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Zora Neale Hurston's Their eyes were watching God: A stylistic analysis and its application to the teaching of writing

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ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD:
A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE TEACHING
OF WRITING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Joseph Stanley Klepadlo
June 1990
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ABSTRACT

Creating an effective voice in a piece of writing is a difficult task for student writers who are faced with the anxiety of their limited stylistic knowledge. Providing students with examples of well-established voices would increase their stylistic choices, freeing them from their anxiety.

In particular, women writers of the past who were successful creating effective voices can provide many worthwhile stylistic examples for the student writer. Many of these women writers had to solve problems similar to the problems student writers face.

The fact that Hurston solved these problems can provide many stylistic clues to the writer trying to discover voice. Hurston experiments with language and style until she creates a language of her own. Ideally, student writers search for autonomous language that can effectively express their ideas. In a sense, Hurston searched for a voice in the same manner that a student writer must. An analysis of Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God will provide many fertile examples that students can use as models to create an effective voice of their own.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. iii

INTRODUCTION ........................................................... 1

CHAPTER

I. THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD:
   A CALL TO WOMEN ................................................... 9

II. EXPERIMENTS WITH STYLE AND LANGUAGE .................... 16
   Active Language: Developing an Energetic
   Voice of Authority ................................................ 19

III. SENTENCE EXPERIMENTATION .................................... 28

IV. EXPERIMENTS WITH VOICE ........................................ 35

V. LEARNING FROM A VOICE THAT GROWS .......................... 47

VI. MODELS FOR IMITATION AND INVENTION ....................... 54

WORKS CITED .......................................................... 58
INTRODUCTION

One of the main problems in a writing class is helping students understand the rhetorical role that voice plays in engaging a reader in a piece of writing. In his essay, "The Essential Delay: When Writer's Block Isn't," Donald M. Murray says "that an effective piece of writing creates the illusion of a writer speaking to a reader. The writing voice provides the intensity that captures the reader; the voice provides the music and grace and surprise that keeps the reader interested; the voice communicates the emotions and the mood that makes the reader involved" (225). Therefore, the creation of an effective voice in the writing process is vital if the reader is to become properly engaged with the text.

During my Internship in Education 495 (an upper division writing class) at California State University, San Bernardino, I noticed how difficult it was for most students to establish an effective voice of their own. Many students' writings lacked a sense of propriety. Fear and anxiety permeated the students' language, as if they were feeling bound by rigid rules that left them unable to express themselves fluently and effectively. I began to see similarities between the problems these student writers were having and the problems that many women writers have
had in the past establishing effective voices. As I explored this problem, I concluded that student writers would benefit greatly if they examined the texts of women who had been successful establishing effective voices in their writing.

Writers must search for language that they can use to create effective voices. By experimenting with language and style, writers can create their own language that will help them produce authentic voices in their writing. Many women and student writers have felt serious blocks during their writing process. Women writers have felt impositions from a male-dominated literary tradition, while student writers have faced the anxiety of their limited stylistic knowledge.

Some women writers have felt that they have been "condemned either to adopt the masculine discourse that leaves them essentially unexpressed, or to engage in a masquerade by which they mime the masculine syntax and take upon themselves the signs of presence and power" (Donoghue 31). Similarly, student writers find themselves trapped by either their limited stylistic knowledge, their own expectations of how they should write, or the expectations of their instructors. Consequently, it becomes difficult for many women and students to feel the stylistic freedom necessary to establish a voice of their own.
Likewise, Luce Irigaray complains in her *Ce Sexe Qui N’em Est Pas Un* that all the statements she makes are “thus borrowed from a model that leaves my sex aside... or else my utterances are unintelligible according to the code in force” (Donoghue 32). Irigaray felt that the code in force was male and that this code imposed itself upon her writing. How then can writers break through literary impositions to establish a code of their own, one that will provide them with creative tools to construct a voice of their own?

In “Women Re Woman: No Important Woman Writer, I Think, Has Really Wanted To Write ‘Like A Man.’ They Had Too Much Taste,” Hortense Calisher addresses this issue of literary impositions and points out some failed attempts by women writers. She argues that many women writers, such as Katherine Porter, Carson McCullers, and Mary McCarthy, reacted to the code in force by assuming a “neutral voice and ignoring whole areas of their female sensibilities and experience” (189). Calisher concludes that this has damaged their works. What these women are accused of writing is what Johnathan Baumbach calls “voiceless” prose. Baumbach suggests the solution to “voiceless” prose is helping writers discover themselves as the “center of their writing process” (Baumbach 89).
Adrienne Rich suggests that women's fear of "being overheard by men" is at the root of a woman's problem in establishing her own voice. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Revision," Rich maintains that the problem women have with "language and style" results from women trying to write in a male-controlled culture, faced constantly by the "specter of male judgment." As an example of the neutral-voice problem, Rich says that "only at rare moments" in A Room Of One's Own "do you hear the passion" in Virginia Woolf's voice. Instead, Rich observes, the tone is that of a "woman almost in touch with her anger, who is determined not to appear angry" (20). Unfortunately, Woolf as well as the male-controlled culture confuses the attempts of women writers trying to establish voices of their own by introducing the theory that great writing must be androgynous.

When writers make their writing conform to the expectations of the literary community, their works lack a sense of authenticity. Their voices tend to seem restricted. As an example of the problem many women writers have had, Adrienne Rich says that "no male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language. But, to a lesser or greater extent, every woman writer has written
for men even when, like Virginia Woolf, she was supposed to be addressing women" (20). Whenever writers become preoccupied with their audiences, they consequently shape their voices by the constraints that the specific audience might impose. Instead of creating a voice from the center of their writing process these writers shape their voices according to their audiences. If the concern with audience is primary it can damage the writer's authentic voice.

On the same note, in "A Criticism of One's Own," Denis Donoghue draws an analogy between women miming masculine syntax and a "faked orgasm" and cites the problem with women writers as a succumbing to a master-slave relationship, always ready to "gratify their masters" (31). Likewise, student writers also suffer from an anxiety. Many feel the need to gratify their instructors by miming what they believe their instructors want. Unfortunately, these students forfeit creating their own voices for the creation of "voiceless prose."

Looking at how some women writers solved the problem of feeling trapped into miming a male syntax offers many solutions to the student writer who feels a similar predicament. The first step writers must take in creating an effective voice is to define themselves as the "center of their writing process" (Baumbach 89). For many women writers, this means redefining the identity that men have
shaped for them. If a woman writer accepts Wordsworth's dictum that "a poet is a man speaking to men," she negates everything she is about. Therefore, she must kill these self-proclaimed poetic fathers and replace their definitions with her own. Student writers as well need to create a clear sense of identity in order to place themselves in the center of their writing process.

Presently, many women are actively reshaping the definition of womanhood. For instance, Merlin Stone tells a story "When God was a Woman" and the Goddess was omnipotent:

The Goddess Sarasvati in India was honored as the inventor of the original alphabet; while in Celtic Ireland the Goddess Brigit was esteemed as the patron deity of language. Texts revealed that it was the Goddess Nidaba in Sumer who was paid honor as the one who invented clay tablets and the art of writing. She appeared in that position earlier than any of the male deities who later replaced Her. The official scribe of the Sumerian heavens was a woman. But most significant was the archeological evidence of the earliest examples of written language so far discovered; these were also located in Sumer, at the temple of the Queen of Heaven in Erech, written there over five thousand years ago. Though writing is most often said to be invented by 'man', however that may be defined, the combination of the above factors presents a most convincing argument that it may have actually been a woman who pressed those first meaningful marks into wet clay. (3)

Even if this Golden Age of Women never existed in history, it exists now as a story being passed from woman to woman. This story has caused many women writers to actively reclaim language to create their own stories. In
Diving Deep And Surfacing: Women Writers On Spiritual Quest, Carol P. Christ points out that women's stories have not been told. As a result women are alienated from "those deeper experiences of self and world that have been spiritual" (1). She claims that the depth of a woman's soul will never be known until "storytelling is returned to women's hands" (1). With storytelling in their own hands, women can pursue a definition of womanhood on their own terms—an identity apart from the definitions imposed upon them by the previous patriarchal writing.

How then did some women manage to write with such distinct voices of their own in the face of all these difficulties? If we accept Virginia Woolf's claim in A Room Of One's Own that sentences written by such renowned male authors as Thackeray, Dickens, and Johnson are unsuited for a woman's use, how then does a woman writer like Zora Neale Hurston solve this problem and establish an effective voice of her own? Hurston's solution to this problem was to experiment with gender-related language until she created a language of her own. It intrigues me that Hurston has appropriated the conventional language of men and adapted it to fit her rhetorical needs.

For student writers the solution is the same. They must make use of all language that is available to them and experiment with it until it becomes their own. David
Bartholomae claims that "students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were members of the academy or historians or anthropologists" (Bartholomae 135). Zora Neale Hurston, with her anthropological background, does exactly what Bartholomae claims a student must do to produce an effective voice in her writing. Hurston does not allow the literary and social impositions that plagued many other women writers to shape her voice. Instead, Hurston defines herself as the center of her writing process and appropriates all gender-related language, moving in and out of gender-related language until a new language develops. Hurston adopted this particular solution which I believe worked well for her. And I also believe that student writers who are struggling to develop effective voices of their own will benefit from analyzing Hurston's experiments with language and style.
CHAPTER I

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD: A CALL TO WOMEN

Writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was Zora Neale Hurston's response to a need that she saw existing for women—the need to actively use and develop the voice that their poetic fathers had denied them, both socially and artistically. According to Wendy J. McCredie, in her essay "Authority And Authorization in Their Eyes Were Watching God," *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the "story of Janie's struggle to articulate, to appropriate her own voice and, through her voice, herself" (25). To facilitate her call to women, Hurston designs her novel's narrative structure to echo her theme—the need for women to articulate their voices. To accomplish transforming her story into a call to women, Hurston experiments with language and style until she creates an effective voice of her own.

As much as I believe that many areas of style are organic to the writer, with deep psychological roots, I am also aware that writers create a style by making stylistic choices: "Writers create a style by selecting words that give ideas clarity, emphasis, specificity, and variety" (Lindemann 124). By a close stylistic examination of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* we can discover some of the stylistic choices Hurston made in establishing an
effective and distinct voice during a time when other women writers had failed to do so.

For student writers, an increased awareness of in stylistic choices would free them from feeling trapped in gender-related language and style. Specifically, I mean those images and sentence structures which we have traditionally defined as "male" and "female." Ideally, language should perform effectively for a writer regardless of the writer's sex. However, if some writers have been led to believe that the only language available to them is gender-specific, then they will inevitably be limited in expressing their ideas. An authentic style emerges from the writer's freedom to choose. Increasing a writer's knowledge of stylistic choices through education offers a solution to the development of an authentic voice.

Hurston's particular solution in establishing a distinct voice was to move in and out of gender-related language and style until a new language and style developed. I believe Hurston wanted to achieve a voice that reflected her sense of identity. Contrary to a critic like Wendy J. McCredie who states that Hurston establishes a female voice (25), I don't believe that Hurston thought there was a distinctly female voice to achieve. Instead, Hurston experimented with language until she created a voice that reflected her own identity, only part of which is female.
For a similar reason, I have chosen not to depict Hurston as a black novelist because I believe that Hurston wouldn't want to be confined by such categories. Hurston didn't let sex or race limit her. In fact, in her essay, "How It Feels To Be Colored Me," Hurston says: "I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature has somehow given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are hurt about it. I am not tragically colored" (153). Instead, Hurston saw herself as an individual.

Joyce Carol Oates speaks of Hurston's brand of voice when she says that "the serious artistic voice is one of individual style, and it is sexless" (11). Oates, like Hurston, feels that what "matters in serious art is ultimately the skill of execution and the uniqueness of vision" (11). In her reply to the question of a distinctively female voice Oates accuses women of sacrificing their works by stressing their content and failing with language proficiency. Oates states that this failure has ultimately damaged many women's works.

Clearly, Zora Neale Hurston demonstrates proficiency with language and style. She uses many rhetorical strategies to emphasize her theme to the reader—that women should use their individual voices, both socially and artistically. One rhetorical strategy Hurston employs is designing her narrative as a story being told from one
woman to another, a structure that expresses the desperate need for articulation shared by feminist writers. Thus, Hurston emphasizes the power of a woman's utterance by opening and closing her novel with Janie and Phoeby, two women, sitting on a porch talking.

By writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from a woman's perspective, Hurston, herself, breaks through male-centered literary traditions just as her character Janie breaks through the social constraints that had previously denied her a voice. Creating the narrative technique of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a story being told from one woman to another, Hurston stresses to the reader the power of women as active participants, both socially and artistically. Furthermore, when the character, Janie, tells the female narratee, Phoeby, "you must tell 'em" (284), Hurston recognizes the power of women telling their own stories. The "'em" refers to all those women who need to be awakened to their own voices—women who have accepted the male codes as the only reality.

Because women live in a world where most stories told about them are told from a male perspective, men have actively shaped the definitions of the female experience. Although women have been included in the stories of men, usually in roles defined by men, Hurston claims that "there had usually been only men telling lies on the front porch
of Joe Clark's store" (Hemenway 232). These "lies" refer
to the folktales that men enjoyed telling and sharing. But
women were denied a place in these storytelling sessions.
It is during these storytelling sessions that definitions
get imprinted in minds. If women never take part in the
storytelling, they will never be the definition makers. In
fact, Missy Dehn Kubitschek, in her essay "Tuh De Horizon
And Back: The Female Quest in Their Eyes Were Watching
God", goes so far as to say that Janie "discovers her own
soul only through the art of storytelling" (109).

Hurston urges women to be in control of their own
definition of womanhood, to use their voices and become
active participants in their own stories. As models for
other women, Hurston creates an active voice for herself,
as author, and for her character Janie who represents all
women struggling to articulate their voices. By placing
her character Janie as an active subject, rather than as a
passive object that is acted upon, Hurston allows Janie to
use her own voice to define herself.

Hurston realized that, without articulation, Janie's
self would become "dead from the standing still and trying
to laugh" (247). Realizing that without articulation the
self perishes, Hurston fought the patriarchal view that
"somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens
and cows" (110) by sending her heroine Janie on a search
for self-expression and by allowing Janie to uncover the vital weapon of her own voice.

As an expert rhetor, anthropologist, and storyteller, Hurston knew that "even if the author is speaking, in a grammatical sense, there is no necessity for his voice to be intrusive, like the voice of the essayist" (Peter 622). To construct an active voice that will engage a reader and sustain an illusion of involvement, an author must distinguish between a prose that "tells" and a prose that "shows." According to Maria Tai Wolff, in her essay "Listening And Living: Reading And Experience in Their Eyes Were Watching God," Hurston accomplishes the task of creating an unintrusive voice. Wolff says that "the narrator of Their Eyes Were Watching God is a 'big picture talker' who employs lyrical language in order to allow the reader to make a visual and sensual expression of the text" (32).

Clearly Hurston knew that a story should tell itself through the impressions of the characters. In fact, Bette S. Weidman points out that "Hurston did not worry about plot." Weidman compares Hurston to Mark Twain and concludes that "Hurston knew the art of the story was in the telling" (535). Hurston simply orchestrates rhetorical
choices: the characters' words and actions, or the characters' thoughts, perceptions and feelings.

As educators, we can use these observations to help student writers discover what "stylistic choices are possible and how to choose wisely" (Lindemann 124). By not acknowledging the past myth that style is solely a mystery, writing instructors can teach students that many aspects of style are deliberately and consciously chosen and developed. Writing instructors can free student writers from the notion of divine inspiration by encouraging a creative search for available rhetorical choices. Increasing their repertoire of stylistic choices can give students the range and flexibility to create an effective voice of their own. Students can then feel free to tell their stories to the audience of their choice.
CHAPTER II

EXPERIMENTS WITH STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Language competence and performance play an important role in a writer's composing process. Fiction writers create "an image of life entirely through word symbols that create an illusion of reality, not reality itself" (Porosky 2). To accomplish this, fiction writers are concerned with manipulating and examining language to see if it will effectively express their ideas and their particular version of reality. For this reason, a writer's language proficiency is vital to assist in the struggle for the right words. Peter Porosky emphasizes the necessity for writers to educate themselves about language choices that help create an effective voice of one's own:

In order to master the art of fiction writing, writers must educate themselves about the conscious impulses which determine their choices. In knowing about the characteristics of these choices, writers will be freer to more accurately present their voices through the medium of their art. (2)

Faced with the problem of adequate transmission of her story, Hurston developed a metaphorical style, a prose "to see and hear through, humanly apprehended, filtered through the consciousness of the onlooker" (Peter 623). Considering her audience, women who feel trapped in a male-
controlled culture, Hurston starts her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with language that reflects her theme:

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For other's they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. (9)

Here, on this first page, Hurston makes a distinction between the nature of men and the nature of women. She emphasizes the importance of the woman's role in her novel, when the narrator points out on this first page that the "beginning of this was a woman." Claiming that men and women dream differently, Hurston describes the differences in the way men and women view reality. Men see reality as being controlled by forces outside of themselves—"Time," while women see reality as a possibility that they can create. Hurston presents us with a reversal of stereotype roles on this first page. She presents men as weak-willed while women, on the other hand, are in control of their destinies, capable of exerting their wills to fulfill their view of reality—"Dream is the truth."

Hurston forecasts that this will be a story about a woman's successful search for identity. Her style and language on this first page demonstrate that Hurston, herself, is a
woman who has created her own identity. Hurston's well-established voice on this first page reveals that she has placed herself at the center of her writing process.

This first page is rhetorically dramatic because Hurston's theme is echoed in her language and style. Hurston reverses the stereotypes of male and female codes in language when she describes men as watchers "turning their eyes away in resignation" and women as individuals who "act and do things accordingly." Hurston reverses the traditional sex roles and redefines the woman's role by presenting the reader with a male-observer and a female-doer. Also, the narrator's tone is philosophical in these first few lines, like a wise observer, full of strength, forecasting that Hurston will not be intimidated by the "specter of male judgment" (Rich 20). Hurston has a rhetorical need and she will use any rhetorical means to fit that need and convey her central idea—that women should assert their active voices and no longer remain subjects to the male will.

By sometimes reversing roles in her novel, Hurston sets out to deconstruct the "illusion of maleness that all men cherish" (123). Hurston presents her characters in roles that are atypical for their gender. For example, Hurston describes Tea Cake "combing Janie's hair" (156). And in the preceding scene, both Janie and Tea Cake go
fishing together, not a common pastime for males and females to share. And finally, both characters share responsibilities for the preparation of the meal. To depict this kind of equality, Hurston needed to experiment in order to invent a language and style that reflected this equality.

Active Language:
Developing An Energetic Voice Of Authority

While reading the literature of the feminist movement, I was struck by its curt sentences, its explosive language, and its aggressive stance. Unlike the "anxiety of authorship" that Gilbert and Gubar (49), in The Madwoman In The Attic, claim nineteenth century women writers share, more and more twentieth century women writers are writing with energy and authority. And the language that Hurston employs in Their Eyes Were Watching God embodies this energy and authority.

Hurston's experimentation with language in Their Eyes Were Watching God responds to the need expressed by women to invent a new language of their own that would adequately express feminine issues. For instance, Anais Nin discusses inventing new language in the preface to Delta of Venus. She states:
I had a feeling that Pandora's box contained the mysteries of woman's sensuality, so different from man's, and for which man's language was inadequate. The language of sex had yet to be invented. The language of the senses was yet to be explored. (xiii)

I finally decided to release the erotica for publication because it shows the beginning efforts of a woman in a world that has been the domain of men. (xv)

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston herself expresses this need for a new language. In response to Janie's awakening to self-discovery, Hurston says that "her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them" (54-55). Using her own advice, Hurston employs a new language, creating feelings about her characters that resonate in our minds long after we have read them. But this new language that Hurston creates does not simply appropriate stereotypically feminine images. Instead, her experimentation embraces stereotypically male images as well.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* begins with the character Janie's return to Eatonville after embarking on a mission to establish herself as an active subject. No longer a passive object under the control of her grandmother, Logan Killicks, or Joe Starks, Janie actualizes her voice by telling her story to her best friend Phoeby whom she hasn't seen since she left Eatonville a year and a half earlier. At the beginning of their reunion, Phoeby
recognizes Janie’s new found autonomy and self-awareness by saying, “you looks like youse yo’ own daughter. Even wid dem overalls on you shows yo’ womanhood” (14). Since Hurston has established Janie as an active subject, it is appropriate that Janie returns to town wearing the overalls that metaphorically signal her liberation.

Because writers employ images to promote immediate understanding and to make suggestions and implications, mastering the use of imagery is vital in both imaginative and expository writing. Examining Hurston’s metaphors will provide student writers with a rich repertoire of verbal images. By using the stereotypical masculine image of “overalls” to clarify Janie’s strength, Hurston creates a tension between the stereotypical use of “overalls” and the resulting comparison of strength being natural to women.

To affirm Janie’s right to be an active subject in controlling her destiny, Hurston constructs the “return scene” with active language:

The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. (11)

It is particularly important to Hurston’s case against male opinions of literary women that the men in Eatonville notice Janie’s strengths as she returns to town. Janie’s return to Eatonville could easily represent Hurston’s
rightful place in the literary world that had excluded women. But it is even more crucial to Hurston's pride as a woman, to depict Janie's strengths as natural to women. Therefore, in this passage, Hurston combines a feminine image like "plume" with a masculine image like a "great rope" to describe Janie's long black hair. Thus, she gives equal weight to each image, implying that a self-realized person is capable of both stereotypical feminine and masculine qualities. Also, she uses a natural image like "grapefruits" to state that it is quite natural for women to exhibit strength as depicted by Janie's "firm buttocks." And amidst all the masculine images, the reader is never allowed to forget that Janie is a woman, as Phoeby points out.

Although Hurston uses traditionally male-coded words to describe Janie's strength as an individual, she breaks through the patriarchy that coded these words by creating the image of Janie's "pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt." Breasts are not usually thought to be "pugnacious." And women, traditionally, have worn blouses, not shirts. This image that Hurston creates for the reader becomes a metaphor for her own writing endeavor, as well as a metaphor for Janie's success at self-discovery. Both women are actively breaking through the male-centered world
of language. Hurston bores right through the male literary world just as Janie’s actions draw the attention of those men in Eatonville. Accordingly, Hurston’s style is as affirmative and bold as Janie’s return to Eatonville.

In successfully appropriating male images, Hurston defies all those women who would have her act as though male images didn’t exist. Instead, she appropriates these masculine images to suit her rhetorical needs. Hurston’s metaphorical style clearly demonstrates what Peter Elbow suggests a metaphor should do:

Every metaphor is a force-fit, a mistake, a putting together of things that don’t normally or literally belong together. A good metaphor in poetry or any kind of writing is somehow graceful and just right....They should in fact wrench and violate your accustomed way of thinking about a topic. (79)

Hurston wrenches and violates the reader’s way of thinking about men and women when she presents opposite images to build a dramatic tension. We can clearly see this in the following passage:

She got so she received all things with the stolidness of the earth which soaks up urine and perfume with the same indifference. (119)

Here, Hurston describes an earth that is indifferent to male and female qualities. Both "perfume," a delicate feminine image, and "urine," a harsh masculine image, are soaked up by this indifferent earth. Hurston consciously chooses these opposite male and female images to depict her
characters as individuals capable of exhibiting all human characteristics. Hurston creates both multi-facted male and female characters. As Ann L. Rayson points out in her article "The Novels Of Zora Neale Hurston," Hurston's "good women and men have the same characteristics—endurance, generosity, and natural morality" (9).

Hurston presents her readers with other examples of non-stereotypical images to describe her characters. For example, look at the last paragraph of Their Eyes Were Watching God:

Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of his window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead...She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. [emphasis added] (286)

Here, Hurston describes Tea Cake wearing "the sun for a shawl." In that same paragraph, she describes Janie as pulling in "her horizon like a great fish-net." Normally, we tend to think of a "shawl" as women's clothing and "fishing" as men's pastime. However, here as elsewhere, Hurston depicts her characters in terms that defy stereotypical expectations. In return, by reversing these expectations, she creates characters who reflect their individuality. Tea Cake is an easy going male "prancing
around." But more important, her heroine is a woman in charge of her life who "pull[s] in her horizon" with energy and authority.

In some cases, besides presenting this reversal of images, Hurston blends these images until it is indistinguishable who they are meant to describe. The following is a good example of how Hurston blends female and male images:

So they were married there before sundown, just like Joe had said. With new clothes of silk and wool. (55)

"Silk" has a feminine connotation; while "wool" has a masculine one. However, Hurston places these two stereotypical fabrics on her page in such a way that it is impossible to figure out who is actually wearing which. In this way, the blending of images deconstructs stereotypes in the reader's mind. Just as Hurston intends to liberate Janie, she also wants to liberate the reader's mind.

To liberate her heroine, Hurston must create a language that moves along her page with energy and authority. For instance, in the following passage, notice how the language is constructed to create a liberating energy and a sense of authority:

The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. (135)

This evocative image of "letting down her hair," as a metaphor of liberation, is reinforced by the adjective
"plentiful," which suggests Janie's abundant energy. Hurston portrays Janie as an active subject making deliberate moves toward her own self-liberation.

A few lines later in the narration, Janie, having taken "careful stock of herself" (135), "burnt up every one of her head rags and went about the house next morning with her hair in one thick braid swinging well below her waist" (137). Here again, Hurston emphasizes Janie’s active role in her self-liberation by using a powerful verb like "burnt," a word that evokes aggressive activity. "Burnt" suggests that Janie actively puts an end to the "head rags" that symbolize her oppression. Also, the image of Janie’s hair being freed repeats itself again in this paragraph. Describing Janie’s hair as "one thick braid swinging" sets Janie’s liberation in motion. Both author and character are liberated: Hurston in style; Janie in life-style.

Hurston clearly demonstrates an ability to move in and out of gender-related images until a new image develops. For student writers, using rich images will enhance their writing. Hurston’s metaphorical language could easily be used by a writing instructor to teach experimentations with imagery. Peter Elbow points out that exercises in metaphorical thinking "will gradually increase your creative and imaginative capacity. (Aristotle was right when he said that metaphorical ability is a mark of
intelligence but wrong, I think, when he said it could not be learned)” (Elbow 78). Fortunately, making conscious choices during the writing process is something a writer can control. Unlike the implicit linguistic competence of the unconscious writing process as described by Dan I. Slobin (7), each writer has within his or her ability the power to learn what choices are available. Using the metaphorical language of a successful writer like Hurston as a model of energy and authority can extend the students’ writing abilities and can help them create energetic voices of their own.
CHAPTER III
SENTENCE EXPERIMENTATION

One rhetorical device that Hurston employs often is the short sentence, power-packed with imagery and meaning. Yet many critics such as Virginia Woolf and Helene Cixous have argued that the short sentence, with its preciseness, is a masculine quality in writing. Hurston has no problem with the "formlessness" that Mary Ellmann argues against as a female stereotype in Thinking About Women (74). She knows where to place her punctuation. Traditionally, short sentence construction has primarily been the domain of the male writer—the concrete earth; while women have been traditionally accused by critics, like Henry Tilney in Northanger Abbey (Todd 2), of writing more sinuous sentences that are usually compared to the stereotypical way a women's mind is thought to work—like the formless sea. Hurston's experiments with sentence construction set out to deconstruct this myth of the feminine formless sentence.

Examining even the first paragraph of Their Eyes Were Watching God reveals Hurston's ability to make use of both the stereotypical male and female attributes for sentence construction:
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. That is the life of men. (9)

Notice that three of the four sentences of the opening paragraph are ten words or less. Only one sentence exceeds ten words; yet this sentence is divided by three commas that create four short utterances.

Hurston never denies her female identity as she creates many stereotypically male sentences. Hurston appropriates the shortness of the male sentence and fills it with imagery that is sensual, visual, and emotional—all of which are stereotypically feminine traits. Also, she appropriates the flow and lyrical rhythm of a longer female sentence until she creates a new sentence, one that expresses Hurston's individuality.

In the passage below, Hurston uses a short sentence as a metaphor to describe the tension that develops after Janie and Joe Starks separate:

After that night Jody moved his things and slept in a room downstairs. He didn't really hate Janie, but he wanted her to think so. He crawled off to lick his wounds. They didn't talk too much around the store either. Anybody that didn't know would have thought that things had blown over, it looked so quiet and peaceful around. But the stillness was the sleep of swords. (125)

Instead of describing in concrete terms the mental torture Janie felt after this separation, Hurston employs
a short sentence that uses language sparingly, emphasizing its importance. Thus, she evokes in the reader's mind, in a few words, the complex concept that the "stillness" of someone's silence is as sharply abusive and potentially damaging as Hurston's metaphoric sword implies.

If we continue to examine the short sentence constructions throughout her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God, we find that they perform just as effectively as longer ones. In fact, in most cases, as we see, Hurston has purposely chosen short sentences to draw attention to specific meaning. For example, as a rhetorical device, Hurston will use a short sentence as a single paragraph:

A big-mouthed burst of laughter cut him short. (67)

Instead of taking an entire paragraph to describe the attitudes of the people of Eatonville, Hurston uses this metaphor, a "big-mouthed burst of laughter," to isolate these attitudes, thereby emphasizing their importance.

The short sentence acts as a moment of focus for Hurston. Usually, a short sentence appears when Hurston wants to relate her attitudes toward the male-dominated culture. It seems ironic but fitting that Hurston appropriates the male short sentence as a stylistic tool to help bring attention to the oppression of women by men.

In addition to the short-sentence paragraph, Hurston often uses sentence fragments to bring the reader closer to
the shared experience of the story. For instance, in the following passage during the “mule talk” scene when everyone, excluding Joe, makes up stories about Matt Bonner’s yellow mule, the reader can almost hear the sarcastic attitude Janie has for Joe Starks:

Janie noted that while he didn’t talk the mule [talk] himself, he sat and laughed at it. Laughed his big heh, heh laugh too. But then when Lige or Sam or Walter or some of the other big picture talkers were using a side of the world for a canvas, Joe would hustle her off inside the store to sell something. [emphasis added] (85)

By drawing the reader’s attention to the phrase, “big heh, heh laugh,” the reader is inclined to laugh at Joe Starks. By bringing the reader closer to the story and closer to Janie’s thoughts, with these fragmented descriptive phrases, Hurston persuades the reader more easily to dislike Joe Starks.

Hurston’s ability to utilize short sentence constructions to perform effectively for her rhetorical purpose is quite obvious. Analyzing this ability can help writing instructors to awaken students to an understanding of the importance of sentence length in terms of rhetorical purpose. Student writers are constantly being taught to combine sentences as sentence combining is often mistaken for syntactic fluency. However, many times these sentence combinations clutter sentences and create syntactic chaos. Analyzing the style of Their Eyes Were Watching God will
help students understand the purpose of a rhetorically useful short sentence as a moment of focus.

In Notes Toward a New Rhetoric, Francis Christensen suggests that "students don't need to write longer, more complex sentences simply to produce more words; rather, writers can use the sentence-as-form to examine the ideas expressed by the words, sharpen or add to them, and then reproduce the idea more effectively" (Lindemann 137).

Sentence combining can weaken the quality of writing when too much emphasis is placed on syntactic complexity instead of the effective presentation of ideas. Although researchers such as Kellogg W. Hunt and Frank O'Hare point out the positive benefits of sentence combining (Witte 151), we must also be aware that too much combining creates ineffective sentences.

Hurston's proficiency with the short sentence can be used to demonstrate the benefits of sentence decombining as a syntactic alternative. In teaching writing to students, emphasis should be placed on the effective presentation of ideas rather than sentence complexity. Some students "attempt such extraordinarily complicated sentences that the syntax gets twisted. They may be writing to please the teacher whose implicit praise sanctions long sentences; nevertheless, they develop a style which obscures ideas in hopelessly convoluted syntax" (Lindemann 135).
In the following paragraph from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston demonstrates the rhetorical effectiveness of not combining sentences:

The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so their skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment. (10)

Sentence combining techniques would ask us to combine those three last sentences until they read like one of the following:

They became lords of sounds and lesser things, passing nations through their mouths while sitting in judgment.

Sitting in judgment, they became lords of sounds and lesser things and passed nations through their mouths.

Becoming lords of sounds and lesser things, they passed nations through their mouths and sat in judgment.

Any of these options detract from the writer's purpose. Here, Hurston chooses a series of short sentences as moments of focus causing her words to sound like a marching drum that builds tension with each new short sentence. To alter this structure by sentence combining would create a gentler rhythm and less dramatic tension than Hurston wanted.
Examining Hurston's ability to move in and out of
gender-related sentence constructions clearly demonstrates
her syntactic fluency. Hurston made use of every available
rhetorical means to present her ideas effectively. She
defies the narrow thinking of categorizing short sentences
as masculine and sinuous sentences as feminine in Their
Eyes Were Watching God by effective sentence experimen-
tation. But more important, her writing examples disavow
the notion that a sentence's length or style is gender-
related. Discovering this vital information can free
student writers from getting trapped in gender-related
sentence constructions, giving them more technical choices
to create a voice of their own.
An authentic voice is crucial for a writer. However, to a beginning writer an authentic voice might seem more foreign than a mechanical voice, one that "lacks sound rhythm, energy and individuality" (Elbow 299). When educators present student writers with clear examples of well-established voices, like Hurston’s authentic voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God, student writers can experiment with language until they find their own voices.

When a voice is imbued with specific characteristics it becomes authentic. Notice how the assertiveness and strength of Hurston’s voice in the following lines give her voice authenticity:

Her speech was pleasant enough, but she kept walking straight on to her gate. The porch couldn’t talk for looking...But nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody even thought to swallow spit until after her gate slammed behind her. (11)

Hurston, like a great orchestrator, directs her third person narrator’s use of an active voice like “kept walking” and “slammed” to inform the reader that Janie is in control of her destiny. Janie, as an active subject, has managed to affect the whole porch by her assertive presence. Everyone on the porch remains speechless until Janie signals them by the slamming of her gate. She is a
woman in control. As she forcefully slams her gate behind her, Janie shuts out all the old ideas that her community held—that women should be weak, voiceless, passive objects. Instead of submitting to the impositions of her community, Janie returns to town as an active subject; the community, those people who made "burning statements with questions," and "killing tools out of laughs" (10), becomes her direct object, affected by her action.

_Their Eyes Were Watching God_ can easily be used by writing instructors as an example of discovery of one's voice. Both narrator and protagonist discover their voices as the novel progresses. As the character Janie grows into self-awareness, she masters the use of her own voice enough to become a storyteller. It is at the end of the story that Janie actually sits down to tell her story to Phoeby. Like Janie's discovery of poetic language, the narrator's language also becomes more poetic as the story progresses.

But before Janie gains this poetic control over her own voice, she goes through a series of attempts to control her own destiny. During each attempt, Hurston places Janie as a subject in control of the objects by way of a strong active voice. For example, when Janie decides to leave her first husband, Logan Killicks, the third person narrator tells us that Janie "untied [her apron] and flung it on a low bush beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and
making a bouquet" (54). This emphatic image of untying her apron, narrated in a strong active voice, alerts the reader to Janie's awakening sense of self. The verbs that Hurston uses during these awakening moments [untie, flung, walk, pick, and make] are assertive and strong. With each movement that Janie takes forward and with each new action verb that Hurston introduces, the reader is led into the center of Janie's self-discovery.

Hurston illustrates this theme of Their Eyes Were Watching God, growth into self-awareness, most dramatically, by allowing Janie's voice to permeate the narration. For instance, there are many times during Their Eyes Were Watching God when the narrator's words sound as if they were Janie's own voice. It is as though Hurston has blended the consciousness of the protagonist with the consciousness of the narrator to suggest the power of a women's voice, once evoked.

Often, writers reveal their characters' motivations by going into the minds of their characters and commenting on what happens there. This authorial exposition or commenting takes on the task of connecting the inner consciousness of the character with the actions outside of the character. Writers bring these commentaries to the page by such words as "thought," "knew," "felt," "wondered," and so forth.
Hurston makes use of authorial commenting in the lines below by her repetition of "knew":

She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, "Ah hope you fall on soft ground," because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed. She knew the world was a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether. She knew God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun-up...She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman. (44)

In the preceding paragraph, we notice the author commenting clearly. However, there are many instances throughout Their Eyes Were Watching God where it is harder to distinguish between an author's comments and a character's actual thoughts. The following paragraph provides a good example of this:

In the few days to live before she went to Logan Killicks and his often-mentioned sixty acres, Janie asked inside of herself and out. She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking. Finally, out of Nanny's talk and her own conjectures she made a sort of comfort for herself. Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. Janie felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn't seem so destructive and mouldy. She wouldn't be lonely anymore. [emphasis added] (38)

In this paragraph Hurston brings the reader closer to her character by revealing Janie's inner thoughts. She does this by using words such as "wondering," "thinking,"
and "felt." These words convey Janie's inner thoughts and feelings. However, Hurston doesn't stop there. She wants to bring the reader even closer to her character Janie so she places Janie's thoughts right on the page. For instance, in passages such as: "Yes, she would love Logan after they were married," the reader senses the direct thoughts being formulated inside Janie's mind rather than Hurston's comment. The next sentence combines an authorial comment with Janie's direct thoughts. "She could see no way for it to come about" suggests the author's observation while the second part of this sentence sounds more like Janie's direct thoughts again. The next sentence that begins "Husbands and wives" continues Janie's interior monologue. Janie formulates a definition of marriage right on the page in front of the reader. This narrative technique Hurston employs—inner monologue—brings the reader closer to the character's central conflict because it paints a perfect picture of the character's specific motivations for her actions.

This fictional device that renders a character's direct thoughts onto the page is not an easy strategy to reproduce. Many writers fail in attempts to portray their characters' thoughts. Their Eyes Were Watching God offers many examples of successfully employing both authorial commentaries and the character's inner monologue.
Hurston's smooth masterful blend of these two fictional devices offers a fine example to student writers because Hurston blends both the narrator's consciousness and Janie's without ever disturbing the reader.

Hurston's mastery of interior monologue experimentation takes place whenever the narrator's voice and Janie's thoughts become indistinguishable. For example, in the following lines, the narrator's voice and Janie's could be interchangeable:

After that she came to where Joe Starks was waiting for her with a hired rig. He was very solemn and helped her to the seat beside him. With him on it, it sat like some high ruling chair. From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. (54)

Notice that the phrase "a bee for her bloom," referring back to Janie's "pear tree vision" earlier in the novel, sounds like words that Janie is thinking. Placing importance on this phrase by dramatically setting it against the author's narration until it blends with the narrator's voice provides a clearer motivation for Janie's actions.

In another example, the power of the active voice of both character and narrator blend again:

"Dis sittin' in de rulin chair is been hard on Jody," she muttered out loud. She was full of pity for the first time in years. Jody had been hard on her and others, but life had mishandled him too. Poor Joe! Maybe if he had known some other way to try, she might have made his face different. (134)
The phrase "Poor Joe!" is set up as part of the narration, but it sounds more like a thought from Janie's mind. It is as though "Poor Joe!" is still part of the dialogue that Janie "muttered out loud."

Hurston often allows her characters to speak through the narration. In one case, Janie appears to be posing a question through the narration:

Janie was halfway down the palm-lined walk before she had a thought for her safety. Maybe this strange man was up to something! But it was no place to show her fear there in the darkness between the house and the store. He had hold of her arm too. Then in a moment it was gone. Tea Cake wasn't strange. Seemed as if she had known him all her life. (151)

"Maybe this strange man was up to something" sounds like a question that the character Janie, rather than the narrator, would ask. Janie asks a question through the narration, and she also answers it—"Tea Cake wasn't strange."

Similarly, Hurston allows Janie to use the narration to pose her doubts:

Janie wanted to ask Hezekiah about Tea Cake, but she was afraid he might misunderstand her and think she was interested. In the first place he looked too young for her. Must be around twenty-five and here she was around forty. Then again he didn't look like he had too much. Maybe he was hanging around trying to get in with her and strip her of all that she had. Just as well if she never saw him again. [emphasis added] (152)

Hurston constructs these intrusions as another solution for creating an effective voice. They appear more
frequently as Janie awakens to her autonomous voice.

For example, when Janie first meets Tea Cake, the narrator describes Janie admiring Tea Cake’s physical qualities:

She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashes curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, over-padded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice! (146)

But by the end of this description, Janie’s thoughts about Tea Cake being “nice” impress the reader more than the narrator’s physical descriptions. Janie’s thoughts about Tea Cake being “even nice” verify Janie’s growth in relationships. Here, the reader meets an adult Janie who knows the qualities she admires in a person and demonstrates her ability to recognize them. Whenever Hurston brings us closer to Janie’s thoughts, we recognize the relationship between Janie’s personal growth and the development of Janie’s voice.

Janie’s voice is not the only intrusive one. In fact, several times throughout the novel, Joe Starks’ voice sneaks into the narration. For instance, when Janie and Joe Starks first meet, the narrator mimics Joe’s voice in a long paragraph:

Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin’ for white folks all his life. Saved up some money—round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in
his pocket. Kept hearin’ 'bout them buildin’ a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin’ money where he was. But when he heard all about 'em makin’ a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice... (48)

The narrator here mimics the diction of Joe’s speaking voice and pokes fun at Joe’s voice by imitating his boastful style. Introducing Joe in this rambling fashion lessens the impact of Joe’s “big voice” and forecasts for the reader that Joe’s voice isn’t as “big” as he thinks.

In the next passage we see the narrator continue the attacks against Joe:

Joe was at the back of the store and Walter didn’t see him. He felt like rushing forth with the meat knife and chopping off the offending hand. That night he ordered Janie to tie up her hair around the store. That was all. She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others. But he never said things like that. It just wasn’t in him. (87)

“That was all” and “She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others” sounds like Joe Starks expressing his possessive anxiety toward Janie. But, look closely at the two sentences following these. The narrator takes this opportunity to act out against this male antagonist with sarcastic comments like “but he never said things like that” and “it just wasn’t in him.” When the narrator oversteps boundaries and personally attacks Joe, the reader joins in.
Another example when the narrator oversteps boundaries and personally attacks Joe with commenting can be seen in the lines below:

Just about time for the committee meeting called to meet on his porch next day, the first wagon load of lumber drove up and Jody went to show them where to put it. Told Janie to hold the committee there until he got back, he didn't want to miss them, but he meant to count every foot of lumber before it touched the ground. He could have saved his breath and Janie could have kept right on with what she was doing. (65)

In the sentence starting "Told Janie", we hear Joe's inner thoughts and get a sense of the control he tried to exert over Janie. But in the following sentence "He could have saved his breath" the narrator attacks Joe's oppression of Janie.

The intrusion of Joe's voice builds intensity as the novel progresses and Janie resists his oppressive presence: Joe returned to the store full of pleasure and good humor but he didn't want Janie to notice it because he saw that she was sullen and he resented that. She had no right to be, the way he thought things out. She wasn't even appreciative of his efforts and she had plenty cause to be. Here he was just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the world and she there pouting over it! Not that he wanted anybody else, but just too many women would be glad to be in her place. He
ought to box her jaws! But he didn’t feel like fighting today, so he made an attack upon her position backhand. (98)

Allowing the reader access to Joe’s direct thoughts such as “ought to box her jaws” builds tension in the reader, adding to the empathy the reader already feels toward Janie. As the narrator positions the reader against Joe, the reader cheers Janie on in her fight for individual freedom.

Joe Starks finally strikes out at Janie:

Then Joe Starks realized all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible....But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing....There was nothing to do in life anymore. Ambition was useless. And the cruel deceit of Janie! Making all that show of humbleness and scorning him all the time! Laughing at him, and now putting the town up to do the same. Joe Starks didn’t know the words for all this, but he knew the feeling. So he struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store. (123)

Here, Joe’s voice attempts to strike through Hurston’s text in order to oppress Janie even further. However, Joe Starks fails. And his voice is never allowed to enter the narration again. Instead, with Joe’s absent voice, Janie’s voice grows more powerful. Hurston’s narrator mocks Joe’s voice for the final time, “scorning” him along with Janie. We can almost hear the narrator laughing along with the town.

The brilliance of Hurston’s style lies in the fact that the character’s intrusive voice represents Janie’s
central conflict. This masterful rhetorical device helps Hurston render the central conflict of self-discovery more accessible. Hurston demonstrates her genius by staying out of her character's way and allowing the character to portray her own conflicts, free from authorial intervention.
Hurston's language also reflects the central conflict of self-discovery. When Janie finally gains verbal freedom, her voice becomes extremely powerful. It often seem to intrude into the narration to the point that the style of the narrator's language and the style of Janie's language seem identical by the end of the novel. Both the language of the narrator and the language of the main character also grow more poetic as the novel progresses. Just as Janie has her moments of illumination which lead her to use more poetic language in the second half of the novel, the narrator also appears to have gained poetic fluency, as if the narrator, too, has experienced an awakening.

This increase in poetic fluency happens to Janie over the course of the story. In contrast to the poetic language of Janie's dialogue in the latter half of the novel, her dialogue in the beginning reveals a character who has not mastered poetry. For instance, when Janie tells her grandmother about her marriage to Logan Killicks, she states her case in simple language:

His belly is too big, now, and his toe-nails look lak mule feets. And 'taint nothin' in de way of him washin' his feet every evenin' before he comes
tuh bed. "Tain't nothin' to hinder him 'cause Ah places de water for him. Ah'd ruther be shot wid tacks than tuh turn over in de bed and stir up air whilst he is in dere. He don't never mention nothin' pretty. (42)

Although this passage offers some detail in description, it lacks those graceful qualities of Janie's later dialogue. This comparatively flat dialogue lacks an authoritative force behind the words, the kind of passion one would expect with an angry attitude.

Further along in the novel, Janie reacts to Joe Starks telling her that she looks as old as "Methusalehm" and that her rump was hanging nearly to her knees. In Janie's comments that follow, we hear the passion and anger in her words:

Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. 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. (123)

Her passion builds until her final language explodes with a metaphor like "de change uh life" describing Joe's old body.

During her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie also invents new ways to express herself as she learns to define her sense of self on her own terms. As her self-awareness increases, her language takes on a new "lyrical" mood. In
the middle of the storm, when Tea Cake asks Janie if she is angry at him for dragging her into their predicament, Janie replies:

Naw. We been together round two years. If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don’t keer if you die at dusk. It’s so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuz fumblin’ round and God opened de door. (236)

Janie’s language in this passage creates pictures in the mind of the readers to express her appreciation of Tea Cake’s influence on her life. Earlier in the novel, Janie would have used a straightforward simple style to express this thought; in this latter half of the novel, she has put into action the narrator’s advice in the beginning part of the novel: “Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them” (54-55).

By the end of the novel Janie has gained such proficiency with poetic language that her dialogue and the narration resemble each other in style. For instance, by the time we get to the last few pages of the novel, we find Janie saying:

Then you must tell ‘em dat love ain’t somethin’ lak uh grindstone dat’s de same thing everywhere and do the same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It’s uh moving thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it’s different with every shore” (284).

The imagery of the formless sea meeting a concrete shoreline exemplifies both Janie and Hurston’s ability to
use both male and female images to describe an abstract idea like love. Since *Their Eyes Were Watching God* encourages women to discover themselves, it seems appropriate that Hurston also urges women to view themselves beyond stereotypical impositions. Hurston accomplishes this by providing the reader with a language that "is a movin' thing," moving in and out of gender-related language until a new image is created.

Janie's poetic growth can clearly be seen in the last paragraph of the novel. Here, the language of Janie's interior monologue and the narrator's language merge:

The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing. Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come in and see. (286)

The "of course he wasn't dead" sounds more like Janie's philosophizing rather than the narrator's commenting. And by this point in this novel it is easy for the reader to recognize Janie's interior monologue. But the next lines could be either Janie's interior monologue
or the narration since both Janie and the narrator are capable of using figurative language like this. Since her figurative language reflects Janie's awakening, it is appropriate that Janie shares the narrator's voice directly in these last few lines. In fact, much earlier, Hurston forecasted Janie's ability to speak with the adorned language of the narrator when Hambo tells Joe Starks that Janie "is a born orator" (92).

It is rhetorically dramatic that Janie's storytelling should permeate the story's narration, just as Hurston's novel has infiltrated the male-centered literary traditions. By the end of the novel, we are aware that Janie, as well as Hurston, has shown an ability to use language effectively. Each woman tells the same story—that there is power in an active voice. Thus, the narrative technique of Janie gaining her voice is a metaphor for Hurston's message—namely, that women should reject the sea of patriarchal writing that defines women as passive objects and reclaim their active voices.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* provides many examples of possible techniques for creating an effective voice that students can imitate in order to create or discover a voice of their own. Since an authentic voice is crucial for a writer, student writers can benefit from examining other writers' voices. If teachers would present students with
clear examples of well-established voices, like Hurston’s in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, students could experiment with language and style until they found their own voices.

Hurston presents many layers of voice within her text. She combines the character’s interior monologue, authorial commenting, character intrusions, and the third person narration to provide a comprehensive narrative structure that establishes an effective voice. Hurston weaves many voices together in her novel to establish a unique voice of her own.

Peter Elbow suggests that “writing with no voice is dead, mechanical, faceless” (287). If a piece of writing presents valuable information but is lacking a clear voice, the writing will lack sound and texture. Bureaucratic memos and technical writings are examples of what Elbow calls the “army manual style.” Elbow claims that writing without voice is “wooden or dead because it lacks sound, rhythm, energy, and individuality.” In contrast, he says that writing with voice “is writing into which someone has breathed. It has that fluency, rhythm, and liveliness that exist naturally in the speech of most people when they are enjoying a conversation” (299).

Writing instructors can direct a student’s search for the right voice by providing clear examples of well-established voices in writing, such as *Their Eyes Were
Watching God. Students can experiment with other writers' techniques to help them discover their own potential voices. Although the central idea of Their Eyes Were Watching God would be especially important to women, I believe that most student writers would benefit from this book and its encouragement to use one's voice fearlessly.

One of the problems Elbow warns against is letting our fears revise the voice out of a first draft. He suggests that many people worry and change their minds about which words to use so often during the writing process that they lose the natural breath that makes for a good voice. If students saw examples like Hurston's voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God, they would feel free to experiment with styles, realizing that many stylistic variations of voice exist. Students need to be freed from the fears engendered by the feeling that they must conform to one style. Exposing students to examples of effective writing and encouraging them to experiment with styles are two ways to free students from their fears of writing.
Women writers of the past who were successful in creating distinct voices of their own can provide many worthwhile stylistic examples for the student writer. In a sense, a successful woman writer like Zora Neale Hurston had to search for a voice in the same manner a student writer would have. Until recently, woman writers had many impositions to overcome, both literary and sociological.

How Hurston overcame these impositions can provide many stylistic clues to the writer trying to discover voice. But more valuable for the student writer is Hurston's ability to appropriate both male-associated and female-associated language until she invents a language for herself. Ideally, student writers search for an autonomous language that can effectively express their ideas. But this new language that the student writer creates must come from somewhere. And models of other writers can provide fertile examples that student writers can re-shape to suit their rhetorical needs.

Frank J. D'Angelo states in “Imitation and Style” that “the student writer will become more original as he engages in creative imitation.” D'Angelo claims that by imitating styles a student writer will, in the process, “internalize
the formal principles that are so necessary for subsequent invention" (207). Exposing students to other writers' styles adds to the students' repertoire of invention strategies. Imitation is an invention strategy. And since invention is vital to the generation of ideas in the writing process, adding imitation to a student's invention process gives the student more stylistic resources to draw from for invention.

Learning to write by imitation is nothing new. In his De Instituione Oratoria, Quintilian, the first-century Roman rhetorician, says:

There can be no doubt that in art no small portion of our task lies in imitation, since, although invention came first and is all-important, it is expedient to imitate whatever has been invented with success. And it is a universal rule of life that we should wish to copy what we approve in others. (Kehl 285)

Similarly, in the early nineteenth-century, in Conversations with Eckerman, Goethe states:

If you see a great master you will always find that he has used what was good in his predecessors, and that it was this which made him great. (Kehl 285)

And more recently, Edward P.J. Corbett, in "Teaching Style," encourages imitation:

Each aspect that teachers and students can look at when studying someone else's style can be applied to studying specimens of their own prose...Improving our students' analytical skills is a proper concern of English teachers, but improving our students' synthetical skills should be our main concern as teachers of composition.(31)
Corbett suggests imitative exercises to help students refine their style and enhance their stylistic virtuosity. He claims that the following exercises have proven fruitful for his students:

1. Simply copying verbatim admired passages of prose.
2. Copying a passage but changing one element in it—for instance, changing all the past-tense verbs to present-tense verbs.
3. Composing a sentence on the pattern of a sentence written by some admired author.
4. Taking a sentence that someone else has written and seeing in how many different ways one can say essentially what the model sentence says.
5. Taking a group of isolated kernel sentences and combining them into a single sentence.

And finally, in support of imitation as an invention strategy to discover one's voice, William Zinsser, in *On Writing Well*, also encourages students to use models. He urges students not to hesitate to imitate another writer. Zinsser claims that "every artist learning his craft needs some models." During the process of imitation, student writers will find their own voices and "shed the skin" of the writer they imitated. But Zinsser advises student writers to "pick the best models," authors they can admire as writing mentors.

I wholeheartedly recommend Zora Neale Hurston as a writing mentor. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an excellent choice for imitation. She has pushed language beyond its stereotypical boundaries, experimenting with sentence constructions, non-sexist metaphors, and a variety
of techniques for establishing voice. Hurston solved
stylistic problems similar to those facing student writers.
In a sense, Hurston searched for a voice in the same manner
that student writers must. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
provides many examples that student writers can use as
models to create an effective voice of their own. Hurston
presents solutions
WORKS CITED


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