

## No Pain, No Gain:

### An Exploration of Contrasting Emotions in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Up*

Since the dawn of mankind described in the Fall of Man in Genesis, humans have always strived for happiness. According to Western religions, Adam and Eve lived in harmony at Eden until they were banished into an imperfect world filled with pain, sadness, death, jealousy, and every other flawed “human” emotion. Because they were conscious of the contrast between their perfect lives and their Fall to expanded awareness, they constantly desired to retreat to the Garden of Eden and pure bliss.

The ramifications of Adam and Eve’s Fall have been passed down through generations; the suffering associated with sin sprung the idea that perfection could erase human pain. However, the extremes on the spectrum of emotions are interdependent: in order to experience the highs in life, one must, in turn, persevere through the lows.

This paper will explore contrasting emotions by examining the parallelism within two works: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* written by Zora Neale Hurston and *Up* directed by Pete Docter and Bob Peterson. Before delving into each work, it is helpful to contextualize the reader in the novel and the film. Hurston was one of the foremost African-American writers of her time, and while *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was initially criticized, this novel is recognized today as a fundamental work in the literary canon. The novel surrounds Janie Crawford’s retelling of her life to her best friend Pheoby Watson — a journey of finding her voice alongside two abusive husbands, Logan Kilicks and Jody Starks, and one soul mate, Tea Cake. *Up* also builds on the theme of love intertwined with pain through a silent montage of Ellie and Carl Fredricksen’s relationship from ages 9 to 78. The colorful film is packed with imagination and creativity, and thus individuals often mistake it for a children’s movie; however, each character and visual decision was intentionally crafted to reveal philosophical messages that transcend demographics.

Within the novel and film, the writers delve into the emotional and realistic complexities of love and marriage. Both protagonists, Carl and Janie, persevere through the death of their spouses and ultimately pass their journey forward to minor characters. By emphasizing that a spectrum of emotions allows for richness in life, the writer and directors, perhaps unknowingly, prepare the audience for a realistic marriage. These two works provide a distinct contrast to the

plethora of films and literature that solely depict the happy moments that make up a relationship and broadcast an unrealistic accord of romance to the masses.

While many movies focus on portraying the highlights in marriage, *Up* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* explore the realistic dichotomy between gaiety and despair. During Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, her third husband, she is nurtured physically and emotionally; Tea Cake continually provides her with the happiness that was missing in her early years under the controlling hand of Nanny and two domineering husbands. Janie describes her affection for Tea Cake as a "self-crushing love," a term that is paradoxical in nature, highlighting the duality and tension between joy and destruction entangled within the singular word, "love" (Hurston 122). Thus, like any marriage, the couple engages in conflict, too, such as the time that Janie sees Tea Cake flirting with another lady. While experiencing a jealous rage, Janie hits Tea Cake and they begin a passionate argument that ends in love making. In this moment, Hurston directs the audience's attention to the connection between sex and anger: "they wrestled on [...] till he hurled her to the floor and held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body" (Hurston 132). At first glance, the aggressive diction of "held" and "hurled" suggests that Janie is forced into non-consensual sex with Tea Cake. However, near the end of this passage, the narrator describes that "they fell asleep in sweet exhaustion" (Hurston 132). Through this argument, Hurston deftly utilizes ambiguity in order to highlight the messiness and dichotomy of love. While there are problematic tendencies of Tea Cake's aggressive demeanor in the beginning of the conflict, both partners end their argument with pleasure. This heated confrontation emphasizes the shared passion between both rage and love, thus highlighting that all relationships continually experience contrasting emotions.

The syntax and diction that Hurston utilizes to display a spectrum of emotions is mirrored by the directors' use of film techniques in *Up*. Although there is no dialogue, the filmmakers manipulate the music and lighting to accentuate the highs and lows in Carl and Ellie's marriage. In the first scene, the couple experiences a joyful wedding and move in together. The high-key lighting enhances the sense of liveliness within the initial portion of Carl and Ellie's relationship. During the ceremony, Ellie is in a traditional white wedding dress and is glowing; her image provides a contrast to the dull ambiance created by their dark house, suggesting that she is Carl's whole life (Doctor and Peterson 0:22). The lighting remains dream-like while they move in together and is enriched by vivid tones when the couple paints their child's room. Additionally,

throughout the first minute of the scene, the music has a fast tempo, which mirrors the increased heart rate and adrenaline rush responses that individuals experience when they spot their lover and thus signifies the continual bliss shared between Ellie and Carl in their new life together. However, the light dramatically shifts into low-key lighting when Ellie has a miscarriage, and the tempo transitions into a slow and melancholy tune (Doctor and Peterson 1:30). This stark contrast illustrates the suffering that both characters endure from the loss of their child and the speed at which emotions are subject to change. The intricacies and complexities of Carl and Ellie's relationship are expressed through sensory details, such as lighting and sound, which allow the audience to wholeheartedly experience the realistic highs and lows of the couple as their life unfolds on the screen.

In both works, the couples find the balance to live in harmony, with coexistence of individual thought, in order to maintain an equal, happy marriage. Throughout Janie's relationships in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she was constantly subjugated, which forced her to develop into two disparate people internally and externally and made her marriages unhappy failures. Therefore, her marriage with Tea Cake was successful because it was mutually beneficial. A significant moment in their relationship is when Janie spends the day picking beans beside Tea Cake, and then they go home together where "the house was full of people [... Janie] could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to" (Hurston 127-128). Janie's ex-husbands suppressed her into assuming the role of a housewife — an expectation for women during this era. Thus, the fact that Janie feels comfortable enough to engage in and enjoy conversations, as an equal to Tea Cake, suggests that their relationship is prospering because of the balance between the two; this moment provides the greatest contradiction between Janie's second and third husband, where Jody silenced her by classing her off from her own community. Furthermore, Tea Cake encourages Janie to maintain individual thought, specifically when they went shooting together and Janie "got to be a better shot than Tea Cake" (Hurston 125). The shared activities highlight that no partner is overpowering the other in the marriage and both are willing to sacrifice traditional gender roles to foster a respectful, congruous relationship. Both Janie and Tea Cake share work, conversations, their home — and above all, share a life, which allows them to preserve the voice of both individuals. Hurston utilizes these examples to emphasize that the key to a successful marriage is balance and comfort.

Similarly, in *Up*, the directors utilize geometric shapes to express that Carl and Ellie maintain their individuality to create a blissful marriage. Physically, Carl's facial structure is a square, and each detail that he owns is also square, including his coffee mug and lamp, whereas Ellie is comprised of circular structures (Doctor and Peterson 1:01). When they move in together, Carl places Ellie's circular chair in the living room, while Ellie positions his square chair. Further, everything in the house, including photo frames, is either circular or square. By choosing not to blend the shape of each character or their possessions, the directors utilize the symbol of structure to emphasize that a good marriage maintains the coexistence and independence of both shapes, or partners. Another example of this balance is the acceptance of reversed gender roles, a parallel to Tea Cake and Janie's relationship, which is catalyzed by the shared work between Ellie and Carl. While constructing their house, the partners equally contribute to the labor: Ellie cuts wood while Carl hammers window frames, and they both add their handprints to their mailbox (Doctor and Peterson 0:19-0:25). The directors manipulate moments and gender roles in order to highlight that one can only experience true love if both partners contribute equally and maintain their independence.

The uncontrollable losses of both protagonist's partners, Tea Cake and Ellie, emphasize the heartbreak and anguish that ends true love and marriage. Near the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a hurricane strikes the Everglades, and Tea Cake is bitten and develops rabies while saving Janie. Subsequently, Tea Cake's irrationality caused by the disease takes a toll on his relationship with Janie, for it pains her to see the mental deterioration of his passion and care: "to kill her through Tea Cake was too much to bear. Tea Cake, the son of Evening Sun, had to die for loving her" (Hurston 169). Hurston utilizes figurative language to suggest that while Tea Cake is dying, Janie is, too; the lovers are deeply connected and dependent on one another that the idea of death for one is so painful that it kills the other. This intimate bond illuminates that their love is truly unconditional. Hurston characterizes Tea Cake's death as "the meanest moment of eternity," and Janie "held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service" (Hurston 175). The diction demonstrated through "mean" emphasizes that this singular moment is the greatest loss that Janie has experienced in her tough life. Compared to Hurston's diction throughout the novel, "mean" is rather elementary, which suggests that Janie reverts to a child-like state while expressing her emotions because she cannot process her despair. Her world is drastically different in the absence of Tea Cake, and she

is gracious for the intense love that they shared. Furthermore, Tea Cake lies on Janie's "breast" when he dies, which is symbolic of the way a mother gives a child milk. This comparison emphasizes that Janie loves Tea Cake the same amount a mother loves her child. After his death, the tone shifts: "then the grief of outer darkness descended" (Hurston 175). Janie's marriage with Tea Cake was filled with color and emotion, and the loss of him can solely be characterized by a darkness, which suggests that Tea Cake was the light in Janie's life. Without Tea Cake, her world is plagued with darkness.

Janie's heartbreak over Tea Cake's death parallels Carl's emotions when Ellie dies in *Up*. The directors use color, frames, and music to emphasize how Ellie's death impacts Carl's quality of life. In the beginning of the scene, there is a long shot of Carl climbing a hill with Ellie at its peak, which the audience learns to be their special spot (Doctor and Peterson 0:37). The tone is relaxed as they lay down and watch the clouds. However, later in the film, the audience observes the same spot, but with noticeable differences: the bright blue hue is replaced with a cloudy and orange hue, the sun is lower in the sky, and Carl has to assist Ellie as she struggles to climb the hill (Doctor and Peterson 3:24). The noticeable orange shift signifies the autumn season, where leaves change color and die, and the hint of evening approaching mirrors the passage of time and serves as a harbinger for Ellie's impending sunset. In addition, the screenplay is typically characterized by vivid and bright ambiance; however, at the end of the opening scene, the light is drained out of the background, which mirrors the death of Ellie (Doctor and Peterson 4:01). Even the house, a once vibrant exterior, fades into a dull building that blends into the dark night sky (Doctor and Peterson 4:19). The shifts in color emphasize how dependent Carl is on Ellie for his happiness; Ellie was literally the light for Carl, and without her, his life is visually dull and virtually meaningless. Furthermore, the melody is adjusted to a slower tempo during this scene when Ellie is in the hospital (Doctor and Peterson 3:34). When she dies, the notes become softer and begin to fade out. This new tune provides a distinct contrast to the uplifting and joyful melody expressed moments before, and connotes depression, loss, and solitude, which continues throughout the scene until the music fades out into silence. The directors' manipulation of the music emphasizes that Carl's life is detrimentally impacted by Ellie's death, for her presence in the scene provides Carl with brightness and senses. The light and dark mise-en-scene and musical changes allow the audience to distinguish the gloomy and heart-wrenching moments of Ellie and Carl's marriage, specifically at death. After the loss of their spouses, both Janie and

Carl are forced into the unfamiliar world of living alone, and are faced with the task of growing into their voices in the absence of a partner and gaining self-reliance.

Near the end of the novel and movie, the protagonists reach a moment of enlightenment and self-growth as they accept their independence and pay tribute to their perished partners, which allows them to become heroes by passing their journeys forward. Janie finishes telling her life story to Phoebe in the final chapter of the novel: “ah done been tuh de horizon and back” (Hurston 182). This moment of amplified awareness, maturity, and self-expression would not be possible without the duality of emotions she journeyed through with Tea Cake. Janie experienced pain and passion, and without those opposite, extreme emotions, she would not be fulfilled. She appreciates the messiness of her adventure by defining it as a horizon. Since a horizon is the median of two separate entities, the dichotomy illuminates that Janie had to endure pure chaos and deep intimacy to have a complete marriage. Thus, her “horizon” is the complexity of marriage. She shares this knowledge with Phoebe, and adds, “you got tuh go there tuh know there [...] they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (Hurston 183). This insightful comment is a summation of Janie’s search for true love. She shares her secret of a full life, which is all about experience, and in doing so completes her bildungsroman. By passing her experiences forward, she not only enlightens Phoebe and provides her with advice to enrich her own life, but ultimately the reader. Janie’s heroic journey is Hurston’s way of preparing the audience for marriage and emphasizing that true love only blossoms from true experiences, and unconditional marriages are built on the foundations of complexity.

The directors of *Up* similarly utilize the protagonist to broadcast an agenda to the audience regarding personal growth after loss. During the final scene of the movie, Carl bestows a pin on boy scout Russell, his younger friend and partner in adventure (Doctor and Peterson 0:53). This special pin is called the “Ellie Badge” and serves as a token of Carl and Ellie’s true love. While Russell may be too young to comprehend the concept of love, in his future years he will understand the significance and richness ensconced in that single pin: the complexities of marriage. In this moment, the colors are vibrant and the harmonious music employed during the first scene of the movie is reintroduced. The nostalgic music connects this moment to Carl’s relationship with Ellie, which illuminates the directors’ message to the audience, that life will always come full circle. By passing this knowledge forward to Russell, Carl accomplishes his hero’s journey and shares his enlightenment with another character. Carl and Janie both

experienced true love followed by intense heartbreak, and the author and co-directors emphasize the positive repercussion of deep intimacy: after reflecting on marriage and accepting independence, one passes the greatness and messiness of life onward to future generations.

Throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Up*, the use of film techniques and figurative language reinforces that relationships with love only coexist with happiness and pain, and these two emotions cannot be separated to experience a rich life. In doing so, the writer and directors raise awareness of humanity's flawed pursuit of happiness, as well as prepare them for a realistic, perfectly imperfect marriage. The entertainment business detrimentally shapes American culture by promoting the idea that love is only meaningful when there is no pain. Further, legendary films such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Singin' in the Rain* familiarize society with the concept of pure joy in relationships and create a culture defined by artificial romance — an unrealistic universe where fights end in five minutes, proposals occur after two months, and there are no bad days. However, this novel and film break the archetypal structure to reveal to audiences that experiencing a range of emotions in relationships enhances the quality of life, for it is the interplay and depth of each that complements the other. While suffering is uncomfortable, these paradoxical relationships are connected to the most enriching experiences in our lives, where the profound lows drive the profound highs and emotions catalyze, rather than hinder, the fullness in life. Adam and Eve should be proud that they released a cornucopia of complex and beautiful emotions.

Rae- Couldn't be more proud of you. Wow. This argument's really working--creative, interesting, and solidly backed. Way to go. Such commitment to the process of creating an air-tight, engaging synthesis. Keep at it!

#### Works Cited

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