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Symbols in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Hurston's symbolism in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is reawakening. Most metaphors and symbolic elements are related to Janie's womanhood and the sense of freedom. Symbols represent the evolution and ultimate development of Janie's character, who blossoms, matures, and finds her identity. Hurston uses the reoccurring motif of symbolization of the protagonist's hair, the pear tree, and the horizon to illustrate not only Janie's growth but also other characters' position towards her.

One of the strongest symbolic motifs is Janie's hair, which represents her pitch of freedom. Joe Starks is mesmerized by her hair, but after they marry, he orders Janie to hide the hair as a symbol of his ownership (*Summary and Analysis of Their Eyes Were Watching God: Based on the Book by Zora Neale Hurston* 36). On the other hand, Tea Cake sees her hair as a token of good luck – after combing Janie's hair, he brings a few hairs with him to a card game. Yet, after he dies, Janie lets her hair down, claiming a new beginning as a woman who is in control of her own destiny (*Summary and Analysis of Their Eyes Were Watching God: Based on the Book by Zora Neale Hurston* 36). This motif was also reinforced in her childhood, when the protagonist used to wear her hair down. It should be confidently stated that Janie's hairstyle is a symbol of her inner and outer freedom.

Horizon is a strong symbol in Hurston novel, which has religious Vodou background

besides its primary meaning. According to Sheffler, Janie represents the reincarnation of the Vodou goddess of love and women, Erzulie (2). Janie reflects the main characteristics of the goddess: sensual nature, skin tone, and preference for the blue color (Sheffler 2). While Janie appears as Erzulie, Tea Cake is Legba, the gateway god. He opens the door to the Great Road, which itself is a symbol of the connection between the spirit world and the temporal world, so-called horizon (Sheffler 4). For Janie, the horizon became a symbol of the opportunity for a better life, the future. Using the revelation about the Vodou, the sense of the horizon gets deeper – Tea Cake, as representation of the spirit, opened the horizon for Janie. Eventually, it turns out that she could only pursue her bright future after meeting Tea Cake.

A pear tree is one of the most obvious symbols used by Hurston, which translates into life, love, sexuality. The blossoming tree is a standard representation of growing into a mature woman, exploring love and own sexuality (Chadwick 49). When Janie is lying beneath the tree, she watches a bee gather pollen from the pear flowers. That becomes an idea of a perfect relationship for her, and she later says that Logan and Joe were not letting her blossom. According to Kumar, Janie's quest for identity is strongly bonded with the idea of love and idealistic marriage she discovered under the pear tree (9). When she meets Tea Cake, her dreams of love and ideal relationship become true (Hurston 8). Janie says, that "he could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps" (Hurston 106). The repeating motif of a blossoming pear tree allows readers to see how the main character's attitude towards love and womanhood changes through time.

To sum up, there are three main reoccurring symbols in the novel – horizon, Janie's hair, and the blossoming pear tree. The symbolic motifs the author uses give out narrative to Janie's

development as a character and as a woman. The symbols have become an essential part of Janie's personality. They represent how freed she feels, how she foresees her future, and how she perceives love.

Works Cited

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