got me to the place, hate to see my bumble bee leave home

Bumble bee, bumble bee, don't be gone so long  
Bumble bee, bumble bee, don't be gone so long  
You's my bumble bee and you're needed here at home

I can't stand to hear him buzz, buzz, buzz  
Come in, bumble bee, want you to stop your fuss  
You're my bumble bee and you know your stuff  
Oh, sting me, bumble bee, until I get enough

Bumble bee, bumble bee, don't be gone so long  
Bumble bee, bumble bee, don't be gone so long  
You's my bumble bee and you're needed here at home

I don't mind you going, ain't going to stay so long  
Don't mind you going, don't be gone so long  
You's my bumble bee and you're needed here at home

I can't stand to hear him buzz, buzz, buzz  
Come in, bumble bee, I want you to stop your fuss  
You's my bumble bee and you know your stuff  
Oh, sting me bumble bee, until I get enough (Garon 105)

## APPENDIX C

### BIG BOY BLUES

Oh run here, daddy, tell me what's on your mind  
Oh run here, daddy, tell me what's on your mind  
Oh, keeps me worried, grieving all the time

There's two things I can't understand  
There's two things I can't understand  
Why these married women crazy 'bout the back door man

[*SPOKEN*]

Lord, toot it, big boy, toot it  
Lord, that's my back door man

[*SUNG*]

I'm goin' up on the mountain, goin' by the railroad tracks  
I'm goin' up on the mountain, goin' by the railroad tracks  
I lost my daddy and I can't turn back

I got a letter this morning, it didn't read just right  
I got a letter this morning, it didn't read just right  
That means I'm leaving to walk the streets all night. (Davis 202)