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**The Representation of Southern Women in the Literary Works of Flannery
O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston: A Comparative Approach**

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1. Abstract

This paper will focus on the representation of Southern women in the literary works of the American writers Flannery O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston. Through different mechanisms we will see how both authors try to demythologize two stereotypes associated with women in the American South during the first half of the twentieth century: the white Southern lady and the black woman as the mule of the world. O'Connor's and Hurston's fictions offer not only a psychological and physical depiction of Southern women but they also deal with different subjects such as education, marriage, love, gender discrimination or racism which will allow us to have a detailed portrait of both white and black women in a new American South after the age of plantations and slavery. Since both authors refer to the same matter, the representation of Southern women, there are several common features in their works. O'Connor and Hurston usually use a confrontation between two generations of Southern women to create their female protagonists, a confrontation where the elder generation embodies the social conventions of the Old South mentality while the young generation represents an embrace of the sociological changes that are taking place in the American South. However, each writer focuses on that type of woman they best understand: O'Connor on her self-righteous white women and Hurston on her proud, strong and independent black women. As a result, that same confrontation between generations also reflects contrasts between O'Connor's and Hurston's women.

2. Introduction

The works of Flannery O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston offer a wide-ranging view of the white and black women's situation respectively at a time, the first half of the twentieth century, when the period of plantations and black slavery is starting to be overcome and, consequently, the class distinction between races and the segregation of black people. In fact, in both cases such representations are used by the authors to demythologize two deeply rooted stereotypes of Southern women inherited from that age. We will see in this paper how one of the main dramatic elements used by both O'Connor and Hurston to carry out this task is the clash or confrontation between two generations of Southern women. The main aim of Flannery O'Connor is to dismantle the romanticized image of the white Southern lady on her plantation, still present in the elder generation of white Southern women. We will see how O'Connor tries to knock down her female characters from their pedestals of self-righteousness through the so-called "mother-daughter pattern" (Westling 510) in several short stories included in her two collections *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) and *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965). Zora Neale Hurston also uses this pattern to depict her strong and independent black women who are used by the writer in order to break with the victim mentality, frequently attributed to the African American community, a victim mentality that as we will see in novels like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and short stories like "Sweat" (1926) is still prevailing in the minds of their elders.

Flannery O'Connor is "much more interested in shocking the ladies than putting them on a pedestal" (Hemple 130). In order to carry out this task O'Connor resorts to what she calls "mystery and manners": "'a serious fiction writer describes an action only in order to reveal a mystery' [...] serious writers are like the Old Testament prophets who dedicated themselves to the task of 'recalling people to known but ignored truths'" (Magee xi). As O'Connor herself admits in an interview: "the writer puts us in the middle of some human action and

shows it as it is illuminated and outlined by mystery. In every story there is some minor revelation which, no matter how funny the story may be, gives us a hint of the unknown, of death” (Magee 17). Flannery O’Connor subjects her white female characters, mainly depicted by their self-righteousness, to violent experiences of suffering or even death with the sole purpose that the so-called “action of grace” (Wyatt 66) take place and reveal to them, following the example of the secular epiphanies of James Joyce, something that they already know but they are “not very willing to accept” (Wyatt 66), something that clashes with how they understand the American South and their role in it, something that shows “their frailties – selfishness, bigotry, pride- and their dubiousness as vessels of grace” (Wyatt 68), all in all, something that finally makes them understand that the plantation age and white supremacy are over.

The ideas of “mystery and manners” and “the action of grace” reflect the profound Catholic belief of O’Connor: “I’m a born Catholic and death has always been bother to my imagination. I can’t imagine a story that doesn’t properly end in it or in its foreshadowings” (Magee xi). Therefore, despite the fact that her stories are riddled with a grotesque violence, such brutality can be interpreted as redemption for O’Connor’s female characters, redemption through death in the same way as Jesus Christ’s redemption on the Cross. As a result, besides being a “harsh critic of the superficial faith of many Catholics” (Magee xix) O’Connor’s violent short stories can also offer them a last opportunity: “how behind the cruel sardonic, often terrifying events that take place in them, there is a hidden radiance, a light made up of hope and faith in ultimate salvation, and hope and faith in mankind, struggling, involved in evil, seeking to extricate itself, falling back and rising again” (Magee 48). However, this is an interpretation that goes beyond O’Connor’s possible aim with her stories since all of them end just at or before the moment of revelation of her characters. Indeed there is a revelation but whether the terrible experience they have just been victims of has had a repercussion on them

and has caused them to change their minds ultimately depends on our own interpretation as readers: “we are left to ourselves to construe the meaning of the experience by looking back and again looking back at the various implications of the action” (Orvell 141).

The main tool used to carry out the action of grace on the white female characters in O’Connor’s short stories is that of the violent figure of the intruder: “a stranger, deceptively polite and unexpectedly malignant, intrudes upon the domestic tranquillity of a family” (Orvell 136). There is “a slightly mad, slightly diabolic element in his character. Each is more or less thoughtful and troubled, but capable of some outrageous, evil action which upsets the usual balance of the world” (Orvell 127), the balance of O’Connor’s proud white Southern women.

On this matter of breaking with stereotypes Zora Neale Hurston prefers, as noted earlier, “not to focus on American blacks as victims of racial prejudice and oppression; rather she sought to capture in her work the richness and vitality of African American folk life” (Andrews 252). This way of facing up to life appears in her essay entitled “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (1928) where Hurston explains how she had never paid attention to the colour of her skin until the moment her family moved from Eatonville, “exclusively a colored town” (Andrews 416), to Jacksonville: “I remember the very day that I became colored [...] I was sent to school in Jacksonville [...] I was not Zora of Orange County anymore, I was now a little colored girl” (Andrews 416). However, despite being pointed out because of the colour of her skin, she doesn’t feel she is a victim of racism: “but I am not tragically colored [...] I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood [...] I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less” (Andrews 417). What is more, Hurston belongs to that generation after the slavery period that wants to take advantage of a new atmosphere of slight freedom for black people: “slavery is sixty years in the past. The

operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you [...] no one on earth had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost” (Andrews 417).

Hurston ends this essay defining herself with an ingenious metaphor where she takes up again the idea of living your life without taking into account the colour of your skin: “I feel like a brown bag of miscellany [...] in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless” (Andrews 418). Therefore, Hurston, like some of her characters, doesn’t feel racism from white people; she thinks that any human being has to be judged for his lights and shadows as a person independently of the colour of his skin. Quite the opposite, we will see how in Hurston’s work racist attitudes come from black people: “white people [...] they liked to hear me ‘speak pieces’ and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things [...] the colored people gave no dimes. They deplored any joyful tendencies in me” (Andrews 416). In this regard O’Connor’s stories contrast with Hurston’s view. Her white Southern women are depicted as self-righteous individuals who judge a person by his appearances, his manners, his education and, above all, by the colour of his skin. However, this feeling of superiority leads O’Connor’s female characters to extend their racist behaviour to their white fellow citizens lower in social status (the so-called “white trash” in many of O’Connor’s stories). Thus, apart from racism towards black people, in O’Connor’s fiction there is also discrimination among people of the same colour as in Hurston’s work.

The attitude that “I am not tragically colored” (Andrews 417) is the guideline that every character of Hurston’s works follows in their lives, above all her strong, independent and proud black women. As Hurston says in her essay “the world is to the strong” (Andrews 417). Therefore, Hurston’s characters are not obsessed with whitening their lives, quite the opposite; they celebrate their negritude through their language and rich oral tradition. Above

all, they are concerned about being treated as human beings (Frías 1998). Hurston herself comments in this regard: “my interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so regardless of his color” (Frías 24). As a result, Hurston shows in her literary work “a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much of black writing and literature” (Frías 24).

All in all, Hurston follows the view of the so-called *Harlem Renaissance* of which she was part in order to represent her black female characters. The *Harlem Renaissance* was a literary and intellectual blossoming of African American culture in the 1920s and 1930s. The general purpose of this cultural group was that of dignifying black people and their culture and eradicating stereotyped images like the ones of “The Happy Sambo” (Frías 1998) or “The Tragic Mulatto”. Not every black man is a potential rapist (or “walking penis”) and not every black woman is a prostitute (or “wench”) (Frías 1998).

3. The representation of Southern women in O’Connor’s and Hurston’s literary works

3.1. An overview

Flannery O’Connor and Zora Neale Hurston make a detailed representation of Southern women through their white and black female protagonists respectively. Their works can be considered the two sides of the same coin. Each author focuses on that type of woman they best understand. O’Connor herself replies to a question about why black characters don’t have a greater presence in her work: “I don’t understand them the way I do white people. I don’t feel capable of entering the mind of a Negro. In my stories they’re seen from the outside” (Magee 59).

As a result, both representations differ in many aspects since they refer to two different kinds of women. First of all, in terms of representation it is important to highlight

that Hurston makes a more complete depiction of her women since she deals with both their psychology and physical appearance while O'Connor centres almost exclusively on the psychological side. However, in O'Connor's fiction, some of her female characters are also physically depicted. Such depictions usually show their deformities, their ugliness, their disabilities as symbols of their distorted minds, their weakness or their truculent moral standards. In this regard it is important to remark that O'Connor herself was a disabled person due to the lupus she suffered and which was the cause of her death at an early age. Therefore, these distorted portrayals are in some way an ironic self-criticism of O'Connor: "perhaps only a writer who was herself afflicted with a crippling disease, in this case, disseminated lupus, could get away with using her character's physical handicap to symbolize a crippling moral and spiritual defeat" (Collins 181).

This different way of representing their female characters is a consequence of the context in which each writer sets her female characters. Flannery O'Connor carries out her representation of white Southern women by depicting her female white characters within the society of the American South of their time. In other words, she usually portrays them through their interactions with the society that surrounds them. In contrast to O'Connor, Zora Neale Hurston, in the creation of her black women, focuses more on the depiction of her characters as independent individuals. She presents characters in active opposition to social conventions whereas many of O'Connor's characters, including those who present themselves as transgressive, do not really question their social context. Therefore, Hurston tackles a wider range of topics such as domestic violence, marriage or the interaction man-woman which allow a more complex definition of her women.

Nevertheless, since both authors are dealing with the same matter, the representation of Southern women, there are several common features in their works. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, through their works Hurston and O'Connor try to demythologize

two deep-rooted stereotypes based on the age of plantations and slavery: the Southern Lady and slave mentality. One of the main ways of depicting their female characters is through the clash between two generations of women. The elder generation plays the role of submissive women devoted to their families whose sole functions in life are motherhood and taking care of the household. On the contrary, the young generation of Southern women try to break with that domestic role in which their elders are stuck and they fight for a future beyond their mothers' horizon. In line with this it is important to underline the meaning that the American South has for both writers and their characters.

Finally, in both bodies of work there is a clear influence of Hurston's and O'Connor's lives in the process of creation of their women. In the case of Flannery O'Connor, her famous "mother-daughter pattern" is, to a certain extent, a reflection of her relationship with her mother. Like some of the daughters in her short stories, O'Connor spent great part of her life in a state of permanent disability due to lupus. She was in her mother's care in Andalusia, her family's farm in Milledgeville, Georgia. Therefore, her criticism towards characters like Joy can be understood as well as an ironic self-criticism. The similarity of her fiction and her real life is completed with the figure of her mother. O'Connor's mother's depiction has its reflection in the figure of many of the mothers of her fiction:

Most central of all was her mother, who enters into so many of her stories as the fulcrum of their violent moral action [...] actually, she was a small, intense, enormously efficient woman, who, as she fussed strenuously and even tyrannically over Flannery, gave off an air of martyrdom which was the exact opposite of her daughter's quiet acceptance. (Magee 56)

Biographical features of Zora Neale Hurston are present as well in her literary work. There is a symbol present in many of Hurston's works, the symbol of the horizon, a symbol which expresses the longing of some of her characters to live new experiences in life, which

has its origin in Hurston's mother's piece of advice to their children to "jump at the sun". Her mother's tenacity and strength during her difficult marriage is present also in Hurston's female characters: "small in stature, large in spirit, Lucy Hurston possessed the steely toughness she needed to deal with a philandering husband" (Frías 47). Hurston herself married several times and she had neither lasting love affairs nor children, events which have a clear influence on the multiple marriages of some of her protagonists and which reflect Hurston's opinion about marriage as an obstacle to her characters' happiness and independence (Frías 1998).

3.2. Flannery O'Connor and her "mother-daughter pattern"

Flannery O'Connor uses the so-called "mother-daughter pattern" (Westling 510) in her short stories in order to represent two generations of white Southern women. "Variations and echoes of this mother-daughter motif appear in [...] many [...] stories" (Westling 511) such as the mother-son pair in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" or the grandfather-granddaughter twosome in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy". Apparently, the initial function of this pattern is that of reflecting the generation gap between mothers and daughters. However, we will see how this pattern also reflects the contrary, in other words the great dependence that a generation has on one and the other. Zora Neale Hurston also takes advantage of this mother-daughter pattern to portray two generations of black women. Nevertheless, compared to O'Connor, Hurston does use such a pattern to stress that gap between generations and, through it, depicts her strong, independent and proud black women.

Broadly speaking, the mother figure in O'Connor's works fits into the archetypal profile of the lady on her pedestal which the writer tries to demythologize: "the Southern Lady [...] harped on her beauty and grace; modesty and hospitality; submissiveness and devotion to husband, children, household slaves, the poor, the unsaved, in short, to practically

everyone except herself” (Andrews 11). The elder generations of white Southern women are reluctant to integrate into the new American South and they live their lives following all the values and social conventions of the Old South: “many of the women in O’Connor’s fiction ‘assume the role of traditional female protagonists’ who learn ‘submission, dependence and a rude awakening to limits’” (Hemple 131). Self-righteousness, religiousness, naivety, condescension, racism or a deep nostalgia for the glorious past of the American South are some of the characteristics that mould the character of the mother in O’Connor’s works.

However, despite trying to live their lives like genuine Southern ladies, as mentioned earlier, the era of plantations and slavery is over. In fact, “the lady of the plantation was hardly typical of the majority of white southern women, who raised children and worked hands-on from dawn to dusk on small farms without the benefit of slave labor” (Andrews 11).

Almost all of O’Connor’s families have been truncated in some way [...] most frequently [...] the parent figure is a woman who has been left to raise truculent, unruly sons and daughters [...] these stranded women prove tough and resourceful in their dealings with the outside world, providing comfortable if modest homes for their children. The side effects of their struggle are a degree of stinginess and smugness, wariness of strangers, and determination to see things in a cheerful light. (Westling 511)

The figure of the daughter in O’Connor’s stories represents the antagonistic character with regard to the mother. The young generation of white Southern women clash with the traditional role represented in the elder generation. There is a more than palpable disconnection between both generations. The daughters in O’Connor’s fiction belong to a new generation of intellectual people. Most of them usually have received a high education that includes a university degree or even a Ph.D. Thus, they “move beyond the traditional role of women in the South” (Collins 178). The young generation is made up of “women with

ambitions beyond the traditional domestic sphere” (Collins 179). Therefore, the daughters in O’Connor’s work don’t share their mothers’ prejudices and their hierarchical view of life in the American South. They also detest their mothers’ ingeniousness and the cheerful predisposition that they have to face up to life and people. And, above all, young white Southern women are unafraid to face the fact of the new world order after the period of plantations and slavery.

As a result, they consider themselves superior to their mothers and to most of the people who surround them in the rural and traditional South. They are characterized as vain and proud persons who rejoice at their own achievements and ambitions (Collins 2003). Consequently, they are ashamed principally of their mothers and in general of Southern people. They react against this scene by vexing their mothers with their odd behaviour, with their physical appearance or by subjecting their mothers to humbling experiences. O’Connor’s children usually “cringe, glower or make snide remarks” (Westling 511) about their naive mothers. They even react violently against this stupidity that surrounds them and deny their own mothers on occasion. In other words, the figure of the daughter carries out together with the figure of the intruder the task of demythologizing the image of their mothers as Southern ladies.

Nevertheless, these younger generations are at the same time also ridiculed by O’Connor by showing their useless function in life compared to the traditional roles assumed by their mothers, also criticized but at least active and productive in the society of the American South:

O’Connor’s widowed mothers care for their children, but neither sons nor daughters mature successfully. The sons grow up to be intellectual drones who live at home [...] similarly, daughters fail to live up to their mothers’ expectations or examples. They are socially crippled, being not only physically

unappealing but also too intelligent, well educated and sourly independent to ever assume “normal” roles as wives and mothers.

Although O’Connor seems to view farming as an unnatural role for a woman, at least it serves an active and productive function in society. For the daughters there seems to be no useful function and no hope. (Westling 512, 517)

A good example of how this mother-daughter pattern works in O’Connor’s attempt to represent white Southern women can be found in the short story entitled “Good Country People”. The story deals with Mrs. Hopewell, a divorced woman, who lives with her daughter Joy on a farm. Like many other mothers in O’Connor’s fiction, Mrs. Hopewell tries to give her daughter a good life. However, Joy, who has a wooden leg because of an accident during her childhood, has a sour character and she constantly clashes with her mother’s view of life. This family’s monotonous and quiet life is disturbed by the appearance of Manley Pointer, a Bible salesman.

Mrs. Hopewell embodies perfectly the figure of the traditional Southern mother explained above. The title of the story itself, “Good Country People”, is one of the sayings of Mrs. Hopewell. Such a saying illustrates one of the features which define the character of the mother in many of O’Connor’s stories, the feature of seeing “things in a cheerful light” (Westling 511): “Mrs. Hopewell said that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not” (O’Connor 183). Her surname, “Hopewell”, is related to this idea. Such a surname is one of the multiple examples of how O’Connor uses ingenious and comic names or surnames for her characters that explicitly reflect an important feature of their personalities in a parodic way. Both Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, her cleaning lady, share this view of life, they think they know everything about every little aspect of life or people: “they are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, these women,

with a force of utterance staggering in its banality [...] bounded by the prefabricated walls of cliché, neither Mrs. Freeman's nor Mrs. Hopewell's perception of the world penetrates beyond outward appearance" (Orvell 137). This attitude to life hides other concepts such as racism, manners, keeping up appearances, condescension and their "dubiousness as vessels of grace" (Wyatt 68) frequently associated with the elder generations of white Southern women in O'Connor's fiction. Take the case of how Mrs. Hopewell defines the Freemans: "they were no trash. They were good country people" (O'Connor 179). Another example is the conversation she has with the intruder of the story, Manley Pointer, the apparently pious, innocent and polite Bible salesman:

"People like you don't fool with country people like me!"

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides, we all have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"

"You said a mouthful," he said

"Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world!" she said, stirred. (O'Connor 188)

Such a conversation is quite ironic if one takes into account that a few paragraphs above Mrs. Hopewell herself had defined the Freemans as "no trash". Irony is one of the main tools that Flannery O'Connor uses to ridicule Southern ladies like Mrs. Hopewell. The apparently naive and pure words of Mrs. Hopewell are full of condescension against her white fellow citizens lower in the social scale. Moreover, this is an example of the "harsh critic of the superficial faith of many Catholics" (Magee xix) that in O'Connor's short stories is usually focused on her maternal characters.

In contrast to her mother there is the character of Joy, "a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg [...] she was thirty-two years old and highly educated" (O'Connor 178). Joy

incarnates the next generation of women who, as mentioned earlier, gets away from the traditional stereotype of white Southern women that her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, represents. In comparison with Mrs. Hopewell, Joy is an intellectual “whose knowledge of reality stops at the scientifically knowable, and who is stridently unconcerned with the nothing that is anything else” (Orvell 137): “‘science wishes to know nothing of nothing’”(O’Connor 185). As a result, Joy clashes constantly with her mother’s mentality. She can’t bear Mrs. Hopewell’s view of life and, by extension, loathes the American South and its people: “Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about” (O’Connor 184).

Such is the abhorrence that Joy feels for the mentality of the Old South embodied in her mother that she enjoys disappointing all the expectations her mother has for her by different and spiteful means. While Joy is studying at the university far from her home, she changes her name: “Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language. Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed without telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was Hulga” (O’Connor 181). Joy’s physical appearance is another of her tricks against her mother: “she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and showed simply that she was still a child” (O’Connor 184).

The most ferocious trump card that Joy uses in her personal struggle with her mother is that of attacking directly Mrs. Hopewell’s idealized life. For example, Joy restricts the presence of religion at her home by commanding her mother to have her Bible out of Joy’s sight: “Mrs. Hopewell could not say, ‘My daughter is an atheist and won’t let me keep the Bible in the parlor.’ She said, stiffening slightly, ‘I keep my Bible by my bedside.’ This was

not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere” (O’Connor 187). Joy even tells her mother directly that she is not the person she pretends to be, that she is not a Southern lady: “to her own mother she had said –without warning, without excuse, standing up in the middle of a meal with her face purple and her mouth half full– ‘Woman! Do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God!’” (O’Connor 184) In this quote it is important to highlight Joy’s final exclamation “God!” This is another example of how O’Connor uses irony in order to question the moral values of her female characters. Despite the fact that Joy declares herself an atheistic person, she uses a “God!” to release all the anger her mother causes in her.

On her part, Mrs. Hopewell also clashes with her daughter’s view of life, above all, with the intellectual world in which Joy is cloistered:

Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the Ph.D. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go to school again. Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had “gone through.”(O’Connor 183-184)

As indicated earlier, the mothers in O’Connor’s fiction play the role of traditional, submissive and naive housewives. And this is the plan they have for their daughters, that one day they will be devout wives for their families as well. However, Joy rejects this kind of life: “sometimes she went for walks but she didn’t like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity” (O’Connor 185).

This is related to the contrast between the idea of young generations of white Southern women as free and independent individuals and the idea of them as beings dependent on their mothers. Despite the above mentioned superiority of the children compared to their mothers,

a presumed superiority which creates in these individuals a feeling of freedom/disconnection from their mothers, O'Connor's younger generations are depicted as total failures in life: all of them live at their mothers' places, they fail in having any normal social or love relationship, they are unable to assume normal roles as wife/husband and mother/father and they are seen in their mothers' eyes as still infantile beings who need their maternal care. And in this regard Joy is not an exception: "Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated" (O'Connor 178). "She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times" (O'Connor 181).

If Joy is the tool used by O'Connor to dethrone Mrs. Hopewell from her pedestal of self-righteousness, in "Good Country People" the "action of grace" (Wyatt 66) and the consequent revelation fall on the character of Joy/Hulga. The appearance of Manley Pointer, the Bible salesman, provokes in Joy the idea of seducing him in order to dismantle all the pious and innocent facade of good country people he is transmitting: "she had started thinking of it as a great joke [...] she had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of" (O'Connor 193). Nevertheless, this evil game of Joy turns against her when Manley Pointer takes an interest in Joy's wooden leg: "I see you got a wooden leg," he said. 'I think you're real brave. I think you're real sweet'" (O'Connor 196). Sentences like this last one destroy the solid shield Joy has built around her and a self-indulgent infatuation that reveals her naivety starts to bloom in her heart as she accedes even to take her wooden leg off and let Pointer touch it: "this boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse voice, 'All right,' it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously in his" (O'Connor 202). "Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him" (O'Connor 203).

At this stage of the story Manley Pointer reveals his true self when he opens one of the Bibles he is selling: “it was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards [...] with an obscene picture on the back of each card” (O’Connor 203). This is the particular revelation Joy gets smacked with, that the pious, innocent and romantic Manley Pointer, far from being good country people, is a fetishist who finds sexual pleasure in peculiar things such as a wooden leg or a glass eye: “‘aren’t you,’ she murmured, ‘aren’t you just good country people?’” (O’Connor 203). “‘I hope you didn’t think,’ he said in a lofty indignant tone, ‘that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn’t born yesterday and I know where I’m going!’” (O’Connor 204). And this terrible encounter ends with Pointer running away with Joy’s wooden leg leaving the girl totally shocked and helpless in the barn.

Therefore, despite her arrogance, her intellectual superiority, her feeling of having everything under control, Joy falls into the trap laid by Manley Pointer, the hunter becomes the hunted. When the Bible salesman pays Joy a compliment about her wooden leg, a wooden leg that moulds Joy’s personality up to the point of turning her into an antisocial bookworm, a wooden leg that in essence is her own self, she believes that for the very first time someone sees the person she really is. However, at the same time Pointer is also playing on her own arrogant self-esteem, and soon he shows his real intentions. This is Joy’s coup de grace, the lesson she is going to learn. As a result, Joy’s revelation means that, deep down, she has been as naive as her mother judging Manley Pointer. Joy’s downfall is the result of an ironic inversion found in many of O’Connor’s short stories: the idea that the strongest value of the young generations of white Southern women, their intelligence, becomes their weakness (Collins 2003).

At the end of the story Flannery O’Connor uses again the tools of irony and comedy to ridicule “the sturdily omniscient farm women” (Orvell 138) represented in the character of

Mrs. Hopewell. Without knowing what just happened to her daughter in the barn, Mrs. Hopewell says about Manley Pointer: “‘why, that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday,’ [...] ‘He was so simple,’ she said, ‘but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple’” (O’Connor 205).

As mentioned earlier, the “mother-daughter pattern” (Westling 510) is often used by Flannery O’Connor to demythologize the image of the Southern lady of many of her elder female characters. A variation of this pattern appears in the short story entitled “Everything That Rises Must Converge”. On this occasion the clash between generations is focused on the characters of Julian, “a college graduate and typewriter salesman with a dubious future as a writer” (Orvell 7) and his mother, a woman “displaced from the elegant world of her childhood” (Wyatt 69) and who “suffers for attempting to practice her class-conscious mannerisms in a world that is ‘in a mess everywhere,’ where social convergence has blurred class distinctions, where ‘the bottom rail is on the top’” (Wyatt 69). As can be deduced from the title, the story deals with the “paradox of *rising descent*, the rising and convergence of a suppressed group (blacks) in society” (Wyatt 68). Therefore, through these two antagonistic characters, O’Connor reflects the clash between the Old South mentality incarnated in the character of Julian’s mother and the New South mentality represented in the figure of her son Julian.

In line with Mrs. Hopewell, Julian’s mother is a proud white woman clinging to the social conventions of the Old South. Her self-imposed blindness about the new world that surrounds her does not let her to see that the good times of her childhood have gone. She still believes in white supremacy and, despite the fact that the social decay of her family is more than obvious, she acts as a genuine Southern lady: “since this had been a fashionable neighborhood forty years ago, his mother persisted in thinking they did well to have an

apartment in it. Each house had a narrow collar of dirt around it in which sat, usually, a grubby child” (O’Connor 4).

Another sign of the real economic hardship that both Julian and his mother are suffering, and that the latter is not willing to accept, can be seen in the purchase of a hat by Julian’s mother: “the hat was new and had cost her seven dollars and a half. She kept saying, ‘Maybe I shouldn’t have paid that for it. No, I shouldn’t have. I’ll take it off and return it tomorrow. I shouldn’t have bought it [...] I was out of my head. I can pay the gas bill with that seven-fifty’” (O’Connor 4-5). However, the hat means for Julian’s mother a symbol of her family’s currently fragile social status: “she was one of the few members of the Y reducing class who arrived in hat and gloves and who had a son who had been to college [...] ‘this hat looked better on me than any of the others’” (O’Connor 5). “She was holding herself very erect under the preposterous hat, wearing it like a banner of her imaginary dignity” (O’Connor 8). This is a hat that will play throughout the story an important role in the particular “action of grace” (Wyatt 66) of Julian’s mother.

With regard to this a discussion takes place between Julian and his mother related to whether the mother should take the hat back or not. Such a discussion hints at the clash between both generations and defines perfectly the personality of both characters. While Julian’s mother is clinging to her pedestal of self-righteousness, condescension, racism and keeping up appearances; her son is “free of prejudice and unafraid to face the facts” (O’Connor 12) of the current situation of his family and the new world order based on more freedom and understanding between white and black people:

She said, “if you know who you are, you can go anywhere [...] I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am.”

“Knowing who you are is good for one generation only. You haven’t idea where you stand now or who you are.”

“Your great-grandfather was a former governor of this state,” she said. “Your grandfather was a prosperous landowner. Your grandmother was a Godhigh.”

“Will you look around you,” he said tensely, “and see where you are now?”

“You remain what you are,” she said. “Your great-grandfather had a plantation and two hundred slaves.”

“There are no more slaves,” he said irritably

“They were better off when they were,” she said. [...] “It’s ridiculous. It’s simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence.”

(O’Connor 6-7)

This dispute between mother and son shows the same attitudes seen in “Good Country People”. On the one hand there is Julian’s mother’s persistence in considering herself and her family higher in social status than black people. Her words are full of racist manners and condescension against her black fellow citizens. Julian’s mother’s stance is strengthened by her allusion to the glorious past of her family, the Godhighs –notice one more time O’Connor’s ironic tone in the surname of the family, this time expressing the importance of their status–, who possessed plantations in the past. She is in favour of maintaining the segregation of black people and she refuses to see how that segregation is becoming more and more diffuse. On the other hand there is the antagonistic opinion of Julian about this matter. Like the character of Joy in “Good Country People”, Julian attacks his mother’s values explaining that the age of plantations and slavery is already overcome. He uses similar words to Joy’s to diminish his mother’s social pretensions, to make her see that they won’t enjoy anymore the privileged life of their ancestors, the Godhighs.

Julian’s mother tries to end this dispute with her son remembering the glorious past of their family: “‘well let’s talk about something pleasant,’ she said. ‘I remember going to Grandpa’s when I was a little girl’” (O’Connor 7). As indicated above, one of the features that

defines the figure of the mother in O'Connor's short stories is the profound nostalgia that the elder generations of white Southern women have for the age of the antebellum American South in contrast to the new order they refuse to accept. Many of the mothers' memories of their ancestors' mansion in O'Connor's work come flooding back, either physically or in dreams, as a shelter from this new American South which threatens their supremacy. This metaphor of the mansion appears in many of O'Connor's stories. The mansion is understood as a metaphor of the last home, of Heaven: O'Connor imagines, "for some of her characters, a state of innocence in a mythical childhood [...] her protagonists will hold in their minds an image of perfection as it existed in the past, one that is usually associated with a containing structure –the house that is the first 'cocoon'" (Orvell 37). "It is home in the broadest sense – the place one starts out from, the place to which one returns [...] the mansion [...] is a return, through death, to an earlier state of innocence and purity, to a place far off the main road, away from the sterility of the city" (Orvell 131-132). At the same time the mansion is used by O'Connor also as a metaphor of the changes that the American South is suffering, changes which are a sign of the social decay and the economic ruin of many white families of landowners and that also imply a greater equality between white and black people: "Doubtless that decayed mansion reminded them,' Julian muttered [...] Negroes were living in it" (O'Connor 7).

Julian's mother's memories of the old plantation are not only an escape for her. The conversation about the ruined mansion arouses in her son Julian a longing as well. Despite the fact that Julian "prides himself on knowing that he lives, truly and tragically, in a fallen world" (Orvell 9) he also has nostalgia for the home of his ancestors: "He had seen it once when he was a child before it had been sold [...] it appeared in his dreams regularly [...] he preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him" (O'Connor 7-8). Therefore,

Julian, like Joy in “Good Country People” with her total surrender to Manley Pointer, is betraying his apparently steely principles. His forthrightness in opposing his mother crumbles when he has the same longing for the ruined mansion as his mother and makes him as paradoxical as Joy “producing a rent in his person –a longing for the past, on the one side, and a forced embrace of the future, on the other” (Orvell 10).

The motif of the ruined mansion is also present in the short story entitled “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”. The story deals with the journey of a white family to Florida. The main character is the grandmother who during the trip “recalled an old plantation that she had visited [...] when she was a young lady” (O’Connor 9). She is eager to visit it but the rest of her family is not so enthusiastic, above all, her son Bailey: “she knew that Bailey would not be willing to lose any time looking at an old house” (O’Connor 9). This is another example of the clash between generations. Finally, the family makes a diversion from the main road in order to fulfil the grandmother’s desire. However, this is a decision that will lead the whole family to their fatal end. Before arriving at the old plantation the family has a car accident and it is at this stage of the story that the figure of the intruder appears, The Misfit, a criminal “wanted, dead or alive”. The character of the grandmother is similar to those of Mrs. Hopewell and Julian’s mother. She shares with them their naivety, their self-righteousness, their condescension and their excessive positivism towards life and people. Like the other maternal characters, the grandmother will be a victim of “her class-conscious mannerisms” (Wyatt 69). As soon as she recognizes The Misfit, he and the rest of his criminal band start to kill each and every one of the members of the family. In order to prevent her family’s massacre, the grandmother uses her condescension with The Misfit: “‘you wouldn’t shoot a lady, would you? [...] I know you’re a good man. You don’t look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!’” (O’Connor 15). In other words, the grandmother uses a similar attitude with The Misfit as Mrs. Hopewell with Manley Pointer in

“Good Country People”. However, the situation of the grandmother is slightly different. Unlike Mrs. Hopewell, she gradually comes to know the true self of her intruder. This is another example of how O’Connor’s irony works: the grandmother attributes the description of “a good man” to someone who is killing her family. Despite the grandmother’s compliments The Misfit doesn’t show any kind of mercy and, in a last desperate attempt, the grandmother touches him and calls him her child thus provoking a terrible effect on him who finally kills her:

She murmured, ‘why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!’ She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest [...] ‘she would of been a good woman,’ The Misfit said, ‘if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.’ (O’Connor 22-23)

Therefore, the “action of grace” comes to the grandmother because of her condescension with The Misfit: “The Misfit evidences a distinguishing gentility of manner, which the old lady, with her desperate equation of manners and morals, mistakes for goodness” (Orvell 132). And the result of this “action of grace” is her death near the old plantation of her youth. This is another example of the ironic image of the ruined mansion as the last home, as Heaven.

Going back to the story of “Everything That Rises Must Converge”, there is a second symbol, apart from the ruined mansion, that O’Connor uses to suggest the ambivalent equalization of races: the bus. Julian’s mother is attending a class in weight reduction and she needs to take a bus there. Nevertheless, she refuses to travel alone because of the presence of black people on the bus and she always asks Julian to accompany her: “she would not ride the buses by herself at night since they had been integrated” (O’Connor 3). Once they get on the bus Julian’s mother realizes that everybody is white and she expresses her tranquillity with

the following racist comment: “‘I see we have the bus to ourselves,’ she said. Julian cringed” (O’Connor 10). As indicated earlier, O’Connor’s short stories are set in an American South that is becoming more liberal in racial questions. In this new atmosphere, daily routines like taking a bus become a symbol of integration. There is no more segregation of black people on board. And this new situation bothers characters like Julian’s mother: “for the Southerner, buses ‘have been transformed into small, uncomfortable rolling arenas wherein the forces hidden for a hundred years in the structure of his society threaten to break loose and play themselves out each time a bus pulls away from a corner’” (Orvell 7). Taking advantage of the absence of black people on the bus, Julian’s mother starts a conversation with another white woman. Both women are cast in the same mould, their animated chat is full of racist comments. At a certain point they talk about their children and Julian’s mother tells the woman how proud she is of her son: “My son just finished college last year. He wants to write but he’s selling typewriters until he gets started” (O’Connor 10). Like other mothers in O’Connor’s fiction, the good education of her son is due to her sacrifice and hard work in giving Julian the best:

All her life had been a struggle to act like a Chestny without the Chestny goods, and to give him everything she thought a Chestny ought to have [...] what she meant when she said she had won was that she had brought him up successfully and had sent him to college and that he turned out so well—good looking (her teeth had gone unfilled so that his could be strengthened), intelligent (he realized he was too intelligent to be a success), and with a future ahead of him (there was of course no future ahead of him). She excused his gloominess on the grounds that he was still growing up and his radical ideas on his lack of practical experience. She said he didn’t yet know a thing about

“life,” that he hadn’t even entered the real world—when already he was as disenchanted with it as a man of fifty. (O’Connor 11-12)

This last quote shows several characteristics already seen in “Good Country People”. In both stories, the mothers, Mrs. Hopewell and Julian’s mother, have worked hard to provide the best education for their children. However, unlike Mrs. Hopewell with Joy, Julian’s mother is really proud of her graduated son. But, paradoxically, she still thinks of her son as a child in the sense of an immature person, someone who is still growing up as she says in the quote, a person who has never had a normal life. Mrs. Hopewell also has this perception about Joy’s development. Here we find again the idea of young generations as failures in life, as infantile beings still dependent on their mothers, as individuals too intelligent to play normal roles appropriate to their age. And as we can see through Julian’s thoughts (included in brackets in this quote) despite his good education and his attempt to seem detached from his mother and superior to the rest of his fellows, he also considers the idea of himself as a failure, a social outcast.

After the conversation between Julian’s mother and the other woman a black man gets on the bus. Once this man sits down a white woman who was beside him rises and goes to the part of the bus occupied exclusively by white people. Watching such a racist gesture Julian immediately plans to teach his mother a lesson in humility and he decides to sit down beside the black man: “he would have liked to get in conversation with the Negro [...] his mother kept her eyes fixed reproachfully on his face” (O’Connor 13). Nevertheless, the black man doesn’t feel very talkative and Julian’s attempt to bother his mother doesn’t come to fruition.

He starts to think about new ways of teaching his mother a lesson when a black woman and her son get on the bus. O’Connor’s portrayal of this black woman follows a pattern used by many Southern writers like O’Connor herself in this story or in the one entitled “The Artificial Nigger” or like Zora Neale Hurston as we will see in this paper. In

both cases black women are physically depicted through a series of terms and metaphors related to nature and its untameable power, to motherhood or to housework. This can be related to the role of black women in the society of the American South but, at the same time, with Hurston's representation of proud, strong and independent black women: "He visualized the woman as she had stood waiting for her tokens—the ponderous figure, rising from the red shoes upward over the solid hips, the mammoth bosom, the haughty face, to the green and purple hat. [...] The woman was rumbling like a volcano about to become active" (O'Connor 17).

While Julian is observing the black woman he realizes that she is wearing the same hat as his mother's. Besides the ruined mansion and the bus, this hat is the third symbolic element used by O'Connor in this story to express the collapse of class distinctions between both races. If at the beginning of the story we have seen both the economic and social values that the hat implies for Julian's mother, now we witness how the same hat is worn by a black woman which destroys all the significance that the hat has for Julian's mother and which puts one woman on a level with the other one and, by extension, one race with the other one. Julian himself sees in this hat the perfect humbling experience for his mother: "the vision of the two hats, identical, broke upon him with the radiance of a brilliant sunrise [...] he could not believe that Fate had thrust upon his mother such a lesson" (O'Connor 17). However, again Julian's plan fails:

His mother's mouth began to twitch slightly at one corner. With a sinking heart, he saw incipient signs of recovery on her face and realized that this was going to strike her suddenly as funny and was going to be no lesson at all. She kept her eyes on the woman and an amused smile came over her face as if the woman were a monkey that had stolen her hat. (O'Connor 17-18)

After Julian's mother's unexpected reaction with its suggestion of condescending racism, she focuses her attention on the son of the black woman. The black child arouses in Julian's mother a feeling of tenderness: "'isn't he cute?' Julian's mother said to the woman with the protruding teeth. [...] 'I think he likes me,' Julian's mother said, and smiled at the woman. It was the smile she used when she was being particularly gracious to an inferior" (O'Connor 108). And this condescension leads her to want to give the child some money: "He had the terrible intuition that when they got off the bus together, his mother would open her purse and give the little boy a nickel [...] as they neared the door, Julian tried to relieve her of her pocketbook. 'No,' she murmured, 'I want to give the little boy a nickel'" (O'Connor 19). Julian tries to prevent this act of condescension because he senses the possible reaction of the black woman who has shown her strong character during the bus. When the black child is receiving the coin from Julian's mother his mother gives her a powerful slap while she says "'he don't take nobody's pennies!'" (O'Connor 20). This violent intrusion, which will trigger the "action of grace" for both Julian and his mother, reflects perfectly Hurston's attitude of "I am not tragically colored" (Andrews 417). The black woman rejects Julian's mother's alms because she doesn't belong "to the sobbing school of Negrohood" (Andrews 417) as Hurston herself declares. She doesn't consider herself or her son inferior (the figure of the hat is a good example as we have already seen). Unlike her ancestors, she doesn't need the charity and condescension of white people because now both races are not linked by a master-slave relationship. In fact, Julian also thinks about it and while her mother is on the sidewalk totally dazed by the slap, he doesn't hesitate to make her see it:

'I hope this teaches you a lesson', he said. [...] 'That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you, and to be sure,' he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), 'it looked better on her than it

did on you. What all this means,' he said, 'is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn.' [...] 'You aren't who you think you are,' he said.

'You needn't act as if the world had come to an end,' he said, 'because it hasn't. From now on you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up,' he said, 'it won't kill you.' (O'Connor 21-22)

However, Julian's mother is still stunned and starts to mutter unconnected sentences about the ruined mansion, her grandfather and her black nurse Caroline: "'Tell Grandpa to come to get me,' she said [...] 'tell Caroline to come to get me'" (O'Connor 22). She walks with difficulty staggering and finally falls practically dead to the pavement. This is the "action of grace" for Julian's mother. As we have seen with the character of the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", when death comes to any of O'Connor's maternal figures there is a regression to their childhood and to the old plantation of their ancestors, either physically or in dreams (the case of Julian's mother), as a vehicle to Heaven.

The "action of grace" for Julian's mother causes her son's. When Julian sees that his mother is about to die a revelation strikes him, his great dependence on her: "the tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow" (O'Connor 23). Despite his attempt to show himself totally detached from his mother and the rest of his fellow citizens, a detachment consolidated in his intellectual superiority, the death of his mother reveals to him that he is far from being an independent person. Like Joy in "Good Country People", Julian is a failure and his strength, his intelligence, his need to subject his mother to a humbling experience turns against him and becomes his weakness, the catalyst of his fatal revelation.

3.3. Zora Neale Hurston and the stereotype of “de nigger woman is de mule uh de world”

The “mother-daughter pattern” (Westling 510) and the consequent confrontation between both generations of Southern women present in O’Connor’s short stories is also used by Zora Neale Hurston in her work as a means to portray her black female characters. Through such disconnection, Hurston depicts the contrast of mentalities between both generations. Like the figure of the mother in O’Connor’s fiction, the elder generation of black women represents the mentality of the plantation/slavery period, an age where black women occupied the last post on a scale led by the white man, when black women only have a submissive role. Like O’Connor’s mothers, these women are depicted as devoted and hardworking wives, mothers and housewives. These characters have assimilated and internalized the terrible role they had suffered as slaves and maids on the white plantations to such a point that, like O’Connor’s mothers, they are incapable of changing their minds and adapting themselves to a new South where racial harassment is starting to decrease. They safeguard themselves in their role as victims of white supremacy. In short, they are “tragically colored” (Andrews 417) and “belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood” (Andrews 417) that Zora Neale Hurston rejects in all her literary work. This is how they understand life and their role in it and this is what they try to inculcate in their female descendants.

In contrast to these women the young generation adopts a different attitude. As in O’Connor’s work, young black women play an antagonistic role in comparison with their ancestors. They refuse to follow in their footsteps and they are portrayed as free individuals whose only objective in life is happiness. Like O’Connor’s daughters, they live their lives without taking into undue account the influence of society and the role they carry out in it; they act without any kind of prejudice or feeling of racial discrimination. However, unlike characters like Joy in “Good Country People”, the young generations of black women feel at

home in the American South. Hurston on this matter considers: “the South was Home. It was not a place from which one escaped, but rather, the place to which one returned for spiritual revitalization” (Frías 47). Thus, in some way, they share a similar feeling to that which O’Connor’s mothers have with the ruined mansion of their ancestors. But, at the same time, they have a longing to know new places, to have new experiences... to go beyond the horizon. The horizon is a symbol present in many of Hurston’s stories, one which the writer herself also shares with her protagonists: “the most interesting thing I saw was the horizon [...] it grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like” (Frías 49). This longing for the horizon was instilled by Hurston’s mother in her children: “mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to «jump at the sun»” (Frías 47).

As mentioned earlier, the “mother-daughter pattern” (Westling 510) appears in several of Hurston’s works. We can find an example of how this pattern works in the representation of two generations of black women in her novel entitled *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This novel deals with the story of Janie Crawford, a strong, beautiful and independent black woman from Florida whose main aim in life is finding a man who loves her.

Janie has been brought up by her grandmother Nanny. Nanny lives her life under the yoke of being born during the age of plantations and slavery. She has spent much of her life working hard as a slave on a plantation in Savannah. This terrible experience has moulded Nanny’s mind making her understand the role of black women in the American South and, by extension, of all black people. Despite the fact that the scene has changed a little bit since the abolition of slavery, Nanny has assimilated the notion that black people will always be a race subjugated by the white man, a race uprooted, a race victimized by white supremacy. Their problems, their dreams, their culture, their very identity are no longer taken into account. The never-ending workdays on the plantation from morning till night have been replaced by an

equally hard life as wives and mothers. Therefore, Nanny represents the stereotypes of the “tragically colored” and “the sobbing school of Negrohood” (Andrews 417). She tries to inculcate this view in her granddaughter Janie: “‘you know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots [...] ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat’s one of de hold-backs of slavery’” (Hurstun 21). In this situation of discrimination black women bear the brunt:

‘Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see.’ (Hurstun 19)

This quote shows Nanny’s view about the society of the American South. According to her, there is a social scale based on a master-slave relationship. On the top there is the white man who delegates his heavy work to his black servants. But, at the same time, black men also reproduce this master-slave relationship by using their womenfolk to carry out the hardest tasks. It is important to highlight how Nanny explains to her granddaughter Janie how hard the situation of black women is in this social scale. She uses the metaphor of black women as the mule of the world. Among black people, women are those who generally have to endure the greatest situation of discrimination. As mentioned earlier, they usually play a submissive role in their families and, by extension, in their society. They have to work really hard to fulfil their husbands’ dreams and needs and, in order to ensure this doesn’t change, they are mistreated both physically and psychologically. Sometimes this situation becomes so tough for black women that they are completely destroyed as persons, they are considered just another animal in the barn, as Nanny says, a mere mule whose only function is to work until

exhaustion. Despite the fact that this view of Nanny comes from the plantation period, we will see how Janie will have to confront this stereotype in her search for someone who really loves her and respects her as a woman.

In this quotation there is also an allusion to the metaphor of the horizon. Nanny explains that, at least there in the South, this is how society works. She refers to the possibility of a place on earth where black people are not discriminated against, where they have a voice. However such place has to be beyond the ocean, beyond the horizon, a horizon that many of Hurston's characters like Janie will try to reach in their pursuit of happiness.

As indicated earlier, Janie represents the opposing figure compared to Nanny. Janie is a free spirit who lives her life without all the prejudices and stereotypes of her grandmother. She acts without taking into account the colour of her skin. She spends her childhood in a house of white people where Nanny works as a maid. Janie has a normal life with the white children of the house; she even attends school with them. Thus, she doesn't find herself in a situation of racial discrimination. In fact, just like Hurston experienced during her childhood and as she explains in her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me", Janie is not conscious that she is a black person until one day someone shows her a picture of herself: "'Ah was wid dem white chillum so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six year old'" (Hurston 12). This experience is an example of Hurston's response to "the sobbing school of Negrohood". Through Janie's childhood without any kind of racial discrimination, Hurston wants to transmit to black people that things are changing for them, that they must erase from their minds the image of being victims of white people, in other words, the slave mentality of their ancestors. In fact, we will see how the cruellest discriminations suffered by black people come from their black fellows. We have seen a situation like this one in O'Connor's stories, above all, in Mrs. Hopewell's condescension with Manley Pointer and her definition of the Freemans as "no trash" in "Good Country People".

This is how Janie understands life: “Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches” (Hurston 11). She uses this metaphor of the tree to explain the meaning of life for her. Metaphors from nature are frequently used by Hurston’s characters in her works. Such rhetorical devices show the connection of African American people with their African motherland and their way of perceiving life. It is important to remark how this quote contrasts with Nanny’s metaphor of “colored folks is branches without roots” (Hurston 21). Unlike her grandmother, Janie doesn’t feel uprooted from her tree that symbolizes her self. Her tree is full of branches flowered with negative but also with positive experiences. As a result, Janie and her tree are examples of the idea of proud, independent and strong black individuals that Hurston pretends to inculcate in black women and by extension in black people. Unlike Nanny, Janie lives her negritude in a natural way, leaving any kind of prejudice or victim mentality behind.

Hurston also uses these metaphors from nature to depict physically her female characters. Her black women are portrayed through a series of metaphors related to nature and its untameable power but also related to housework, farming and the hard work that these tasks imply, a reflection of the role of black women in the South. Sometimes these metaphors are used with a positive and strong meaning like Janie’s portrayal at the beginning of the novel where she is spending her last days as an inhabitant of Eatonville: “the men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unravelling in the wind like a plume; then the pugnacious breast trying to bore holes in her shirt” (Hurston 3). At other times they have a negative meaning like Nanny’s self-depiction: “have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah’m a cracked plate” (Hurston 27) or her own view of black women: “de nigger woman is de mule uh de world” (Hurston 19). We have also seen the utilization of this rhetorical device in

O'Connor's depiction of the black woman on the bus in "Everything That Rises Must Converge".

This connection of Janie with nature makes her spend all the spare time she has under a pear tree. Through this pear tree Janie is going to find out different aspects of human life such as love, sex or marriage:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant for visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was marriage! (Hurstun 15)

Unlike the elder generations both in O'Connor's and Hurstun's works who identify marriage with submission and devotion to their husbands and family, Janie, through the pollination of the pear tree, believes in marriage built with the purest love. Through the symbols of bees and blooms Janie experiences her sexual awakening. Bees and blooms become symbols that also represent Janie's pursuit of a new love with the arrival of springtime throughout the whole novel: "where were the singing bees for her?" (Hurstun 15). Janie is waiting and waiting for her bee until one day, during springtime, Johnny Taylor appears in her life and they kiss each other. Nanny watches this scene and decides that, in order to prevent this relationship from going further, her granddaughter has to marry as soon as possible: "'Yeah Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away [...] whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots'" (Hurstun 17). Apart from the meaning that marriage has for Nanny, such an urgent decision responds to her own background during

slavery. While Nanny was working as a slave in Savannah she was repeatedly raped by the foreman of the plantation. Fruit of one of those sexual rapes was the birth of Janie's mother, Leafy. Leafy, who was born when the abolition of slavery takes place, represents the first generation of black people who live in freedom. Nanny makes sacrifices in order to give Leafy all the opportunities she was denied as a slave. However, this better life doesn't save Leafy from suffering a similar fate like her mother's. Like Nanny, Leafy is also raped, on this occasion by a teacher at her school. Janie is the result of this rape. Therefore, in order to prevent her granddaughter suffering the same terrible experience, Nanny wants her to marry an old black man from the village called Logan Killicks: "tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection" (Hurston 20). Thus, Nanny, like the elder generations in O'Connor's fiction, sacrifices everything for Janie in order to give her a better life, a better life which must culminate in marriage since marriage, as Nanny says, means protection for women. Nevertheless, most of the time these marriages don't imply love or respect:

Instead of portraying marriage romantically, however, Hurston presents it frankly, replete with infidelity, jealousy, violence, and hatred. There were certain characteristics that she considers essential to a successful marriage – courage, honesty, love, trust, respect, understanding, and a willingness to negotiate differences to prop each other up on every side. As her stories and some of her novels show those who did not subscribe wholeheartedly to her successful marriage formula could suffer disasters. Curiously, in the unsuccessful marriages, the male is always eliminated, i.e., killed –an unusual and hard fate– and the woman is left intact, available, as it were, for another, hopefully happier marriage. (Frías 120)

The root of such unsuccessful marriages lies in the fact that, like Janie's marriage, they usually are arranged by the family, at first for the wife's gain. Nevertheless, as indicated

above, we will see in this paper how this kind of marriages restrict the dreams of the different female protagonists, how these are an obstacle to reach the independence and happiness with which Hurston tries to depict her female characters. These arranged marriages will only imply suffering and repression for black women and in such struggles they have no choice but to come up with different strategies to survive:

In marriages, but not necessarily in love, sometimes physically abused, occasionally physiologically abused, rarely happy, Hurston's female characters find themselves in living arrangements sanctioned by their societies but that are not often in their best interests. They may evolve individual strategies for coping, but they all reflect the basic positions in which women found themselves prior to the liberation movement of the mid-twentieth century.

(Frías 19)

The union between Logan Killicks and Janie responds to this kind of loveless and oppressive marriage. As indicated above, Janie relates marriage to love. However, marriage implies a different thing for Killicks. He is an old man so he shares Nanny's notion that "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (Hurston 19). For Killicks having a wife is a synonym for having a slave or a pack mule: "'mah fust wife never bothered me 'bout choppin' no wood nohow. She'd grab data ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten'" (Hurston 35). Janie, fed up with the terrible life her husband is giving her, turns to her grandmother for help. Nevertheless, Nanny, instead of consoling her granddaughter, explains angrily to Janie that she must forget all nonsense about romantic marriages: "'Dis love! Dat's just whut's got us uh pullin' and uh haulin' and sweatin' and doin' from can't see in de mornin' till can't see at night'" (Hurston 31). As a result, Janie wakes up from her idyllic dream to understand that "marriage did not make love" (Hurston 34).

Caught in such a repressive marriage, one day Janie meets a man called Joe Starks. The connection between them is instantaneous and Janie falls at Joe's feet when she hears his intentions of giving her the life that she deserves: "Ah pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you" (Hurston 39). Janie decides to abandon Killicks and the couple moves to Eatonville, a town built and occupied exclusively by black people, where Joe wants to have a position of relevance: "it had always been his wish and desire to be a big voice [...] a big ruler" (Hurston 39-39). With all these apparently good intentions Janie believes she finally has found the love of her life: "From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom." (Hurston 44)

Nevertheless, nothing is further from the truth. All the plans that Joe has for both of them and for Eatonville hide a more ambitious desire. In Eatonville, Joe Starks pretends to recreate his personal plantation where Janie will play the role of his particular lady on the pedestal: "he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang" (Hurston 55). "He was just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the world" (Hurston 83).

Little by little this pedestal Joe is building for Janie becomes a gilded cage for her. Joe's thirst for power and social recognition makes Janie become one of his most valued possessions and a symbol of his success in life. Consequently, Joe wants to keep Janie out of reach of the rest of their black fellows lower in the social scale, a situation already seen in O'Connor's fiction. And this obsession of keeping Janie on her luxurious altar makes Joe have a more and more repressive attitude with respect to his wife. He wants her to hide her beautiful features, above all her hair, or he mistreats her psychologically in order to turn Janie into a black copy of the submissive ladies seen in O'Connor's fiction: "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman

and her place is in de home” (Hurston 57). “Janie loved the conversation [...] but Joe had forbidden her to indulge. He didn’t want her talking after such trashy people” (Hurston 71). “Her hair was NOT going to show in the store” (Hurston 73). ““Somebody got to think for women and chillum and chickens and cows’ [...] he wanted her submission and he’d keep on fighting until he felt he had it” (Hurston 95). Therefore, Janie is caught again in a repressive marriage. However, as mentioned above, in this kind of unsuccessful marriages the male is eliminated in Hurston’s fiction. After suffering a disease Joe Starks finally dies and Janie frees herself from all the oppression she was subjected by her husband. Receiving Joe’s inheritance, Janie becomes a good catch and soon she is courted by many men from Eatonville and its surroundings.

One day a man called Tea Cake appears in the village. As she has experienced with Joe, Janie soon starts to see signs in Tea Cake of a possible lover: “she couldn’t make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom –a pear tree blossom in the spring” (Hurston 142). And, in fact, he satisfies all Janie’s (and Hurston’s) requirements. In comparison with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks, Tea Cake is a person who believes in equality between men and women. For him women are neither mules nor ladies on their pedestals, women are life partners. Unlike her previous partners, Tea Cake encourages Janie to act in life independently, he likes to do things together, he wants her to enjoy life: “she found herself glowing inside. Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice” (Hurston 128). Tea Cake is not a materialistic person and he admires Janie’s figure, above all, her hair, a symbol of her outer beauty but also of her inner strength and rebel spirit. He loves to comb it and encourages Janie to show and enjoy her body:

She woke up with tea Cake combing her hair [...]

“Ah been wishin’ so bad tuh git mah hands in yo’ hair. It’s so pretty. It feels jus’ lak underneath uh dove’s wing next to my face”

“Umph! You’s e mighty easy satisfied”

“Umph! umph! umph! Ah betcha you don’t never go tuh de lookin’ glass and enjoy yo’ eyes yo’self. You lets other folks git all de enjoyment out of’em ‘thout takin’ in any of it yo’self” (Hurston 138-139).

However, the happiness of this couple soon provokes malicious comments. As indicated earlier, the cruellest discrimination suffered by black people comes from their own kind. Some of the neighbours believe that Tea Cake is not in love with Janie and he only wants her money. There were similar cases in Eatonville of young black men courting older black women with that sole purpose. Another example of this kind of racism among black people occurs when Tea Cake and Janie move to the Everglades to work on plantations. One of their neighbours there is Mrs. Turner. Mrs. Turner “was a milky sort of woman that belonged to child-bed” (Hurston 186). She is depicted as the black version of the mothers in O’Connor’s fiction. She loathes darker people than her and she can’t comprehend why Janie with a “coffee-and-cream complexion and her luxurious hair” (Hurston 186) is in love with someone like Tea Cake: ““You’s e different from me. Ah can’t stand black niggers. Ah don’t blame de white folks from hatin’ ‘em ‘cause Ah can’t stand’ em mahself. ‘Nother thing, Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid ‘em. Us oughta class off”” (Hurston 188-189). With such a mentality, Mrs. Turner tries to pair off her brother with Janie which causes Tea Cake’s rage and the sole occasion on which he mistreats Janie physically: “being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss” (Hurston 196). Thus, despite the fact that Tea Cake represents an alternative in comparison with the previous husbands of Janie, we still see that even Tea Cake, to a certain extent, considers black women a possession of their husbands in line with

Killick's and Starks' beliefs on this matter. As a result, such event gives us a clue to how the novel will end.

Despite this altercation, Tea Cake and Janie continue with their happy life until one day a terrible hurricane batters the Everglades and during the couple's attempt to save themselves a rabid dog bites Tea Cake. As a result, Tea Cake falls ill and rabies makes him go crazy and blame Janie for trying to kill him. Finally, Janie has no option but to kill her lover in order to protect herself from his madness. As we have just seen in the previous paragraph, even Tea Cake mistreats Janie once and despite the fact that this was an isolated incident it is sufficient to precipitate his death leaving Janie free again. This situation where Hurston's women end up independent but alone is a repeated motif in her work which confirms Hurston's definition of marriage as the main obstacle to her protagonists' happiness.

Because of this action Janie is judged. Janie's trial is an example of gender discrimination among black people. From the moment Janie sets foot in the court, all her neighbours look at her with hatred and they comment on her maliciously:

Then she saw all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom [...] they were all against her, she could see [...] they were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks. (Hurston 248)

Finally, Janie is found not guilty of killing Tea Cake a decision which provokes a paradoxical reaction in the courtroom. While the white people, specifically white women, are really happy with the sentence, black people disagree with the judge's decision: "the white women cried and stood around her like a protecting wall and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away" (Hurston 252). This reaction is in line with the idea already seen a few paragraphs above about gender discrimination among black people and how the

white man sometimes acts as a shelter for black women against this situation. This is something that Hurston herself experienced during her childhood and which is explained in her essay “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”. Regarding all of this there is the following dialogue between two black men:

“Aw you know dem white mens wuzn’t gointuh do nothin’ tuh no woman dat look lak her.”

“She didn’t kill no white man, did she? Well, long as she don’t shoot no white man she kin kill jus’ as many niggers as she please.”

“Yeah, de nigger women kin kill up all de mens dey wants tuh, but you bet’ not to kill one uh dem. De white folks will sho hang yuh if yuh do.”

“Well, you know whut dey say ‘uh white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth.’ Dey do as dey please.” (Hurston 252-253)

It is curious how this envy, hatred and discrimination among black people and, above all, against black women goes so far that reality is distorted to such a point that, as we see in the previous quote, a black man describes black women as the freest human beings on earth. We have seen in Janie’s personal struggle with her different husbands (and also in O’Connor’s short stories) that, despite the end of slavery, black women still have to fight against their stereotyped image as mules and the property of their husbands on their way to reach the independence and the respect they deserve.

After Tea Cake’s funeral, Janie returns to Eatonville to spend the rest of her days there. As we have already seen in O’Connor’s short stories, this another example of the idea of the South as a place where someone returns to find peace and rest after going beyond his personal horizon, as Janie explains in the following quotation: “Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons” (Hurston 257).

Therefore, the novel ends with an old Janie who has fought during her lifetime against the submissive role imposed by her granddaughter Nanny and her first two husbands:

She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people* [...] here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon [...] and tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. (Hurston 119-120)

As we can see in this quote, Janie, like many other protagonists in Hurston's work, expresses her total disconnection with her grandmother. We have also seen this situation in O'Connor's short stories; however, unlike Joy or Julian, Hurston's female characters are capable of living independently from their ancestors and their Old South mentality. As indicated earlier, this is an example of how Hurston doesn't rely so much on the "mother-daughter pattern" (Westling 510) while in O'Connor's fiction these kinds of relationships, despite the apparent disconnection between mothers and daughters, are ones of mutual dependence between both generations.

The novel ends with a Janie who finally has found love in the figure of Tea Cake with whom she has gone beyond the horizon. All these experiences have forged a spirit of independence and pride with which Janie will live until her death. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, Janie ends her life also free of all of her husbands, even free of her real love Tea Cake.

Another of Hurston's works that is on the subject of the situation of black women in the American South is the short story entitled "Sweat". As its title suggests, "Sweat" deals with the story of Delia Jones, a black woman who works hard as a washwoman for white people and who lives terrified by her husband Sykes in an oppressive and loveless marriage.

Delia is an example of Nanny's stereotype of black women as the mule of the world. Sykes is unemployed so the couple depends economically on Delia's job. Apart from this job, obviously it is Delia who has to do all the housework. Like Logan Killicks, Sykes considers Delia his personal servant and in order to keep this master-slave relationship he mistreats his wife both physically and psychologically. For example, Delia is afraid of snakes and Sykes, knowing this, usually scares his wife by throwing a whip that looks like a snake.

One of the possible reasons that explain the domestic violence of which black women are victims is that related to the complexes of their husbands. Many black men release their frustrations in life, their inferiority complexes, their cowardice through terrible beatings, rapes and psychological harassment of their wives (Frías 1998). This could be Sykes' possible case. He is unemployed and all the money that comes into his house comes from Delia's hard work for white people. Sykes doesn't like this situation in part because it is not so easy for him to find a job, in part because he is supported by his wife and in part because Delia's job continues to be a reminder, to a certain extent, of the still prevailing supremacy of white people (Frías 1998). For all these reasons Sykes forbids Delia to bring to their house the dirty clothes of her white clients and he threatens to beat her if she doesn't obey him: “Ah done tole you time and again to keep them white folk's clothes outa dis house [...] Ah aint gointer have it in mah house. Don't gimme no lip neither, else Ah'll throw 'em out and put mah fist up side yo' head to boot” (Hurston 956).

However, despite this violent scene, Delia sometimes draws strength and confronts Sykes: “Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin' fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat! [...] Mah tub of suds is filled yo' belly with vittles more times than yo' hands is filled it. Mah sweat is done paid for this house” (Hurston 956-957). Paradoxically, Delia's role as a mule working night and day until exhaustion has provided her

with an economic independence and an inner strength which help her to survive her loveless and repressive marriage, a marriage which, like Janie, Delia initially relates to love while Sykes sees marriage in completely different way: “she had brought love to the union and he had brought a longing for the flesh. Two months after the wedding, he had given her the first brutal beating” (Hurston 957). Sykes’ sexual desire leads to marital infidelity. He is courting a woman called Bertha with whom he spends Delia’s money in food and alcohol. This infidelity is another way of humiliating Delia since Sykes shows in public his love affair with Bertha: “just then Delia drove past on her way home, as Sykes was ordering magnificently for Bertha. It pleased him for Delia to see” (Hurston 960). The whole village knows Sykes’ infidelity. They also know the hard life Sykes has always given to Delia, a woman who was really pretty when she married him and now her body is a reflection of each and every one of the terrible fifteen years of marriage: “it’s too bad, too, cause she wuz a tight pretty lil trick when he got huh” (Hurston 958). Due to this the village supports Delia and rejects Sykes’ behaviour, a type of behaviour quite normal among black men that a neighbour explains with the following simile:

‘Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in ‘im. There’s plenty men dat takes a wife lak dey do a joint uh sugar-cane. It’s round, juicy an’ sweet when dey gits it. But dey squeeze an’ grind an’ wring tell dey wring every drop uh pleasure dat’s in ‘em out. When dey’s satisfied dat dey is wrung dry, dey treats ‘em jes lak dey do a cane-chew. Dey throws ‘em away.’
(Hurston 959)

Sykes’ infidelity reaches to such a point that he plans to throw Delia out of their house in order to begin a new life with Bertha. He resorts to putting a real snake inside a box in order to scare his wife. However, Delia again draws strength and confronts Sykes: “‘Ah’m goin’ tuh de white folks bout *you*, mah young man, de very nex’ time you lay yo’ han’s on

me. Mah cup is done run ovah'” (Hurston 963). Like we have seen with Janie and Hurston herself, white people are considered by Delia and by many black women as a shelter against the discrimination, envy and hatred they receive from their own people.

Days go by and the snake doesn't show signs of leaving the box and attack so Sykes' plan fails. What is more, it turns against him following the pattern in Hurston's works that in unsuccessful marriages the male is always eliminated. The couple forgets the snake in the box until one day it wakes up and attacks Sykes in the kitchen while Delia is hanging out the washing outside. Delia hears and sees Sykes screaming and asking for help but she is totally paralyzed because of her fear of snakes so she watches how Sykes dies because of the snake's poison: “she saw him on his hands and knees” (Hurston 966). It is important to highlight the symbolism that can be extracted from this last quotation. This short story ends with Delia standing up and watching how her husband is dying on his knees. This scene means an inversion of the master-slave relationship that has always prevailed in Delia's marriage (Frías 1998) and a symbol of the strength and independence with which Hurston depicts her female black characters. At the same time, the image of the snake is also loaded with great symbolism. Sykes' use of the snake to terrorize Delia can be considered as an inversion of the mythical connotations that the snake has in the biblical story of Adam and Eve. In the Bible the snake, which symbolizes original sin, persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil and due to this action Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden. There is a clear association between the serpent and Eve and by extension between sin and women. However, in “Sweat” there is an inversion of such association. Sykes and his serpent represent evil for Delia and, as a result, he dies, as occurs with many other husbands in Hurston's fiction. The association between Sykes and the serpent can go further if we consider the reptile as a phallic symbol. Therefore, the many threats of Sykes with both his belt and the serpents can be understood as a symbol, not only of the psychological abuse that

Delia suffers, but also of the physical and sexual abuses perpetrated by Sykes against her. (Frías 1998)

Finally it is important to highlight the information that can be extracted by comparing the two works of Hurston used in this paper. There are certain similarities between them. Both stories deal with the struggle of black women against their image as the mule of the world. Janie achieves her independence after several failed marriages, even her marriage with Tea Cake, the only one based on love. Meanwhile Delia has to fight against her marriage with Sykes where she is his particular pack mule, a union that reminds us what Janie's life would be like if she didn't flee from Logan Killicks, her first husband. As mentioned earlier, the way in which Hurston's women achieve independence is through the death of their husbands. Taking this into account we can see the similarities between the deaths of the two husbands in these narratives, Sykes from a snake bite and Tea Cake from the bite of a rabid dog. As mentioned earlier, this a repeated motif in Hurston's fiction which reveals the ulterior aims of her narratives in presenting women who end up literally alone but independent.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this paper Flannery O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston carry out a detailed representation of white and black women respectively in the American South at the turn of the twentieth century. Although their first intention is that of demythologizing the stereotypes of the Southern lady and the victim mentality of the African American community, we have seen how through the clash between mothers and daughters both writers portray positive and negative aspects of both generations of Southern women.

In general, each of these two authors, with her own way of portraying her female characters, makes an appeal to Southern women and by extension to all women to develop

their own personalities as human beings without taking into account their gender, their skin colour or the cultural heritage of their female ancestors. It is Hurston who is more explicit in this task. If Flannery O'Connor depicts her Southern women through their interactions with the society that surrounds them, Zora Neale Hurston focuses more on her characters as individuals. Janie and other protagonists in Hurston's fiction have as purposes in life finding happiness, falling in love, being respected, going beyond the horizon or living their negritude without taking into account the reactions of the rest of the world. Therefore, her depictions are more complete than O'Connor's because she portrays her independent, proud and strong black women from both physical and psychological points of view, while O'Connor focuses more on the psychological aspect.

The South as the spatial context in both O'Connor's and Hurston's works has a special importance in their task of depicting Southern women. For most of their female characters the South is a synonym for home, for peace, for spiritual revitalization, the place where someone returns to spend her last days. We have seen this fact in the metaphor of the ruined mansion in O'Connor's work or the return of Janie to Eatonville in Hurston's novel. However, at the same time, the South has a negative meaning for other characters; it implies an obstacle to their development as human beings. This is the case of Joy and her desire of lecturing in a university rather than living with her mother on a farm. In line with this idea there is also the longing for the horizon, for new experiences that Janie and other characters of Hurston's fiction have.

Another feature shown in both works is the racial issue. We have seen how Flannery O'Connor uses the racial clash between white and black people as a means to portray both her mothers and daughters/sons. While the elder generation of Southern women is depicted as xenophobic and in favour of segregation of black people, the young generation doesn't have this kind of prejudices. However, at the same time both generations show condescension to

their white fellows lower in social or intellectual status. This racial conflict is also used by Zora Neale Hurston though, in general the discrimination takes place among black people. White people usually mean for her black women a shelter against this discrimination and an economic opportunity to prosper in life and achieve the economic independence that allows them to cope with such a hostile scene.

It is also important to highlight how in both literary works these depictions are clearly influenced by O'Connor's and Hurston's personal lives. Through her "mother-daughter pattern" (Westling 510) and characters like Joy and her disability, Flannery O'Connor makes a self-criticism of her own situation as a disabled person because of lupus and the relationship with her mother. Biographical features of her personal life such as the symbol of the horizon and her conception of marriage are also used by Zora Neale Hurston to depict her independent, proud and strong black women.

To conclude, despite the initial differences between both writers, their literary works can also be considered a denunciation of the situation of women in the American South. O'Connor's Southern lady and Hurston's mule of the world are used to criticize some stereotypes about white and black women but also to denounce, despite the beginning of a new South after the plantation/slavery period, how many women are still caged in marriages where, instead of finding love, they are forced to work hard, where equality between men and women is far from being a reality.

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