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Zora Neale Hurston and the Emergence of Self

by

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Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Jones
Dedication

To my father, James R. Williams, and my mother, Margie G. Williams, who always urge me to "jump at the sun" and to reach for my horizons, no matter how far away they might seem.
Acknowledgements

Writing about Zora Neale Hurston has not been an easy task for me because I love Hurston and her works so much. I found that I wanted to write down every thought, phrase, and quote that praised Hurston. Now I realize that at least twenty pages have been deleted from my original draft. These pages my thesis director, Suzanne Jones, and I lovingly named "fluff." They had nothing to due with the thesis, but they sounded good.

I take this opportunity to give special thanks to Dr. Jones for her sound advice, firm editing, and patience. I thank her for allowing me to discover more about Hurston, and to experiment with new ideas as I wrote. I also owe her any sense of style I might have developed through these long months. Before Dr Jones, I thought style was something only professionals writers claimed to have. I also thank her for our long discussions of Hurston, women, feminism, and life in general. From these discussssions I learned a lot of things about myself as well as Hurston’s literature.

Now that the "fluff" is gone I feel that I have accomplished a good piece of criticism. In addition, I feel that I let some my "true self" emerge in these fifty-four pages.
Zora Neale Hurston and the Emergence of Self

Abraham Maslow in his work *From The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* made the statement:

Every human being has [two] sets of forces within him. One set clings to safety and defensiveness out of fear, tending to regress backward, hanging to the past, afraid to grow... afraid of independence, freedom and separateness. The other set of forces impels him forward toward wholeness of Self and uniqueness of Self, toward full functioning of all his capacities, toward confidence in the face of the external world at the same time that he can accept his deepest, real, unconscious Self (45-6).

What makes a person afraid to grow? What holds a person from reaching the farthest limits, from trying to touch the horizon?

Zora Neale Hurston seeks to answer these questions. She makes her audience aware of how they can become victims of stereotypes which they interpret as truth, thus preventing themselves from developing into individuals. Hurston focuses on the black female in her works. Hurston urges black females to look at their environment objectively. If the stereotyped roles of society are in conflict with a woman’s self, Hurston urges the woman to transcend these roles. When women transcend the norm, they
become autonomous individuals free of the restrictions of the stereotyped roles others may try to place upon them.

Women can transcend stereotyped roles by separating the stereotyped role from self. As women become aware of the roles society expects them to play, they become aware of self. In her works Hurston suggests that male/female conflict arises because there is a lack of self awareness. The black male lets society dictate his role in a relationship and, often, the black female simply adapts to the situation the best way she can.

Hurston elevates the status of the black female by showing that the black female is a survivor. Hurston’s survival motif is a recurring theme through all her works. The survival of the black female in Hurston’s early works is developed through "role reversals." Hurston uses "role reversals" in her short story, "Sweat." Hurston’s female protagonist, Delia Jones, does not come to an actual self-awareness, but Delia heroically emerges as a woman of stronger character. Delia survives the oppression of her brutal husband with stoic perseverance.

In her later novels, Hurston shows some of her characters gaining self-awareness. Although her male characters never come to self-actualization, Hurston’s females emerge as individuals aware of how society’s stereotypes have manipulated their lives and the lives of their mates. Hurston integrates the theme of self-definition best in her novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God. The female protagonist acutely realizes the dichotomy between her public role and her true self. With this awareness, Janie learns
to live in society while retaining her individuality.

Hurston reveals through her use of characterization the internal conflict that black females undergo while searching for self. Hurston shows their internal struggle by placing her female characters into situations in which the reader can observe their psychological growth or lack thereof. Because Hurston's black female characters come from varied socio-economic backgrounds, the reader has a unique opportunity to visualize social alternatives available to black women. Hurston gives insight into why some black females choose the roles society offers as opposed to fighting for their individuality. Hurston's study of the black female makes her works extremely valuable because until Hurston no one had made a careful examination of how the black female interacts with society or among the people within her race.

The material for Hurston's study of the black female comes from Hurston's memories of Eatonville. Hurston's background in Eatonville, Florida, an all black self-governing town, is of relevance to her fiction since most of her characters, male and female, are products of Hurston's own personal experiences in her native Eatonville. Her black female characters are interacting in their own milieu somewhat removed from the oppression of white society.

Thus, questions arise. Though many of these black females are out of the sight of whites, so to speak, are white stereotypes out of the minds of the black women? In addition, does black culture itself have its own oppressive stereotypes that confine
black women? Do these stereotyped roles dictate the way in which we live to the extent that the black woman may be afraid to grow and (worse) unable to take chances to move toward wholeness of self? Possible answers lie in the characterization of Hurston's female protagonists.

Hurston answers some of these questions in her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, in which she writes about her childhood in Eatonville, Florida. Even though black women were out of the sight of whites, white stereotypes still plagued black women in Eatonville. In addition, the blacks in Eatonville did not seek to overcome these stereotypes, but rather capitulated to them.

Eatonville, Florida was the first all black self-governing town in America. Hurston describes it with pride as she says, "a pure Negro town-charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all .... I do not mean by that the backside of an average [white] town" (Dust Tracks, 3). Her life in Eatonville was relatively idyllic. Her father and mother had a good marriage. Hurston and her brothers and sister were comfortable in their eight-room, two-story house. She recalls "a five-acre garden with things growing in it, and so we were never hungry" (Dust Tracks, 18).

Yet, Hurston was still a victim of stereotyped roles impressed upon her by her father. Her father, John Hurston, became a true leader in Eatonville. He was mayor for three terms, he wrote local laws, and he preached. However, John Hurston did not encourage his younger daughter Zora to follow in his footsteps. Hurston recalls her father's warnings to "let well enough alone. It did not do for
Negroes to have too much spirit" (Dust Tracks, 20). Hurston adds, "He was always trying to break mine [spirit] or kill me in the attempt" (Dust Tracks, 20).

Hurston implies that her father preferred the mannerisms of her sister Sarah, who was "meek and mild" (Dust Tracks, 21). John Hurston felt that society would accept a meek black woman. Hurston says, "He predicted dire things for me. The white folks were not going to stand for it. I was going to be hung before I got grown" (Dust Tracks, 21). These examples show that stereotyped beliefs about the proper demeanor of a black woman held much weight even in an all-black township.

Even though stereotyped roles existed, Lucy Hurston, Zora's mother, encouraged her daughter to transcend these stereotypes. Lucy Hurston is described as a small-featured woman weighing around 90 to 100 pounds. Yet, she was the boss of the family. Hurston remembers that "Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at the sun'...she didn't want to 'squinch my spirit'..." (Dust Tracks, 21)." Lucy Hurston became Zora's first role model. Lucy Hurston was a woman aware of self, a woman who rejected the stereotyped roles of her society. Lucy urged Zora to retain her individuality despite the restrictions society placed on women.

Although Zora's father did not encourage Zora to be as outgoing as she wanted to be, John did not accept the stereotyped role that dictated that the male should be the dominant partner in the marriage. John respected Lucy even "when people teased him
about Mama being the boss of the family" (Dust Tracks, 22). Other men beat their wives to show their dominance. Hurston delineates these two very different views on the treatment of women.

Zora’s father held the philosophy that women should not be beaten. John Hurston is described as "two hundred pounds of bone and muscle" (Dust Tracks, 22) while her mother is described as very petite. Hurston’s father says, "What’s the use of me taking my fist to a poor weakly thing like a woman?" (Dust Tracks, 22). Uncle Jim Potts, Lucy’s brother, took the opposing point-of-view. Uncle Jim beat his wife Caroline when he felt that Caroline was not humble enough to show him the respect he thought he deserved. While Lucy Pearson does not have to literally fight for her existence, Uncle Jim’s wife, Aunt Caroline, does. Aunt Caroline asserts authority in her home by brawn rather than brains. If Uncle Jim started an argument, Aunt Caroline would go into action. Caroline was "nobody’s weakling" (Dust Tracks, 23).

Hurston asserts that beating women is another form of stereotyped behavior dictating men and women’s relations. When some men felt that their position of authority was challenged in the home, they beat their wives. These men allowed stereotyped roles to dictate their behavior. These men who relied on stereotyped roles had not come to terms with their role as husband. As Hurston shows in future works, a good relationship between a man and a woman must be one of equality. The man must set aside the stereotyped beliefs that the man must be dominant. The woman must expect a position
of equality and must not subordinate herself to man. Hurston has revealed that the stereotype of the meek woman and the dominant male are roles that the black community endorses for its male/female relationships.

Hurston deals with male/female conflict in her fiction. In "Sweat", Sykes beats Delia because Delia elevates herself to a higher socio-economic class. In Their Eyes Were Watching God Jody beats his wife Janie to make her submit to him. Tea Cake beats Janie once to assert his authority. John Pearson slaps his wife Lucy in Jonah's Gourd Vine because she reminds him of his sinful weakness. Hurston suggests that violence occurs in relationships because of stereotyped roles which dictate how men and women should interact.

The stereotyped ideal of the man providing for the wife and children also affected male/female relations. The marriage of John and Lucy Hurston was not a blessed occasion for Zora's grandmother because John Hurston was from a poor background. An illegitimate mulatto "from over de creek" (Dust Tracks, 13), John was a disgrace to Lucy's family, the Pottses. The Pottses were middle-class landowning blacks. To her grandmother John was never anything but "that yeller bastard" (Dust Tracks, 15). Due to his economic background, Lucy's mother felt that John would never be successful. Thus, Lucy Potts was a prime example of a woman who transcends stereotyped roles. Lucy rejected the middle-class ideal for the man she loves.

Hurston also deals with class distinction in her fiction.
Jonah's Gourd Vine deals with Hurston's parents. Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God tackles Nanny's and Jody's stereotyped ideals of the perfect middle-class black woman. Janie parallels Hurston's mother by rejecting these ideals. Miriam and Zipporah in Moses, Man of the Mountain exemplify two women who are victims of stereotyped ideals concerning class. Miriam never enjoys knowing Zipporah because Miriam is jealous of Zipporah's position as Mennonite tribal princess.

As these examples illustrate, Hurston's discussion of her childhood in Dust Tracks on a Road shows that blacks do hold stereotypes against members of their own race. The stereotypes may be derived from white ideals, but the stereotypes are accepted by blacks. Hurston uses these stereotyped roles remembered from her childhood to form the foundation for male/female conflict in her fiction.

Hurston based much of her early fiction on her Eatonville experiences. Hurston won several literary awards for her early short stories and plays. The recognition Hurston received led her to New York and the Harlem Renaissance. There, Hurston soon found that she had to tackle stereotyped roles dictated to the black writer in the 1920's.

Darryl Pickney, book reviewer for the New York Review of Books, describes the atmosphere of the 1920's in his article, "In Sorrow's Kitchen." The Harlem Renaissance reached its prime in the mid-1920's. Hurston, like many other black writers, was in the center of the black art explosion. Yet, Pickney asserts that Hurston
was at odds with the dominant black literary movement towards protest literature. Prominent Negro activists Alan Locke and W. E. B. DuBois coined the term "The New Negro" to describe the trend. A major theme of an essay by Locke, "Negro Youth Speaks," is that "the young writers will speak for the masses by expressing the race spirit" (Hemenway, 41). "The New Negro" writer was heralded as the spokesperson for the inarticulate masses. Locke aligned himself closely with W. E. B. DuBois by writing, "What stirs upon the lips of the masses is already vocal upon the lips of the talented few . . ." (Hemenway, 42). The "talented few" was what W. E. B. DuBois thought of as the "talented tenth." The talented tenth was a phrase which described the small portion of educated blacks who were to lead the uneducated masses. DuBois later contributed to Locke's volume entitled The New Negro. In a review of The New Negro DuBois said, "This book is filled and bursting with propaganda" (Hemenway, 42). Hurston and other young artists rebelled against the role of racial spokespersons being forced upon them "because they believed that a propagandistic motive vitiated artistic effects" (Hemenway, p.42). In a letter to Alan Locke, Hurston asserts:

"Don't you think there ought to be a purely literary magazine in our group? The way I look at it, The Crisis is the house organ of the NAACP and Opportunity is the same to the Urban League. They are in literature on the side" (Pickney, 55).

Hurston resisted the restrictions opposed upon her a by
initiating a small movement of her own. Hurston, Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman headed a small group of energetic young writers. They called themselves the "Niggerati," a term the younger writers used to shock the older crowd of writers (Hemenway, 43). Hurston, probably the most witty of the group, proclaimed herself "Queen of the Niggerati." Together the Niggerati published a literary magazine entitled Fire!!.

The purpose of Fire!! was to create a forum for free artistic expression outside of protest literature. The source of the materials did not stem from black middle-class themes. Rather, the Niggerati chose themes that dealt with lower-class blacks. Wallace Thurman commented, "We want Fire!! to be provocative--want it to provide the shocks necessary to encourage new types of artistic interest and new types of artistic energy" (Hemenway, 49).

Fire!! was largely ignored. W. E. B. DuBois did not say anything for it or against it. Benjamin Brawley, a respected black critic at the time, criticized it harshly. Alan Locke called its lower-class subject matter a portrayal of "contemporary decadence" rather than noteworthy literature. Only the NAACP's Crisis concluded that the works were nicely written and wished Fire!! well (Hemenway, 48).

Fire!! was only published once. However, the works submitted were very well-crafted and definitely out of the mainstream. Hurston submitted the short story "Sweat," an intricately designed work depicting male/female conflicts.
"Sweat" poignantly depicts the drudgery and pain a black female experiences because her husband resents her. Her husband harbors resentment because his wife has found an income from washing white people’s clothes. The economic imbalance within the relationship releases a whirlwind of violent emotions into the marriage. Dealing with the stereotype of male being the dominant partner as well as the source of economic support for the family, Hurston focuses on the black female protagonist Delia Jones. "Sweat" centers on Delia’s means of dealing with the blood, sweat, and tears of a broken marriage that has lingered on for fifteen years.

Delia grows defiant and independent as the story progresses. Hurston shows the reader that Delia no longer accepts white stereotypes as patterns of behavior. Delia demands respect from Sykes, and Delia refuses to allow Sykes to take away her home. Delia realizes that her hard work has paid for the house and their poor existence.

After being taunted by Sykes, Delia defiantly screams, "Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washing for fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!... Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin' in it" ("Sweat", 40).

Although Delia has been meek in the past, she stands up to Sykes. Delia’s thoughts turn inwardly retrospective. Delia assesses her
marriage. She recalls that "she had brought love to the marriage and he had brought longing for the flesh. Two months after the wedding he had given her her first brutal beating" ("Sweat", 41).

Although Hurston does not focus on Sykes, we can infer conclusions about the reasons for Sykes's actions. Sykes's problems can be traced back to stereotyped roles. First, because of her financial security Delia does not need Sykes at all. Thus, Sykes's manhood is challenged. In retaliation, Sykes begins to keep a mistress named Bertha. His promiscuity is a stereotyped assertion of Sykes's manhood. Lillie P. Howard infers that Sykes finds acceptance in the arms of a woman who needs him. Howard also believes that the beatings represent Sykes's trying to dominate a high-spirited woman (67-8). Sykes is a contemptible character.

Delia and Sykes can be compared to Adam and Eve. Mary Jane Lupton observes that " 'Sweat' is Adam and Eve in reverse, a very blissful bower made peaceful when the snake bites the man" (54). Sykes puts a rattlesnake into Delia's wash basket to kill her, since without Delia Sykes would be free to bring his mistress into the house. The snake is described in "Luciferian terms" (Howard, 206) as he pours "his awful beauty from the basket onto the bed ("Sweat", 50). Delia gets away from the snake, but Sykes returning home is not so lucky. Unlike the Biblical Eve, Delia plays a passive role in the fall of this man.

Hurston's use of role reversals or "ironic reversals" as Mary Jane Lupton calls them are a form of feminism. Yet, unlike later women, Delia survives passively. Delia is heroic only because she
manages to survive. However, Delia's survival is not a triumphant one because Delia does not take an active part in mediating her living condition. Delia never comes to terms with her role and self. Instead, Hurston shows Delia adapting to her situation by withdrawing into her religion. Delia finds strength in her spirituality to overcome her difficulties. Delia attends church functions and constantly goes to her room to pray. Delia hides behind her religion and waits out the storm until the final confrontation. Delia escapes death by sheer luck. Hurston's later female protagonists survive through more active means such as cleverness, a quick tongue, or even a gun if need be.

"Sweat" is a definite movement away from the literature of Locke and DuBois. Hurston makes a literary statement with "Sweat" by her characterization of Delia and Sykes. Unlike much of the protest literature emerging, Hurston does not portray characters motivated by white oppression. Delia and Sykes's martial problems are uniquely their own. Hurston shows a black family interacting independent of outside interference. Hurston successfully developed a piece of literature totally devoid of black/white racial themes.

In addition, Hurston chose lower-class Negroes rather than middle-class Negroes as her subject. Hurston shows the brutal reality that some black men beat their wives. Certainly, such graphic violence is not what Locke and DuBois would have wanted their "New Negroes" to portray. Locke and DuBois feared whites would think all black people are like Delia and Sykes. Yet, "Sweat" is literature—beautifully crafted with complex characterization,
imagery, and symbolism.

Hurston left New York shortly after the publication of *Fire!!*, but her awareness of black male/female relationships was heightened from her training in anthropology at Barnard. She did her field research in Eatonville and the surrounding counties. The material which she gathered there went into her first book, *Mules and Men*. Hurston’s approach to studying black culture was unorthodox. Hurston combined an "'inside' personalized subjective view with an 'outside' scholarly and analytical view" (Mikell, 219). Hurston went back to her Eatonville folk and looked at the culture of her hometown from a scientific perspective. Hurston devoted a large part of *Mules and Men* to the study of the role of black women in rural society.

First, Hurston reveals how women assert authority in black culture. Hurston shows women partaking in lying or storytelling sessions with the men. As the women compete against the men, the comment is made, "Don’t you know you can’t git de best of no woman in de talking game? Her tongue is all de weapon a woman got" (*Mules*, 49). Women verbally assert authority over men. This is an important point. Despite stereotyped roles handed to black women, black women try to regain control over their lives by use of words.

Big Sweet exemplifies a woman who has gained control over men through language. Big Sweet tells stories as she walks with the men. When Sam Hopkins interrupts her Big Sweet regains control by snapping, "When Ah’m shellin’ my corn, you keep out yo’ nubbins,
Sam" (Mules, 141). Big Sweet asserts her authority through language. Cheryl Wall agrees: "Women constantly re-negotiate their positions through language in situations where people seem to be just talking" (376). Hurston reaffirms the legitimacy of black language as a means of establishing the black woman's position among men. Through Big Sweet, Hurston also affirms the potential of the black woman to be a whole self-sustaining individual.

Big Sweet is a curious mixture of warmth and sexual attractiveness, as suggested by her nickname "Sweet." Yet, she is very powerful, as suggested by the adjective "Big." Big Sweet was equal to a man in every respect including physical strength. Her powerful side is evident in a violent scene where Big Sweet defends Hurston with a knife against another woman.

Although Hurston admires Big Sweet, Big Sweet is a victim of her living conditions. In order to survive, Big Sweet compromises her femininity to be equal to men. Big Sweet is caught in the decadence of the work camp. Although women have equal rights to defend their friends, no one should have to submit to violence as a way of life. Big Sweet could be more of a heroic female if she could rise above her condition.

Hurston gives an alternative to Big Sweet's way of life. Hurston opens the passage describing the violence with a sermon on the equality of men and women entitled "Behold the Rib." Black sermons do not focus on this subject often, so, Hurston must have deliberately placed it here. "Behold the Rib" relates that God took the rib from man's side "so dat places de woman beside us"
The preacher goes on to say "Male and female like God made us, side by side" (Mules, 182). Hurston shows that women should be in a position of equality with men. Big Sweet should try to find that relationship with a man who will treat her as an equal rather than fight all men and women in Polk County to retain her self-esteem and self-respect. Hurston suggests that no woman or man should have to lower himself or herself to the expectations of the norms prevalent at the time.

Hurston herself desired to transcend the norms of black novelists at the time. While Hurston was comfortable with short stories such as "Sweat," she wrote, "The idea of attempting a book seemed so big, that I gazed at it in the quiet of the night, but hid it away from even myself in the daylight" (Hemenway, 159). In her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston explains why she was afraid to write her first novel:

For one thing it seemed offkey. What I wanted to tell was a story about a man, and from what I had heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man do such and so regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. Inherent difference, no. But I said to myself that was not what was expected of me, so I was afraid to tell a story the way I wanted, or
rather the way the story told itself to me. So I went on that way for three years (102).


Hurston's female characters play an integral role in the plot. The story revolves around John's reactions to the women he encounters. John never acts on his own volition. Critic Darwin Turner argues that "instead, he reacts to fortune's winds, which most often emanate from the gusty pantings of lustful women" (100). Role reversals are evident. The women—Amy Crittenden, Mehaley, Lucy Potts, Hattie Tyson, and Sally Lovelace—control John. Hurston reveals the control women have over men on four distinct levels: maternal, physical, spiritual, and supernatural.

The first woman John is in contact with is Amy Crittenden, his mother. Hurston uses Amy as the symbol of the "earth mother." Amy is John's protector from the cruelty of his step-father. Despite Amy's deep love for her children and her protective
nature, Amy and her husband Ned are portrayed by Hurston as
tragic figures. Amy and Ned are tragic figures because they are in
constant strife with each other. The strife occurs because
neither has defined his or her role as a free individual rather
than a slave. Amy and Ned are free in body but not free in soul.
Ned and Amy leave the plantation seeking the white ideal of the
big house and the upper-class status that accompanies it. Instead,
they fall victim to the stereotyped roles of how men and women
should interact. These stereotypes are revealed to Ned by the
poor-white trash that Ned works for.

Ned becomes a slave to stereotyped roles. The whites tell
him that John is not a good son since he is a mulatto. They
constantly remind Ned of how lighter-skinned Negroes were treated
better than darker-skinned Negroes on plantations. Ned remembers
how he worked in the hot sun while lighter-skinned Negroes were
allowed to be house slaves. The whites tell Ned that John thinks
that he is a better person because of his complexion. Ned believes
what the white men say and derides John constantly. Ned also
brutally beats his wife to show his authority. Thus, Amy is a
constant victim of Ned’s brutality, and John is a constant object
of Ned’s derision.

The problem in the relationship is that Ned cannot separate
his true self from outside stereotypes. Amy reminds Ned that he
loved John like his own son before he started listening to the
white men. Ned and Amy’s marriage, like Delia’s and Sykes’s has
been turned into a brutal relationship by stereotyped roles.
Although Amy defends her children and herself with scathing words and brute force, Amy is still not a heroic figure. Amy is caught in the subordinate role of a slave-woman. Her former master has been replaced by Ned who refuses to let her be his equal. Amy never rises above her condition, instead, like Delia, Amy stoically survives. Amy and Ned will always be slaves to stereotyped roles until they decide to create a new relationship rather than let stereotyped roles dictate their behavior. Thus, Amy tries to fulfill her role as "earth-mother" by sending John away to his unacknowledged father, Alf Pearson. Amy resigns herself to protect her other children as best she can.

The next woman who controls John symbolizes the "sex-goddess." Mehaley has a physical power over John much like Delilah has over Samson. Mehaley’s actions take over John’s strength. She can easily slide her arms "about John’s passive neck" (Jonah’s, 91). Mehaley is a mystical figure who rings of the exotic African past. Mehaley believes that she can win John’s love and fidelity because of her sexual attractiveness. Although Mehaley’s sexual allure is a type of control that women assert over men, Hurston does not advocate relationships based solely on sexual attraction. Mehaley does not grow into self-awareness from the relationship, nor does John. The satisfaction gained is purely physical.

Hurston gives Mehaley a farcical fate to show that a woman who believes that her sexual attraction can form a foundation for a marriage is in error. Pomp Lamar, a hoe-hand, marries Mehaley. Pomp easily "fell beneath Mehaley’s mango-call--exotic, but
fibrous and well-bodied" (Jonah's, 133). Mehaley's marriage is ill-fated from the start: Pomp is hours late and Mehaley's father, who is not an ordained minister, performs the ceremony. Thus, Hurston shows that a bond between man and woman based solely on sex is not a sacred one but a farcical one instead.

Lucy Potts Pearson asserts her control over John through the bonds of marriage. Lucy is strong, defiant, and independent. Of all of Hurston's early female characters, Lucy is the closest to separating self from the role that society dictates. Lucy loves John and defies her parents to marry him. Lucy's parents wish her to marry a wealthy land-owner so that Lucy will have middle-class status. Lucy rejects this role thrust upon her and starts a life with John. Lucy is similar to Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God in many ways.

Hurston reveals that Lucy and John's relationship is a wholesome one. Lucy is John's soul-mate, and John thrives with her. Lucy advises him on church matters, business ventures, relations with his congregation, and his personal life. Lucy is John's "Jonah's Gourd Vine" of protection.

Hurston wrote Carl Van Vechten that she adopted the title for the novel from Jonah 4:6-10. Hurston writes, "You see the prophet of God sat up under a gourd vine that had grown up one night. But a cut worm came along and cut it down. Great and sudden growth. One act of malice and it is withered and gone" (Hemenway, 192). Lucy, like the biblical gourd vine, is John's protection from harsh realities of life. The malice or cut worm that destroys
Lucy is the infidelity and ingratitude John shows her.

The relationship of John and Lucy deteriorates because John can not define his role in his marriage and his role as a minister. Hurston purposely makes John undergo this struggle. In a letter to James Weldon Johnson Hurston writes:

I see a preacher as a man outside his pulpit and so far as I am concerned he should be free to follow his own bent as other men (Howard, 74).

John’s conflict arises from his definition of manhood.

John’s definition of manhood is purely stereotypical. John believes in the white stereotype that black men are sexually superior. John’s white father encourages John’s behavior by telling John that he is a "walking orgasm" (Jonah’s, 105). John is blatantly unfaithful to Lucy during their marriage. John also believes that as a male he is the dominant force in the marriage. Thus, he does not acknowledge Lucy’s contribution. Hurston makes John pay for his lack of self-awareness and his lack of respect for his soul-mate, Lucy.

Hattie Tyson, John’s voodoo--practicing mistress, blinds John to his moral obligation to Lucy and his spiritual obligation to his congregation. Lucy tells John, "you either got tuh stop lovin' Hattie Tyson uh you got tuh stop preachin" (Jonah’s Gourd Vine, 192). Lucy realizes that John must accept his role as minister or as lover. John thinks that he can be both.

Irving Goffman in his work The Presentation of Self in Everyday
Life speaks about the roles people play.

A person can either be sincere or cynical in the role which he or she plays. A sincere person will adopt the role as his or her true self. The role and self are integrated into a whole individual. A cynical person will separate role and self. He or she will play a part similar to an actor in a play. The actor and the role are not one. In order for the actor to gain respect, the audience must perceive the role the actor is playing as a genuine representation of his or her self during the play (Goffman, 18).

John must do the same in front of his congregation. If John is going to be a preacher, he must act the role. He must appear sincere even if he is not. Lucy knows this, but John is either too stupid or too amoral to realize it. Hurston does not develop his motivations well enough for us to assess exactly why John is so blatantly unfaithful.

The influence of stereotyped roles causes John to resent Lucy. His congregation calls him a "wife-made man" (Jonah's, 184). John tells Lucy, "You always tryin' 'tuh tell me whut tuh do. Ah wouldn't be whare Ah is, if Ah didn't know mo' than you think Ah do. You ain't my guardzeen nohow" (Jonah's, 204). Lucy reasserts her position, "Big talk ain't changin whut you doin'. You can't clean yo self wid yo' tongue like a cat" (Jonah's, 204). Since John can not beat his wife by exchanging words, he ends the battle by slapping Lucy. Hurston shows woman asserting her authority with her only weapon, words. Hurston shows man asserting his authority
over Lucy in two ways—most obvious by brute force and less obvious by sexual promiscuity. Lucy slowly withers away like a dying vine.

Hurston depicts Lucy as a woman on her way to self-discovery (Lupton, 383). She tells her daughter Isis, "Don't you love nobody better'n you do yo'self. Do, you'll be dying befo' yo time is out" (Jonah's, 207). Lucy has put her energy into a man who does not deserve her. John does not acknowledge Lucy's contribution to his success until much later. Hurston elevates the position of women by showing that without Lucy John no longer thrives. Both parts, husband and wife, are required to make a successful marriage. Without Lucy, his soul-mate, John's power withers away also. Hurston encourages men to acknowledge their wives' equality as the "Rib Sermon" in Mules and Men stresses.

Hattie Tyson represents the "sorceress/temptress." Hattie believes that her voodoo practices will somehow make John love her. Hurston uses Hattie to show how some black women believed that voodoo could supernaturally control men. Hattie is somewhat like a "siren": she allures John to her with her supernatural powers and then she destroys him.

Hurston has no respect for women like Hattie because Hattie has little if any morality. Hattie seeks John merely for his wealth and position. She is an ignorant woman who runs to her voodoo doctor, An' Dangie Dewoe, at the least sign of marital problem. Hurston does not portray Hattie as a heroic figure.

Hattie gains all of John's wealth but she does not have a
man to love nor any sense of self. Interestingly enough, Hurston has a deep reverence for voodoo. But she does not approve of its use for evil personal gain. Hurston realizes that voodoo can be used for good reasons such as helping a woman get a man. However, acquiring a married man for his money and status is not justified in voodoo or any other religion. Hurston is asserting that a man and a woman must enter into a relationship in which they can share the joy of one another equally. Hattie only wants John’s status and wealth. John expresses Hurston’s embarrassment over people like Hattie:

"Ah didn’t want the white folks to hear ‘bout nothing lak dat...Dese thinks wese all ignorant as it is, and dey thinks wese all alike, and dat dey knows us inside and out, but you know better" (Jonah’s, 261).

Hurston shows by this statement that not all women who practice voodoo are as ignorant as Hattie to believe that a wholesome relationship can be based on the irreverent use of such a sacred religion. John knows this; he simply fears that outsiders will not understand at the divorce hearings. Thus, John does not use Hattie’s voodoo practices as a defense against her.

When John leaves Sanford and goes to Plant City to try to start over, Sally Lovelace, a rich widow, becomes John’s new gourd vine of protection. Sally secures for John carpentry work and a new church. John thrives under Sally. He comments that he "felt lak Samson when his hair begun tuh grow out agin" (Jonah’s, 295).
Like Samson who totally trusts Delilah, John totally depends on Sally's advice. Sally is an independent, self-made woman who guides John's every move. Sally boldly asks John to marry her. She buys his clothes and his new Cadillac. Sally becomes John's new soul-mate. Hurston develops Sally's character to show women what they can potentially be. Under Sally's presence, John is the perfect husband. He treats Sally as an equal and acknowledges her contribution.

Unfortunately Sally trusts John enough to encourage him to return to Sanford to see his old friends. Without Sally's presence, John falls prey to a young prostitute. John is devastated by his weakness. John realizes that he needs Sally to govern him lest he stray. Hurston portrays Sally as John's conscience. As John's soul-mate, Sally forms a moral foundation for John. John is so weak in the area of morality that he falls prey to sin out of Sally's care. John races back to Plant City where "soon he would be in the shelter of Sally's presence" (Jonah's, 309). Unfortunately, John is killed by a train on his way back.

Hurston has shown a man incapable of governing himself without the spiritual guidance of his soul-mate woman. Hurston reveals through the relationships of John and Lucy and John and Sally how interdependent a man and a woman can be in a marriage. In addition, Hurston uses John as an example to encourage men to respect their wives' contribution to marriage. Hurston urges women to find men who will treat them as equals. Most importantly, Hurston stresses the importance of coming to terms with one's role in private and
public life.

*Jonah's Gourd Vine* was a good first attempt at a novel by Hurston. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is not as well written as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because Hurston needed to develop her characters more. For example, since John was the protagonist, Hurston could have delved deeper into John's motivation to be promiscuous before and during his marriages. We never know how John truly feels about himself and his role. John realizes that he has treated Lucy wrong. However, he never stops to reassess himself personally. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the female protagonist is fully characterized. We know the motivation for every decision Janie makes because Hurston has better command of her genre and her characters. Although Hurston originally wanted to write about a man, she accomplished her best literature using a female protagonist. Hurston fully delineates the female's quest for self and the reactions of society to that quest.

Coming to terms with one's role in public and private life is a major theme of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is clearly Hurston's best novel. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a story of one woman's search for her true self. Janie Crawford finds her true self and then has the rare opportunity to share her being with her soul-mate Tea Cake Woods. Janie finds her "self" by transcending the stereotyped roles which society dictates to her. Janie becomes able to be a part of and apart from black culture because she is acutely aware of her individuality. Hurston uses Janie's victory to show all
black women that they can be in total control of their lives and still enjoy an intensely loving relationship.

Hurston elevates the status of the black female by allowing Janie's quest to be successful. Janie triumphantly emerges from her quest for self as a hero. To be a heroine in the literary sense usually means being a female protagonist, period. None of the literary characteristics attributed to male characters need be present. Hurston constructs Their Eyes in such a way that Janie has the traditional characteristics of the male hero. Mary Jane Lupton argues:

There are strong women in the fictions of George Elliot, Henry James, Kate Chopin and many other writers; but no woman in fiction exhibits so strongly as Janie those strengths associated with the Homeric epic hero -- bravery, completion of a voyage, the endurance of trials, mastery in battle, acceptance in the community, self-definition, survival (47).

Lupton compares Janie's heroic status to that of Homer's Odysseus. Odysseus has a circular journey. Odysseus feels a call to leave, goes to seek his fortune and to prove his manhood; then, he returns home. Eatonville is to Janie what Ithaca is to Odysseus--home. Like Odysseus, Janie is retelling a tale to a friend. Phoeby is to Janie what Alcinous is to Odysseus. Both Odysseus and Janie have battles to fight although Odysseus's battles are physical ones. Odysseus fights the Cyclops, Trojan
warriors, Lotus-eaters, and other selected creatures. He falls prey to women whose love threatens to destroy him such as Circe. He wins his battles and rejects the possessive love offered him. Janie is no different. Her battles are not physical ones, but they are just as intense. Janie fights "against being conditioned into the typical female role" (Lupton, 48). Janie Crawford Killicks Starkes Woods goes through three marriages, a flood, and a rabid lover. Like Odysseus she rejects the destructive love of her grandmother Logan, and Jody. She even has to leave Tea Cake behind lest he destroy her.

The major theme of both the Odyssey and Their Eyes is survival. Both Odysseus and Janie are survivors. Hurston purposely included these obvious parallels to prove that the journey of women is important. The love life, the dreams, and the needs of women too must be fulfilled. A story about the life of a woman is a legitimate source of fictional material.

Hurston also makes a literary statement on the differences between the journeys of men and women. Men journey out of a sense of duty to country and to family. Men seek internal satisfaction through physical means. Odysseus leaves Ithaca to fight for his country. Odysseus proves his manhood over and over through his physical prowess and cleverness. In contrast, Janie is pushed from home by a domineering grandmother. Then, Janie naively trusts her life to Jody. Janie passively outlives Jody with a steadfast belief that somehow she will survive. Janie defines herself after Jody’s death and shares her true self with Tea Cake.
Janie’s triumph is an introspective self-awareness coupled with a feeling of achievement brought about through an intimate relationship. Janie does not return home with battle stories like Odysseus. Instead, Janie returns "full of the oldest human longing—self revelation" (Their Eyes, 18). Thus, Hurston has made Janie a uniquely feminine hero. Hurston has rejected the typical male method of achieving self-definition. Carolyn Naylor argues that the bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel is different for women. For a heroic female protagonist:

the dignity and value of a person are to found in the degree of inner growth achieved, in compassion, in the affirmation and acting out of humanistic values over and against the specifics of one’s condition (Naylor, p. 26).

According to Naylor, there is a holistic spiritual element found in the journey of women and not of men.

Just as men and women’s journeys are different so are their perceptions of reality. Hurston suggests that women sustain their lives by transcending their oppressed existence through dreams. Hurston thinks that men give up on dreams that do not seem to come true, while women never stop believing. In Their Eyes Were Watching God it is Janie’s perseverance that makes her a survivor. Hurston clearly has this message for females because she begins the novel by outlining the perceptual differences between men and women. Hurston writes:

Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on
board. For some they come in with the tide. For others, they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by time. That is the life of men. Now women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do accordingly (Their Eyes, 9).

This quote acts as foundation for the entire text. Men have two fates for their dreams. For some men, dreams become a reality, as signified by the tide coming in. For others, their dreams are never realized, but, instead, held in limbo. After a passage of time, men give up on their dreams. A man turns “away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by time. That is the life of men” (Their Eyes, 9). In contrast, women make their dreams into reality by selectively recalling events within their lives. They never give up on their dreams.

Janie’s actions are determined by her dream which begins in her adolescence. Janie becomes aware of her sexuality in a natural and sensuous scene. As Janie sits beneath a pear tree she notices a bee pollinating a pear blossom:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sing into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of a tree from root to the
tiniest branch creaming in delight. So this was a marriage! She been summoned to a bold revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid (Their Eyes, 24).

Janie experiences her first orgasm. She believes she has gained knowledge about womanhood and marriage. Janie has a dream set in her mind of what marriage is. From this point on Janie searches for what I term her "pear tree dream" of marriage.

Hurston suggests that Janie survives the stereotyped roles thrust upon her by society because she has this unique perception of reality. By holding to her adolescent dreams Janie sustains herself during her search for self. Janie’s "pear tree dream" is the one link to Janie’s true self that she retains no matter what her difficulties. The dream is as unique as Janie. Thus, Janie’s ability to keep believing that she will share her "pear tree dream" with a man helps Janie find her self. Her dream is her gauge denoting those experiences that are in accordance with her true self. Her dream sometimes leads her astray, but in the final analysis, it is what she has to look back on in her memory of Tea Cake.

Lloyd W. Brown addresses the female perception of reality. Brown believes the female uses her dreams to attain a certain transcendentalism from her status as a female. Brown reflects on philosophical analysis of Simone de Beauvoir who also confirms in her work, The Second Sex, that women use dreams to transcend
reality rather than resign to it De Beauvoir writes:

dreams are woman's means of compensating for a sense of subordination (immanence) through the "realm of imagination," and as such they are a form of transcendence, the ultimate effort--sometimes ridiculous, often pathetic--of imprisoned woman to transform her prison into a heaven of glory, her sovereign liberty (39).

Janie's status in society as a black female is very low; she is victimized by many stereotyped roles.

Brown examines Janie's background closely. From an anthropological perspective, Janie has a very important status in society. Janie is a black American woman. The disadvantages Janie faces are evident. From a regional perspective Janie is a native of the rural South. From a historical perspective, Janie is product of the ante-bellum era one generation removed from slavery. Being black and female in a white-male dominated society compounds Janie's problems. Brown thinks Janie's background is an important factor:

Janie's personality reflects how the anthropologist's training readily lends itself to the novelist's use of region (rural Florida), sex (female), and ethnic group (black America)--metaphors of immediate social concerns and universal moral conditions alike (41).
Hurston purposely chooses setting, economic background, and historical background to show black women that they can overcome even the most pathetic background. Thus, Nanny’s mule metaphor is a vivid but true one. The white man threw his burdens on the black man’s shoulders who tossed it over to the black woman who is "de mule of de world" (Their Eyes, 29).

Janie and Nanny both use dreams to sustain them. The initial conflict is caused by the clashing of Janie’s youthful dreams and Nanny’s old wishful longing. Brown calls Nanny an "ethnic archetype of the woman’s universal situation" (41). Nanny is a woman who knows what it is like at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Nanny was not only a black woman but a slave also. Yet, Nanny has that female capacity to dream.

Nanny thinks that she can fulfill her dreams through Janie. Nanny recounts to Janie her awful experiences at the hands of her white master. She tells Janie of her mother, Leafy, who was born from the affair. Leafy was raped by a white man, and Janie was born. Nanny’s life has been full of misery and abuse. Nanny tells Janie, "Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do...But nothing can’t stop you from wishin" (Their Eyes, 31). Nanny sustains herself by holding to the dream that someday Janie will have everything she was deprived of. She explains to Janie:

"But all de same Ah said thank God, Ah got another chance. Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high,
but they wasn't no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms...
She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost off a de highway... Ah said Ah'd save de text for you. Ah been waiting a long time, Janie, but nothin' Ah been through ain't too much if you just take a stand on high ground lak Ah dreamed" (Their Eyes, 31-32).

Hurston's development of the "dream theme" through Nanny makes Nanny a feminist of sorts. Nanny's personal dream is to be able to speak for the rights of black women. All preachers in Nanny's time were certainly men. Hurston depicts the need for black women to be allowed to assume a position of authority in the black community. There was no pulpit for Nanny to use then, and even today there are few. However, Hurston shows that Nanny's desire is intense. Nanny survived by hoping that Leafy or Janie would take up the cause.

Nanny desires Janie to adopt white, middle class standards. Nanny believes that if Janie's socio-economic status is raised, Janie will have all the opportunities that Nanny desired. She tells Janie, "Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have baby, it's protection" (Their Eyes, 30). Nanny wants to protect Janie from the abuses that black women receive from those above them. She explains:

"de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. he pick it up
because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" *(Their Eyes, 29).*

Nanny's desire to elevate Janie is admirable. However, Hurston does not believe living by white middle-class standards ensures happiness. What Nanny fails to realize is that she condemns Janie to the same limitations of race, sex, and money. Janie finds life little different from Nanny's. Janie is pushed to the bed of a man she does not love, and is expected to slave over his land. Janie has exactly what a slave would have had. Life with Logan Killicks as Hurston depicts it is a prison not an escape. Yet, like all women who dream, Nanny sees what she wants to see and forgets the rest.

Janie grows by accepting and rejecting the roles given her. Nanny tells Janie, "Ah'd saved the text for you" *(Their Eyes, 32).* The text Nanny hands Janie is a text of social norms and conventions. Janie has no experiences of her own because her life has been written out for her. There is a tension between text and experience throughout Janie's life. As Janie experiences life, she changes and shapes her own text. Janie then challenges Phoeby to write her own also.

Janie has no concept of her true self because she has not as yet come to terms with the roles impressed upon her. Early in the novel, Hurston emphasizes that Janie has not defined herself. Janie as a child looks at a photograph of herself and does not
recognize herself. She has not realized that she is black. Being black is one thing Janie learns that she must contend with. Janie pictures herself as being the same as any other child, white or black, but the world has a picture of her as black. Janie must form a picture of her inner self because the photograph only defines Janie physically. Janie's experience focuses Janie's life to give Janie a clear picture of her inner self.

Janie's quest for self becomes active as she begins to compare the images of self presented to her with what she intensely feels is her true self. Janie complains to Nanny that she does not love Logan. Nanny immediately hands her a role. Nanny rebukes Janie for not being a happy middle-class woman. Nanny tells Janie, "If you don't want him, you sho oughta. Heah you wid de oiliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road and..." (Their Eyes, 41). Nanny reduces true love to "sweat" (Their Eyes, 41). Yet, love is precisely what Janie desires.

Janie realizes many things about herself through her experiences with Logan. Hurston describes Janie coming into knowledge:

She knew things that nobody had ever told her...The familiar people and things had failed her so she hung over the gate and looked up the road towards way off. She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman (Their Eyes, 43-44).
Janie finds that her past experience is not sufficient to define her existence. She no longer falls back on "familiar people and things." Janie looks for new experiences to help her define her true self. Janie is comparing and contrasting points of view. Her dream that love and marriage are equivalent has been rejected. Janie becomes a woman because she loses her naive notion that one automatically falls in love because one is married and accepts the fact that she will never love Logan.

Hurston gives Janie this insight to prepare Janie and the reader for Janie's rash actions. Because Janie is more aware of her feelings, Janie does not let Logan Killicks use her. Janie quickly perceives that the novelty of the marriage has worn off for Logan also. After six months Logan Killicks tries to hand Janie a new role. Logan tries to make Janie into a mule of the world. First, he wants her to chop wood as his first wife had done. Later, he tells Janie he needs two mules this year. Janie is certain to become, figuratively, one of these mules. Logan has no intention of letting Janie be a housewife. Later Logan defines Janie's place. He tells Janie, "You ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh" (Their Eyes, 52).

Again Hurston shows Janie comparing and rejecting roles forced upon her. Janie becomes introspective about her life with Logan. Janie "gave Logan's speech a hard thought and placed it beside other things she had seen and heard" (Their Eyes, 54-5). Janie rejects Logan's image of her as a work horse at his call. Janie opts for a new life with Jody Starkes. Janie replaces Logan's
image of her with her own image of happiness. Janie thinks, "From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom" (Their Eyes, 54).

Hurston has shown that Janie has grown from evaluating her personal experiences. In fact Hurston even allows Janie the opportunity to chose Jody Starkes on her own. Janie makes this decision all by herself. Yet, Hurston shows that Janie is still naive. In fact, Jody Starkes is much like Logan Killicks.

Hurston makes the parallels between Logan and Jody evident to the reader although Janie is not yet mature enough to see them. Both Logan and Jody represent Nanny's form of "protection." Logan offers Janie a house, land, stability, and middle-class status. Logan's price is hard work and obedience. Jody is worse than Logan. Although Jody offers Janie the leisure of middle-class status, his price is much higher. Jody wants Janie's total submission. However, Jody promises not to tie Janie to the land. He tells Janie, "You behind a plow!... A 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" (Their Eyes, 49).

Janie hesitates because she feels that "the memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong" (Their Eyes, 50). Yet, Nanny would be more pleased with Jody than with Logan. Lloyd Brown summarizes by saying that Jody is Logan's equivalent in socio-economic well-being. In addition, Starkes is the New Negro and the prototype of the black bourgeoisie. Janie hesitates because
she knows somehow that Jody is not the manifestation of her pear-tree dream. Janie does not love Jody any more than she does Logan, but she thinks life with Jody will be better. Janie relates that Jody "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (Their Eyes, 50). Janie forgives Jody's inconsistencies with her dream because she can in no way accept the role of "mule" that Logan offers.

Although Janie is not treated like a mule, she soon learns that she has no freedom with Jody. Just as a mule is a possession of a farmer like Logan, a beautiful woman can be the prize possession of a middle-class entrepreneur like Jody. Janie slowly learns that life with Jody is not what she had hoped. Jody brings "change," but he does not give Janie a "chance" to grow into a self-sustaining individual. Hurston develops several episodes that cause Janie to reflect on her new role as the wife of Jody Starkes.

The first episode in which Janie begins to see her error occurs when Jody holds the town meeting at the store. Janie perceives that she is not allowed to communicate with the other women. Jody has excluded her from communion with her people. Janie recalls, "Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and 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" (Their Eyes, 66). Hurston includes this episode and several other like it to show that Janie desires to be among her "folk." Alienation form the black culture is portrayed as kind of a living death for
Janie. Janie longs to be on the store front at the lying or story-telling sessions.

The second time Janie recognizes that Jody is trying to give her a role to play is when she is asked to speak. Jody interrupts, "Thanks yuh fuh yo' compliments, but 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" (Their Eyes, 69). Janie finds that Jody is not the man she had hoped for. Yet, Janie has not come to a self-assessment because she can not define herself without Jody. Although Janie does not fight back, Janie does know that she feels uncomfortable. She thinks, "It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off of things" (Their Eyes, 70).

Third, Janie realizes that she is Jody's possession. Janie recognizes that "She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others" (Their Eyes, 63). Jody makes Janie tie up her hair which symbolizes Janie's youth and womanhood. Jody further imprisons Janie through harsh words, beatings, and limiting her access to the public. He tells Janie that she is not capable of thinking. Jody says, "Somebody got to think for woman and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none for themselves" (Their Eyes, 110). Hurston explains that Jody "wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it" (Their Eyes, 111).

Hurston has developed Jody into what feminists would call a chauvinist. Jody symbolizes the stereotyped role of male dominance
come to life. Jody has to be in control of Janie because he fears Janie's vitality and feels threatened by Janie's abilities. For example, when Janie speaks, others listen. She is even told that she is a "born orator" (*Their Eyes*, 92). Jody wants Janie to be as subservient to him as the rest of the town is. He feels that she should be grateful to him for establishing her middle-class status. Jody thinks, "here he was just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the world and she here pouting over it! Not that he wanted anybody else, but just too many women would be glad to be in her place" (*Their Eyes*, 98). Hurston does a good job delving into the psyche of men like Jody. Jody is unsure of his own individuality and, thus, tries to rob Janie of hers. Hurston is showing that the insecurities of men cause them to stifle the individuality of their women.

At this point Hurston shows Janie making a clear distinction between herself and the role Jody wants her to play. Janie again becomes introspective. Hurston shows Janie coming to conclusions about her marriage. From Logan Janie learned that marriage does not equal love. Janie now knows that socio-economic status does not make a good marriage either. Janie realizes that her pear-tree dream has nothing to do with status. Her dream is very sexual. For this reason, "The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in ... She wasn't a petal open with him anymore" (*Their Eyes*, 111).

Janie does some soul-searching that leads to her separation
Hurston shows a woman coming into knowledge about herself. Janie found her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over....she had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be...things [had been] packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them (Their Eyes, 112).

Hurston shows Janie understanding the difference between the role and the self. Janie knows she is not what Jody wants or even thinks she is. Janie has become a woman now because she has made a clear distinction between self and role.

Yet, Hurston does not delude her audience into thinking that Janie has the option to kiss Jody Starkes good-bye. Janie has few options. Janie knows that she has no place to go. Janie remembers that "now and again she thought of a country road and sun-up and considered flight. To where? To what?" (Their Eyes, 118). This time there is no knight in shining armor who speaks for "far horizons, change, and chance." Thus, Hurston shows
Janie falling back on her woman's perception of reality. Janie transcends her lonely existence by believing in her pear-tree dream. While she is in the store, Janie presents her public self. Her true inner being is "Under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and clothes. Somebody near about making summertime out of lonesomeness" (Their Eyes, 119). As Jody grows old and bitter, Janie is sustained by her pear-tree dream.

At the climax of Jody and Janie's relationship Hurston shows Janie robbing Jody of what youth he has left. This scene seems to be a cruel one. Yet, Hurston justifies Janie's actions. Jody embarrasses Janie by speaking about the condition of her body and her age. Jody says, "I god almighty! A woman stay round uh store till she get old as Methusalem and still can't cut a little thing like a plug of tobacco! Don't stand dere rollin' yo pop eyes at me wid yo' rump hangin nearly to yo' knees!" (Their Eyes, 121). The men in the store laugh. Janie returns, "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (Their Eyes, 123). Hurston gives Janie poetic justice. Janie has every reason to speak her mind. Janie has feelings; she is an individual. Jody has robbed Janie of her freedom, pride, youth, and spirit. Janie has every right to defend herself by robbing Jody of his stereotyped sense of manhood. The town knows now that Jody's true self and public self in regards to his sexuality are incongruous. Janie has stripped Jody of his public self-image.

Hurston shows Janie undergoing a resurrection of knowledge at the death of Jody shortly afterwards. Janie triumphantly lets
down her hair, the symbol of her unbroken womanhood. Janie wears a mask for the public at the funeral, but "inside the expensive black folds were resurrection and life" (Their Eyes, 136-137). Janie comes to know her true self. Janie admits that she has no interest in her mother, and she hates her grandmother. Janie had left with Jody "for her great journey to the horizons in search of people" (Their Eyes, 138). Unfortunately, Janie had been sidetracked by Jody's materialism. Hurston uses Janie here to show that people need to commune with their race. Jody's greatest sin had been depriving Janie of the contact with the other townspeople.

Janie notices that the town still tries to control her after Jody's death. Hurston uses the townspeople to show the many stereotypes prevalent in society. They tell her that a woman alone is in a sad situation, that all women need help and assistance, and that certainly God never meant for women to stand alone. Most importantly, they say all women need a man. Janie takes all advice politely but does not succumb to it because Janie is finally her own person. Hurston is showing the reader that when a woman is in control she writes her own text rather than have a role handed down. Now, Janie defines herself as a whole being outside of a relationship with a man:

These men did not represent a thing she wanted to know about. She had experienced them through Logan and Joe. She felt like slapping some of them for sitting around grinning at her like chessy cats trying to
look like love (Their Eyes, 140).

For this reason Tea Cake is so special. Janie is sure of her true self. She does not need Tea Cake to define her life. Instead, she simply wants to share her true being with a man who will accept her true self.

Tea Cake Woods becomes an integral part of that as yet unwritten text. He is not what the town/social convention thinks is appropriate for a woman of her standing, but Janie follows Tea Cake because she wants to. Tea Cake offers Janie her life and his. As Maria Tai Wolff explains, "Theirs is a text as yet unwritten, a text to be created out of 'everything.' Tea Cake gives Janie the world, from which they will make a "dream" together. He offers her experience" (31).

Tea Cake is the first man who believes Janie has any potential. For instance, Tea Cake teaches her how to play checkers. Janie is exhilarated: "Somebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play" (Their Eyes, 146). Hurston is showing that a man and a woman can meet on equal ground. The game symbolizes that equality in a relationship is natural. Tea Cake begins to seem like a natural part of her life. In fact, it "seemed as if she had known him all her life" (Their Eyes, 151). Tea Cake encourages Janie to recognize her true self. He tells her her eyes are beautiful. He challenges her to look at herself and see her outward as well as inward beauty.

Tea Cake becomes beautiful to Janie also. He becomes as time passes her object of desire, the symbol of her adolescent dreams,
Janie describes him:

He looked like the love thoughts of women.
he could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God (Their Eyes, 161).

Janie's description is sexual, sensual, and natural. Hurston is showing that all relationships should have those elements. In Jonah's Gourd Vine John and Hattie Tyson destroy each other because they only have sex, no love. In "Sweat" Delia and Sykes are devoid of all three.

Tea Cake does not allow the stereotype of male dominance to influence him. Tea Cake acknowledges Janie's abilities. He shows her how to shoot and does not grow jealous because she is better than he. Jody can not stand for Janie to even express her feelings. Most importantly Tea Cake allows Janie to commune with her people. Tea Cake takes her to picnics, movies, church, fishing, dancing, driving. Tea Cake tells her after they are married that they will share in good times and bad. Tea Cake lets Janie decide if she wants to follow him. On the muck, Tea Cake asks Janie to come to work not because it is her role as wife but because he misses her, and Tea Cake even helps with dinner. Hurston shows that there is a rejection of traditional male/female roles. Lupton agrees that there is "a blurring of sex-role stereotypes within an intensely sexual relationship" (48-49).
However, why does Hurston end the relationship of Tea Cake and Janie in such a violent way? Is Tea Cake really perfect? The answer lies in Hurston's portrayal of all the men discussed so far and her elevation of the female to heroic status. All of the men encountered, Sykes, John Pearson, Logan Killicks, Jody Starkes, and Tea Cake have a destructive, violent side. Looking closer at Tea Cake, he seems to have small imperfections. He risks all of Janie's money gambling. He seems to have had a small love affair with Nunkie. He beats Janie to show that he is the boss of the house to outsiders. Tea Cake did not beat Janie because of her behavior toward him. Instead, the beating of Janie "relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around to show he was boss" (Their Eyes, 218). Tea Cake is imperfect because sometimes he lets stereotyped roles of male dominance influence him. Yet, Why does Hurston let so many instances of verbal or physical violence end relationships?

Hurston allows her female characters to survive their husbands to show that the female is the hero. I have compared Janie to Odysseus. Janie uses her skill with weapons in an act of self-defense. Janie is somewhat like Big Sweet. Hurston claimed in Mules and Men that Big Sweet had the right to defend herself. Now in this relationship so filled with love Janie has that same right. Even Janie and Delia have survival in common. Janie survives the flood and Tea Cake, and Delia survives the snake and Sykes. Role reversal elevate the literary status of women.
Hurston aids the elevation by portraying the male as a potentially destructive animal. Lloyd W. Brown relates that all three men in the novel have animalistic descriptions. Killicks seems to have mule-like feet, Starkes has a mule-like distension of his stomach, and Tea Cake turns into a mad dog (Brown, 45). In addition, Sykes is called a snake, and Lucy tells John that he can not wash himself like a cat. All the men have some type of animal reference.

Brown goes on to say that Hurston uses the violent ending to close her initial thesis that women forget some things and remember others. Janie comes home triumphant. She only recalls her love for Tea Cake not the violence. Brown asserts that Janie’s capacity to transcend her grief with her dreams makes the story so uplifting. Hurston alludes to Janie’s ability:

The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to send a sobbing sigh out of every corner of the room... Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song flew out of the window... of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking (Their Eyes, 286).

Janie gives Tea Cake her unconditional love, and can forgive his imperfections. Although Tea Cake allows stereotyped roles to influence him, Janie always retains her perspective of self.

Janie’s journey comes full circle. She returns to Phoeby
carrying her memories and a pack of seeds that Tea Cake had planned to plant. These seeds are for planting both literally and figuratively. Figuratively, "the seeds represent maturity and potential... young Janie is Springtime...mature Janie is autumn" (Lupton, 54). Janie is reaping her harvest as "she pulled in her horizon like a great fish net" (Their Eyes, 286). Through Phoeby Janie is planting the seeds for the next woman's experience. Janie has shown Phoeby that "she has known the freedom of a kind not available to those who are reluctant to test social norms. Her journey into personhood is completed because she has sought and successfully internalized an understanding of female and male as part of the same continuum" (Naylor, 30).

Hurston and Janie challenge Phoeby and all women to experience life. Women should not be afraid to strive to find that true self that will make a person a whole individual. Janie tells Phoeby:

"It's a known fact, Phoeby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh themselves" (Their Eyes, 285).

Janie passes on knowledge gained from experience. As Lupton aptly states, "In sharing her own story of selfhood and survival she plants the seeds of remembrance in those who will listen" (54).
Phoeby does listen to Janie. Phoeby immediately says:

"Ah done growed ten feet higher jus' listenin
tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid
mahshelf no mo'. Ah means tuh make Sam take
me fishin' wid him after this. Nobody better
not criticize yuh in mah hearing" (Their Eyes,
284).

Janie has successfully awakened in Phoeby the desire to find her self
and to share that self with her husband, Sam.

In her writing, Hurston, like Janie, attempts to awaken
women to the danger of confining one’s self into the narrow view
of reality offered by stereotyped roles. Zora Neale Hurston like
her stronger female characters, was in no way stereotypical. Her
actions spoke for a woman not afraid to transcend convention. Hurston
was not humble or meek. She never played the role handed down to
her by whites of blacks. Hurston wrote her own script. She is
exasperating at times because she does not follow society’s
patterns of behavior. For example, it was not proper for a woman
to smoke in public. Reportedly, Hurston was a woman flamboyant
enough to smoke Pall Malls on the street. Hurston was brash
enough to take money from a blind man’s cup for subway fare. Of
course, she explained to the blind man that she needed the money
more than he at the time. Hurston was fiery enough to leave man
who made sexual advances toward her in an elevator lying face
down when she stepped out. Hurston was wild enough to go down
Lenox Avenue and measure the skulls of strangers as part of an
anthropological experiment. Langston Hughes commented that Hurston received scholarship money from patrons "some of whom paid her just to sit around and represent the Negro race for them. She did it in such a racy fashion" (Pickney, 55). Wallace Thurman, author of Infants of the Spring, developed a caricature of Hurston in the character of "Sweetie May Carr." In the novel Sweetie May says, "Being a writer these days [Harlem Renaissance] is a racket, and I'm going to make the most of it while it lasts (Pickney, 55). All of these descriptions reveal a "New Black Woman" emerging. Unlike Locke's New Negro, however, Hurston did not allow herself to be bound by literary or social convention.

Hurston was probably out of sync with the protest literature of the times because her approach to black literary material was affirmation and not protest. June Jordan asserts that we as an American public have been misled to believe that there is only one form of protest literature. Anthologies of American literature overflow with Richard Wright's searing portraits of black/white relations. Yet until recently, Zora Neale Hurston has been overlooked. Jordan emphasizes that Wright's form of protest is not the only one that deserves our attention:

I would add that the function of protest and affirmation are not, ultimately, distinct: that, for instance, affirmation of black values and lifestyle within the American context is indeed, an act of protest. Therefore, Hurston's affirmative work is profoundly
defiant, just as Wright's protest unmistakably asserts our need for an alternative, benign environment (5).

Like man and woman, affirmation and protest literature should stand side by side.

Hurston and Wright never stood side by side on any issues because of their differing background. Wright was born on a white, Mississippi plantation. Wright's life was filled with black/white antagonism. Zora Neale Hurston, a native of Eatonville, Florida never experienced this antagonism in her developing years (Jordan, 5-6). These facts do not suggest that Hurston, however, was totally unaware of black-white conflicts. On the contrary, Hurston wrote several articles, including "My Most Humiliating Jim Crowe Experience," "The Pet-Negro System," "Crazy for this Democracy," and several others which expound on the unjust treatment of blacks by whites.1

However, since Hurston's fictional works are based on her Eatonville experiences, whites do not play a role in them. She does not need whites hovering over her characters. Hurston affirms that black culture and the potential black women have to achieve heights never dreamed of. Jordan emphasizes Hurston's concentration on an all black cast of characters in Their Eyes Were Watching God. Jordan states, "What matters is the black woman and the black man who come together in a black love that

1. All of these works can be found in I Love Myself When I Am Laughing, Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979. See Bibliography.
makes you want to go and seek and find, likewise, soon as you finish the book" (5).

_Their Eyes_ captures us because we are allowed to follow Janie’s development and to experience with her the consequences that black women face when determined to transcend traditional norms. We experience Janie’s struggle as she clings to Jody for security realizing that her alternatives are few. We celebrate with Janie as she releases her fear, lets down her hair, and steps toward wholeness of self. She envisions this wholeness as her pear tree dream and finds this wholeness outside of a relationship with a man. Then she shares this wholeness of self with Tea Cake. "Unquestionably, _Their Eyes Were Watching God_ is the prototypical Black novel of affirmation; it is the most successful, convincing, and exemplary novel of Black love that we have. Period" (Jordan, 6).

More than just a novel of black love, _Their Eyes Were Watching God_ exemplifies Hurston’s best attempt at revealing the black woman’s struggle to obtain a sense of self. Hurston’s other females struggle to find their public and private selves. Others never come close. Yet, Hurston has captured a slice of the black female’s life. Hurston shows the potential the black female and the black male have if they will relinquish their hold to society’s patterns of accepted behavior. Hurston encourages all females to transcend the norms around them. Hurston hopes that other black females will follow Janie’s example and take chances. Exceeding the boundaries of the accepted patterns of society is risky. Hurston
knew this when she helped publish *Fire!!*. She was aware of the risk of rejection when she became an anthropologist. Hurston makes Janie acutely aware also. Yet, both Hurston and Janie emerge before us victorious. As Langston Hughes stated:

"[The common folks] flourish a wealth of colorful distinctive material for any artist. They still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps those common people will give to the world its truly great negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself" (Washington, 23).

Hurston is such an artist. Zora Neale Hurston was never afraid to let her true self emerge.
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