CHAPTER – II
“INVENTING HERSELF”: EMERGENCE OF BLACK FEMALE IDENTITY

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one’s status in society, “the mule of the world,” because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else—everyone else—refused to carry. We have also been called “Matriarchs,” “Superwomen,” and “Mean and Evil Bitches.” Not to mention “Castraters” and “Sapphire’s Mama.”

–Alice Walker, 

In the above quote, Alice Walker lists many of the dominant stereotypes that have been applied to Black women since slavery, perhaps, most damaging one to their psyches, the Black superwoman myth, which draws from other stereotypes to form colossal social and personal barriers for Black women. Mary Helen Washington writes that "if the rightful end of the romantic heroine is marriage, then Hurston has certainly resisted the script of romance by having Janie kill Tea Cake” (249). Only then "the narrative [would] resolve itself in the repression of romance and the reassertion of quest” (249). Janie could emerge from the muck after her ritualistic immersion in its "blackness" as an autonomous woman. Toni Cade Bambara writes, “revolution begins with the self, in the self. The individual, the basic revolutionary unit, must be purged of poison and lies that assault the ego and threaten the heart” (109). Nagueyalti Warren asserts that:

African American [women] writers often create mothers who are superwomen: self-sacrificing, long-suffering, all-powerful figures whose sons and daughters worship [them] and ironically glorify the very attributes of self-abdication that imprison and diminish the[ir] mother[s’] soul[s] (182).
Warren, to her credit, indicates that some African American women were not so much eagerly assuming these “ideals” as having them forced upon them by African American male writers mould with these portrayals—fantasies to which, Warren claims, many African American women writers succumbed. As examples, she lists Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Hallie Q. Brown.

Their Eyes Were Watching God has been long viewed as Hurston’s highest artistic achievement ever since Alice Walker proclaimed that “there is no book more important to me than this one” (xiii), Seraph, Hurston’s last novel did not receive much attention or praise until the 1980s. The same writer who celebrates Hurston’s most acclaimed novel has only words of scorn for Seraph as a “reactionary, static, shockingly misguided and timid. [It] is not even about black people, which is no crime, but is about white people who are bores, which is” (xvi). Published in Robert Hemenway’s Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, Walker’s sentiments represent the perception of many critics dealing with Hurston’s work. Hemmingway himself holds that “in writing Seraph on the Suwanee Zora Neale Hurston largely turned her back on the source of her creativity. “She escapes the stereotype of the picturesque’ black by giving up the celebration of black folk life, replacing the storytellers on Joe Clarke’s porch with a family of upwardly mobile Florida crackers” (307). Also, “the plot is frequently implausible, […] [it] is an unsuccessful work of art” (310, 14). However, it is argued here that though criticized by two foremost experts on Hurston the novel has much to offer. It is a tale worth examining; it provides insight into yet another story of an oppressed and repressed woman, whose body, originally a source of anguish, turns into a powerful weapon.

The protagonist of Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie Crawford, exhibits many of the same survival techniques used by Hurston in her own life, and struggles against racism, sexism and identity. As Michael Cooke notes:

The more she is threatened, the more resourceful she becomes. The more she is deprived of, the more self-sufficient she becomes. That inner stability and outer indomitability marks her off from anything that has gone before. The confinement of this phenomenon to
women's hands is perhaps telling itself, showing their capacity to bear not just children, or the continuance of life, but to bear life itself (72).

The objective of this study is to explore the idea that through interpreting figurative language, the reader is able to see the novels as a story about Lucy and Janie’s search for identity and autonomy in their life which leads them to newer horizons.

Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God is in one way or another, the rendering of Hurston’s aspirations into a character with a very intense personality. Hull comments on the spirituality of the writer and says:

If being spiritual means going to therapy in order to feel and heal our own pain so that we can identify the pain of others and heal it in whatever way we can; if it means seeking transcendent merging with the whole so that we no longer name as “other” those who are different from us and those whose life scripts challenge us to get outside of our own comfort zones. (03).

In the introduction to his book Bloom’s Modern Interpretations, Harold Bloom praised Their Eyes Were Watching God as a unique work not in its kind but in the superb manner in which it addresses crucial racial, cultural and feminine issues. The novel affirms greater repression on women compared to men. Janie is the spiritual heroine who attempts courageously to confirm her individuality and self-hood in contexts which continues to be male-dominated. Thus, the contexts of the novel modify the representation of Janie. She gains experience and knowledge of herself and life as Kubitschek observes:

The quest motif structures the entire novel: Janie twice leaves established social positions for a more adventurous life, descends into the underworld of the hurricane, faces a literal trial following Tea Cake’s death, and returns to Eatonville with her hard-won knowledge. (109)
Janie tells Phoebe that she has gone “tuh de horizon and back” (229) in a journey in which she has gained more knowledge of love and life. She goes on sharing what she has learned:

Phoebe you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo papa and yo mamma and nobody else can’t tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves (230).

Janie comes back finding out about life for herself and not relying on the knowledge and experience of other people which marks the end of her physical and emotional journey. Hurston’s TE has come to be regarded in academic circles as a novel probing self-consciousness, female identity and autonomy, quest for love and voice. The novel is imbued with symbolism and multilayered imagery: descriptions of the landscape as well as portrayal of the main characters in terms of nature pervade the novel and make TE an artistic high point of Hurston’s. While much has been written on voice, blues, marriage, gender and class in the novel, this section of the thesis discusses these issues in combination with the natural-and-sexual imagery of the novel in order to show Hurston’s approach towards black female identity and the middle-class discourse surrounding the black female autonomy.

The character Janie becomes a prominent figure in a long tradition of similar representations in American literature. Samuel Richardson and Doris Lessing are among the authors who have extended a tradition that could portray the strong woman who begins her journey as an oppressed and weak woman who taps and employs her intrinsic inner strength to surmount the plight and become better and stronger. Bloom asserts that Hurston’s subtle sense of limitation, imposed on her by her black male contemporaries and the white publishers, which is reflected in the limitation that Janie is obliged to live in. This limitation is represented in the character of her grandmother who loves her the most and fears for her excessively. Nanny is a former slave who dreams of making something out of her daughter and grand-daughter, something other than “mules”, the inevitable fate of black women of Hurston’s time. Nanny’s
dream is probably so strong that it causes plenty of insecurity to Janie leading to two disastrous marriages.

As far as Hurston and eugenics is concerned, in TE, Janie finds solace and freedom in getting rid of her oppressive husbands, that is, outside of marriage, for one, seems to be a clear contrast to that is deemed moral in the 1920s. Hurston portrays how Janie always exhibits a great potential to grapple with difficult situations and how she possesses a profound desire to live. Although Hurston, Dreiser and Lawrence differ in their temperaments, Bloom suggests that:

They all share an affinity with heroic vitality. Her art is similar to theirs in that she loves beauty and exalts it, the beauty that tests reality. The character of Janie is close to Dreiser’s Carrie and Lawrence’s Ursula in her persistence and strong will to survive in one’s own fashion. Hurston’s philosophy in the novel and the

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, the sun is the center of everything. Hurston’s fascination with the sun is paralleled with Lawrence’s: “They sat on the boarding house porch and saw the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged (TE 50)”. The unstoppable sense of perpetual possibilities transforms Janie into a rebel who escapes Nanny’s safety-first principle and eventually ends up confronting decades of misfortune with Joe Starks and the beautiful experience with Tea Cake. Despite the positive sense which accompanies Hurston’s ongoing philosophy of the sun, it seems that the sun is both a boon and a doom.

Later in the novel, the heroic vitality of Janie becomes more evident as she breaks the fetters of what is to be and what is to be done. Being aware of the role of the marital institution in the workings of the patriarchal system, Hurston, in her portrayals of marriage, clearly opposes the notion that the submissive role of the African American women in marriage shall bring uplift to the race. Rather, it seems to bring uplift to the black male’s confidence and bring the woman down. Marriage in the works of some of the Harlemite female writers often parallels “the oppressions of
the slave system” (duCille 50). Hurston addresses the institution of marriage in Janie’s tale in *TE*.

The renewed patriarchal system has not emerged immediately, but is rather a result of two parallel processes. While women have begun to form clubs in order to promote a racial cause, men found their outlet somewhere Hornsby a critic of the period notes that:

Not unlike black women who sought to improve the status of their race, by turns playing up their feminine side and then asserting their feminist side in community work, […] black men pondered what best defined their manhood (385).

Janie struggles with herself as a woman and with her other self as a lover; however, her love for the sun and her fascination with the perpetual possibilities for a new day defeats love in celebration of a new life. Hurston herself is a vita list. She has a unique sense of power which is not associated with any political thought or philosophy, with the known feminist modes or with the quest of those who wanted to create a unique black aesthetics. Bloom describes her as a larger-than-life woman, who stands on the same line as the Wife of Bath of Chaucer who is the father of English poetry, In response to the photographs of *Carl Van Vetchten*, she says in a strong and vivid expression of her philosophy: “I love myself when I’m laughing, and then again when I’m looking mean and impressive (04)”. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has such a profound impact upon Alice Walker’s life that the novel would also inform her own work. As Gilbert and Gubar notes "The textual affinities between black women's work generally exist . . . as a function of black women writers’ conscious acts of remigration and revision of the earlier canonical texts” (4). Walker draws on several characteristics and themes found in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and uses them to achieve the same goal of self-hood in the lives of her protagonists, individual lives and personal growth of women within the African-American community; the expression of sexual desire in women; economic freedom and the right to speak for themselves within the community which formerly oppressed them as “the mule[s] of the world” (232).
Hurston presents women’s admirable success in searching for freedom and identity through their sustained efforts and eventually achieving them. Janie finds her identity through individual independence, personal autonomy, power and parity to do whatever she wants to do, firmly believing that women should have individual rights. Janie attempts to assert her identity by resisting predictable oppressive social constructions, doing things according to her own desires and dreams. Janie’s identity is explored in her life which unavoidably relates to many people close to her from the very beginning of her life until she is grown up and acquires her own sovereignty. All the four segments in Janie’s life throw light on how her attitude towards life, her belief and her experiences amazingly manipulate her strength and power deftly to make her dreams blossom into reality, finding her identity and autonomy.

The first segment describes how Janie’s identity develops gradually from her birth. In the second segment, Hurston depicts Janie’s marriage with Logan Killicks, a man whom her Nanny wrongly chooses for her. In the third segment, Huston traces Janie’s marriage with Joe Starks, a man who searches power and whom, she thinks, will help to achieve her identity in the society. Finally, in fourth segment, Huston portrays how her heroin Janie meets Tea Cake, the third man in her life, a man who finds her real identity and makes her know about her own liberation with true love until she becomes a widow when she kills him for self-defense. Janie’s quest for identity and self-hood reforms her society simply by resisting its decaying values. Her status as an outsider and a woman who is alienated by other women secures a heroic posture for Janie in modernist standards. Her inability to integrate in her society keeps her on the outside, looking inside the society and observing its interest in externals and its lack of self-reflection. As Laurie Champion rightly points out, by having the abusive male killed, “Hurston simultaneously discourages those who try to reinforce sexist modes of oppression and encourages women to defy sexism by illustrating how those who abuse women are doomed”(190).

Janie is alienated by her community because of her extraordinary duty. Her relationship with Phoebe, appearing as distinct from the community encloses them in a private connection which saves Janie from the jealousy of the other women. Janie,
like the other women in her community, is prevented from participating in the oral tradition of the community. Voice and power in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is represented not as a collective characteristic but a commodity of the black men. Washington agrees with critic Margaret Homans that:

The possibility that women are excluded categorically from the language of the dominant discourse should help us to become aware of the inadequacy of language, its inability to represent female experience, its tendency not only to (2003: 10).

Janie’s real plight is her position as both a subject and an object. The writer could only save her protagonist from this paradox in the frame of the story where Janie is talking to another woman, Phoebe Watson. As an object in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is passive, deprived of speech, and made powerless by her relationship with her three husbands and the authorial strategies of Hurston. Janie’s image of herself as a blossom changes her figuratively and literally and prepares her for her marriages. Janie’s answers come in the form of two marriages in which men determine and dictate the course of her life and direct the plot of the narrative. Janie struggles with her first husband, Logan killicks and resists him, but her second husband Joe Starks is much stronger than her. Starks buys, sells, and prescribes Janie’s relationships with everyone in Eatonville. He even controls the way in which she should dress or do her hair. By introducing the character of Joe Starks in the novel, Hurston initiates Janie’s quest to free herself from stifling male domination. Further, the language one can find Janie’s arrival to Eatonville, as seen by the men sitting on the porch. Janie and the other women in town are prohibited from participating in the traditional ceremonies and rituals of the community. Further, they are also the subject of men’s talk, gossips, and jokes. Having one’s body treated like an object is a very humiliating experience for women and men equally. When she confronts her husband Jody in the store in front of the other men and calls “change of life” (TE 82), which usually refers to a woman’s menopause, her words are like bullets which cut through his flesh and humiliate him. In this scene, Jody swaps positions with Janie and becomes the “object” of gaze, pity and scorn. Janie has stripped him of the illusion of perpetually irresistible maleness that all men cherish.
When Janie speaks for the first time on behalf of the other women, she delivers a subtle speech about the relentless restraints of the male-dominated community:

Sometimes God gits familiar wid us women folks too and talk his inside business. He told me how surprised he was ‘s bout y’all turning out so smart after him makin’ yuh different; and how surprised y’all is going tuh be if you ever find out you don’t know half as much ‘bout us as you think you do.(TE 91)

Janie, even at an early age, confronts many challenging situations in her life. She realizes where she stands in the society. She experiments with her life in search of identity. She longs for self-autonomy, but so early in her age she is tied up with her Nanny, an ex-slave from a white family without knowing anything about her parents. Janie spends her childhood living with her grandma along with the white kids. She does not know that she is colored until she sees herself in the picture looking different from other kids. When she is six as she says: “so when Ah look at the picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn’t nobody left except a real little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor... Dat’s where Ah Wuzs’ posed to thee” (TE 8 – 9). Janie’s life abounds in obstacles in the past and she has to experience her life and assert herself to establish a complete self. Her finding is her illumination and a precious lesson. Her experiences in the past both good and bad enable her to stand upright by herself. Janie directly encounters her life in her own way. She boldly tells her story to her friend, Phoebe. Janie makes her friend understand her in proper perspective. Phoebe, after listening to her story feels guilty for those who misunderstand and criticize Janie. But Janie does not mind what people say about her because she understands why people talk very rudely about her. She is full of compassion and morality; she forgives them despite their unjust and unjustifiable criticism. Janie’s identity and assertion can be pointed out through her ways of life from childhood till the trial of Tea Cake’s death. She discovers her robust personality by the touch of bitterness and sweetness of her life.

Janie finds authenticity in her life which paves way to find her identity. She says: ‘Two things’ everybody’s got tuh do fuh themselves they got tuh go tuh God, nd
they got tuh find about living fuh themselves (TE 19). Now, “woman forgets all those things they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly” (TE 1). The very first sentence tells the reader about the identity and the discovery of women. Hurston’s novels consistently illustrate how women discover their ability to search for freedom and autonomy. They are always sentient of their life goal. Janie is full of prospective patriarchy and conventional belief. She ultimately gets individual liberty, personal sovereignty, power and parity to do and get whatever she wants, as her individual rights demand. Hurston puts forth a remarkable implication on the first page of the novel.

**Their Eyes Were Watching God** explores the protagonist, Janie’s empowerment against long-perpetrated oppressions and traditional beliefs. Janie, the heroine of the novel is very strong, independent and intelligent who does not meekly follow the mainstream ways of life that long-stand social customs callously stipulate. She learns more from her failures in her own time and real life experiences. Janie’s evolution and discovery of self-identity and autonomy is injected into four segments. The first segment is an “innocent” which depicts Janie’s childhood experiences from her birth to the time she becomes a young lady. The “second segment” portrays Janie’s experience during her time with her first husband, Logan Killicks. The “third segment” explores Janie’s life with her second husband, Joe Starks. The “fourth segment” examines her life-fulfillment when she marries Tea Cake Woods, who is much younger to her. Janie struggles indefatigably for justice. Janie’s strength and power to prove her self-worth and self-esteem is identified in the society which changes her life as a whirl-pool. In each segment, Janie’s identity and her autonomous independence is revealed.

Janie acknowledges and appreciates her greater self and what she sees as a revelation is portrayed when she:

Lying under a pear tree sees a bee enter into a flower of the tree. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom: the thousand sisters – calyces arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiner of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in
every blossom and frothing with delight. So this mass marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Janie felt a pain remorselessly sweet that left her limp and languid (10-11).

Janie looks upon the pear tree visited by the bee, as a symbol of sexual maturity. Immediately after this awakening, Janie kisses a young man who “in her former blindness she had known ... a shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean” (TE 12). Nevertheless, the image signifies love affairs as Janie acquires experience in her life and her heart is filled with determination that: “she was going to have flower dust and spring time sprinkled over everything” (TE 31). She is innocent in her early childhood days. She is even compared to a white rose, immaculate, clean, and serene. However, she is not too innocent to realize who she is. Janie understands and experiences that she is different from other kids. Yet, she does not disclose her negative feelings. Instead, she distinctly stands out with her identity, she realizes that her blackness is not a thing to worry about, as tradition makes out, and sternly decides that she will not let it ruin her life. Janie is resolute with her positive thoughts. The picture of black Janie among white kids signifies her distinctiveness. Later, one could find her character distinctive from that of other people and feel that she will grow up to be different. This “distinctive character” indicates her great potential to the gradual attainment of her “identity”. When she becomes a teenager, her heart and soul are mixed with desire and passion. Janie, compared to a white rose earlier, now discovers that the petals of the white rose have turned into pink. Janie finally steps into a period of changes. Hurston intends to make Janie an imaginative, artistic and self-reliant girl. Apparently, her creativity and imagination ensue of her inborn nature. A clear example in this regard is the way in which Janie interprets the pear tree in bloom and the singing bees around it. Janie experiences joy in relating the real world and the imaginative world together. This shows her unique identity that she is poles apart from others.

The image of a blossoming pear tree, buzzing with bees and dusting the world with pollen is transformed into her image of community and marriage. Janie becomes more curious about love and seeks its significance and relevance. By
watching the honey bee and the flowers, she lets her imagination flow and gradually feels more conscious of being a woman, being loved and loving someone. When she sees a pear tree in bloom with kissing bees, she compares them to herself and questions, “Where were the singing bees for her? (TE 11)”. Being inquisitive, Janie makes experiments by kissing a neighborhood boy, Johnny Taylor, though she does not really love him. Janie is apparently different from other teen age girls in her community, particularly from the women of her grandma’s age who always dream of wealth and security. Women like Janie’s grandmother’s age have stumbled upon atrocious slavery in which they have very little option at all before they are freed. They have faced starving, rapes, violence. What these women always dream of is to live in better conditions. Since they are in a low status and are treated as if they are not humans, they also yearn for indispensable acceptance and recognition from the society. To be established and to be like the wealthy white people, they decide that they should marry men who have big houses and many acres of lands. For Janie, though she is a granddaughter of Nanny, an ex-slave, she does not directly face the Washburn family. Janie is sent to school and raised like other kids in the family of her master.

The problem of Janie is her total lack of paternal and maternal love, having been brought up by her Nanny who cannot fully provide love and care. For this reason, Janie’s desire for love is very strong. Kubitschek considers "storytelling" essential to "community unity and self-definition" (27). Denied voice, Janie is "lock[ed] into a fixed role" in Eatonville; as she is fully involved in the storytelling on the muck, she is freed from her frozen identity and able to construct a self in a process of dialogic interaction "between communal and individual definition” (27). Transcending Nanny's dehumanization, her mother's victimization, and her own objectification in her previous marriages, Janie is finally able to develop an identity, inescapably in response to the issues of race, region, and class, but not completely limited to and defined by these experiences. She craves to find her identity, and gradually learns about herself and others. At first, she becomes aware that she is not white. She gets the perception of her own self that she is black and different from the other kids in the Washburn family. Another thing is the growth of her interest about
things which comes together with the desire for love. These two things play a vital role because they later encourage Janie to take an important journey seeking her identity or as Hurston calls the journey to the horizon. Janie gradually realizes her own desire and identity. She knows what she wants to find out in life. She starts her endeavors by questioning herself about life. Janie asks about love and dreams of love. Instead of letting other people tell her, she herself takes an independent decision to initiate her identity; she decides to marry Logan Killicks. Critics have drawn attention; the issues of region, race, class, and gender are intertwined in Hurston's novel. Toni Flores comments that "Hurston has her character Janie reject power relations between men and women" (124). Janie leaves Killicks when she sees that he is determined to transform her into an obedient wife and a work animal.

Her image of Jody is shattered when she realizes that he is determined to use her as a symbol of his elevated status and privileged position within the community. Tea Cake, on the other hand, enables Janie to connect with life by encouraging her to participate in the communal life instead of silencing her in the name of protection and respectability. As Meisenhelder observes, "Tea Cake breaks down the rigid gender definitions Joe sought to impose, bringing Janie into the cultural life of the black community and building a relationship with her grounded in reciprocity rather than hierarchy" (68). One might say that her grandmother’s force makes Janie necessarily step into marriage. But in reality it is her fond hope for love that goads her step into exploring her identity through her love.

Janie empowers herself gradually in the second part of her life. She slowly realizes where she stands in the society. On one occasion, Nanny witnesses Janie kissing a neighborhood boy, Johnny Taylor, she realizes that Janie has come of age to get married. In this segment, Nanny very skillfully brings about a change in Janie’s life. There are several reasons why Nanny wants Janie to get married to a rich man. When one looks back on Nanny’s background, one comes to know about her tyrannical experiences as a slave. Nanny always bears in her mind that she should not let anything spoil her granddaughter and that she should ensure her safety and happiness. What Nanny has faced is very deeply engraved in her memory. She can’t
forget the excruciating pains that she undeservedly suffered in the past, being brutally raped even after she has just given birth to a child. Seventeen years later, the same kind of outrageous cruelty happens to her daughter Leafy, too. She shudders and gets desperate, recalling the horrible experience. Nanny strongly feels that she must prevent Janie from facing the same brutality in her life under any circumstances. That is why she urges her to marry Logan Killicks, a man who has sixty acres of land. She tries to convince her by saying:

You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without root and that makes things come around in queer ways you in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman be and to do..... Ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn’t want mad daughter used day way neither (82).

Nanny speaks in a way which indicates that she is totally self-preoccupied with the prolonged plight of black women; she knows the real situation of African American people in a society which is dominated by the Whites. She imagines herself as a powerful leader who is preaching to the slaves and other dominated groups about the joy of being independent and a free person. What is striking about Nanny’s stories is that she recounts them in a way that further emphasizes black agency and self-construction; whenever she speaks; she attacks the Whites’ wrongdoings and evils done to the African Americans. Nanny also warns Janie about their current plight. In spite of this entreaty, Janie has to learn a lesson for herself, experiencing what life is. She tells Janie:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place 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 picks it up because he has to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so far as ah can see (4-5).
It is quite clear that Nanny has always been dreaming of having a normal life like other women. She passionately dreams of getting married, having her own land, and being well protected like other women. She yearned for many things. But she could not achieve anything owing to forcefully imposed outrageous social restrictions in her time under the system of slavery. Nanny’s two broken dreams were more than enough to make her put all her hopes and dreams on her only granddaughter, Janie. Nanny tries to convince Janie to take a prudent decision with regard to marriage by reminding her about her pathetic past. This is the reason why Nanny wants Janie to marry Logan Killicks. By marrying Logan, Nanny believes that Janie will have a good fortification and will not face any risky events that her daughter and she once inevitably experienced in the past. She fondly hopes to realize her own dreams through her granddaughter, Janie. Nanny prevents Janie from going out or speaking with any man since she has met Johnny. She insists Janie to marry Logan Killicks, a widower who has asked for her hand, to guarantee her a respectable life. Logan is an unattractive old farmer but he owns a house and sixty acres.

Nanny believes that it is natural for women to get married and that women should not care much about love. Their chief concern should be the property that men have which is the protection they provide to women in marriage. The African American women always long for a lawful marriage. Their former generations suffered a lot of social injustice under the system of slavery in which black women has no rights whatsoever. Their modesty is outraged and mercilessly whipped by the monstrous masters and they, the hapless lot, could not claim any justice anywhere. When they have children, slave holders could sell their children to anyone as slaves. Due to these limitations, African American women always dreams of having a perfect family. For them material comforts and protection alone mattered. Finer sentiments like love hardly accounted because the oppressive social and political climate does not permit them. This is the sordid picture that Hurston paints in her novels. Most women in Nanny’s community think that they should marry a man who has his own house and a big piece of land to keep them safe and happy.
Nanny firmly advises this type of mentality and attitude to Janie: “If you don’t want him, you should aught. Got a house and paid for sixty acres of land (TE 23)”. Nanny’s statement shows her strong view of marriage. She thinks that Janie should marry Logan because he has sixty acres of land and a big house which is a dream that most of the African American women fondly cherish. However, Janie disagrees with her grandmother because she thinks love is more important than property. Janie insists that: “Ah isn’t taking’ data ole land truth heart neither. Ah could throw ten acres of it over the fence every day and never look back to see where it fell” (TE 23–24). The readers can understand that Janie does not care about how much wealth Logan Killicks has. Moreover, she does not love him at all. Janie and her grandmother have different attitudes towards marriage which causes many problems to Janie and triggers a conflict inside as well as outside. She has her own will and dreams based on her own belief. However, being too weak to defend her own rights she has to take a risk at an early stage with the hope that marriage will bring love. Janie reluctantly steps into the route which Nanny decides for her.

Nanny is a very important person because she tries to convey her feelings about her identity to Janie. Nanny thinks that "... de white man is de ruler of everything ... de white man thrown down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He picks it up because he has to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his woman folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world ...”(TE 29). She is born as a slave and therefore she has not been able to fulfill her dream which is about “colored women sittin' high” (TE 31-32). Slavery has now been abolished and she wants to realize this dream of Janie and believes that this is possible only by marrying a wealthy man who can protect her. She equates love with wealth and property: "Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road and ... Dat's de very prong all us black women git shung on. Dis love!”(TE 41). Nanny’s life as a slave is, no doubt, a bitter experience in life. She is treated as a lifeless object and is never allowed all her life to have anything for herself. But now the riches and possessions are so important to her.
Janie carefully considers what she wants in her life. She is too young to realize that marriage does not always bring joy and peace. As Hurston puts: “Janie had no chance to know things, so she had to ask ... did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” (TE 20). Unable to argue with Nanny about marriage, Janie decides to find an answer for mysterious questions by herself. At this stage, Janie learns something about marriage. Janie is aware that she does not love Logan Killicks. She thinks innocently that she will love him after the wedding. Her first impression about him is pessimistic so that she has to try very hard to adjust herself to the new circumstances. She even asks Nanny to guide her as to how to love Logan. She is searching for his love, sweaters and beauty of life which Logan can hardly understand. Janie can see beauty in Nature while other people cannot do so. She is an imaginative and romantic person who certainly clings to mental pleasure much more than physical pleasures. Janie tells her grandmother that she wants to think sweet about her marriage like others, but her grandmother thinks that it is sheer nonsense.

The marriage is supposed to bring financial security but Nanny is aware of the fact that it does not shield Janie from physical abuse: “Ah know dat ... nigger ain’t done took and beat mah baby already!” (emphasis 40). The violence is only limited to one's own household and to one man. As long as Janie remains unmarried she is in danger of “bein’ kicked around from pillar to post” (31). And again Nanny harbors a bad opinion not only about white men but also about men in general: “And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de men folks white or black is makin' a spit cup out a you” (37). In Nanny’s view of the world, race as well as gender makes a black woman unfortunately inferior to the rest. According to her, some kind of fulfillment in life can only be achieved with the wealth of a husband. Although Janie agrees to marry Logan Killicks, she soon realizes that this is not the life she wants to live and she leaves him at the first opportunity. Margaret Earley Whitt in her essay opines “she has stopped playing with her long black hair” (TE 26). The narrator here casts Logan, as an erstwhile romantic poet who speaks in rhymes. Logan threatens Janie and compels her to work like a mule. But Janie stubbornly stands her ground, and he immediately backs down. He believes that her grandmother has spoiled Janie so that she is not used to such hard work and harsh treatment and cannot be changed. He does not really
listen to Janie’s argument, which is her first effort at speaking of and for equality around the house. Logan dismisses her point that if he does his share, namely bringing the wood, she will have to do her share which is cooking the meal. His wife’s strength, or what brings her into the conversation, is her willingness to work like a man. Janie does not want to be man-like. Janie feels that Logan should be different from dominating men. Logan cannot grasp her position as she states it. Logan only acknowledges that any work being done is his doing; he cannot see her contributions. In the only use of an affectionate nick name for her, “Lil-Bit”, he calls on Janie to help him out by cutting up the seed tartars, while he goes off to buy a mule for her. Logan’s every word bears nagging, goading Janie in some way about household responsibilities and chores. When she tries to have a talk with him in the bed in the middle of the night about their relationship, he shuts her down, puts her in her place, and reminds her of her family background. Logan is convinced that he has given protection for Janie. But she is quite disappointed that she does not get the love she yearns for from him. Logan threatens to kill her; “Ah’ll take Holt uh dat ax and come in dere and kill yuh!”(TE 31). The last words he ever speaks to her are blasphemous: “God damn yo’hide!” (TE 32).

Logan Killicks, the once “Gentle man”, who speaks in rhymes and offers kindness by toting wood, becomes a raging and demanding monster, too proud and stubborn to listen to Janie’s words and to her heart. Logan, despite his wealth, is not an attractive man in Janie’s eyes. He could never be a bee man that can fulfill Janie’s desire for both passionate love and its sexual fulfillment. Leaving Nanny’s backyard for Logan’s sixty-acres, Janie’s sees the pear tree, neither in full blossom nor bearing bountiful fruits. Instead, the pear is withered into a pitiful stump as if dying of love. It is clear that Janie’s first dream is dead, for marriage could not give the love that she has dreamed of. Nevertheless, instead of wasting time, mourning over her first dead dream, Janie goes on dreaming new dreams in her life journey.

Janie rejects the traditional view of marriage as an economical arrangement and of the passive and submissive role of the woman which leads to an "emotional" death. She refuses to be:
de mule uh de world” and doesn't submit to Logan's demands. Logan, however, puts Janie's "powerful independent" behavior down to her childhood in the backyard of a white family and criticizes her: "You think youse white folks by de way you act (51).

He associates independence and power with being white. When Janie learns about Logan’s ill-conceived scheme for buying another mule which is “gentled up so even uh woman kin handle (TE 27)”, Janie could not put up with this loveless marriage any more. Unquestionably, what Logan wants to do is not to love her but to “make her the very man-made mule of the world (du Cille 118)”, even though it is precisely to prevent her from leading a mule-like life that her grandmother has forced her to marry the well-to-do Logan. Janie refuses to be a mule by a mean person like Logan. She decides to leave him for Joe Starks, who in Janie’s eyes, will liberate her and make her a real woman. Janie, recognizing that it is time for her to dream new aspirations in her life, continues her female quest for identity. Though “The sow-belly is still in the pan (TE 32)”, yet Janie has taken off her apron and left for the next step in her self-discovery. Janie’s very act of taking off “the apron tied around her waist (TE 32)” indicates her readiness to put down the heavy burden that Logan has imposed on her. Without hesitations, Janie allows her desire to guide her. She envisions the “pollen and blooming trees” once again. Joe Starks speaks of “far horizon” and promises “change and chance (TE 29)”. Janie therefore abandons Logan and then runs away with Jody not because of her love for Jody but because of the “change and chance” that he may offer her. Since “the memory of Nanny was still powerful and strong (TE 29)”, Janie lets Jody be her second husband for the power that his “big voice” expresses rather than choosing a “bee man” according to her deep desire. Janie’s choice, consequently, “demonstrates that a woman’s need for economic security and social recognition often conflicts with her need for self-development (Ferguson 188)”. So Janie finds it indispensable to make her own decisions and further bears the full responsibility for what she has decided. “In escaping from Logan, Janie foreshadows her innate ability to triumph over the patriarchal oppression throughout her life (Ferguson 187)”
Janie doesn't reach the horizon of self-identity and independence upon her first try. Her first two attempts are utter failures. Her first marriage is to an old black man with sixty acres of land, and it is an arranged-marriage by her grandma. It is a marriage without love, and Janie is merely the old man's mule. This is an obvious surrender to Nanny's concept of black women, which defines women as the mule of the world, and they are expected to serve her husband in the bed, in the kitchen and in the field. At first, Janie is treated as if she wasn't capable of any sort of work. Initially, the old husband fetches the water for her, cuts the firewood for her, and even carries the firewood into the kitchen for her. But slowly, he begins to reveal his real attitude about her. And he starts to expect her to work not just in the kitchen, but in the barn and in the field as well. Noticeably, all through the process, her opinion is neither wanted nor desired. Her attempts to communicate with the old man has never succeed, and all that he expects of her is her absolute obedience and gratefulfulness for his taking her as a wife. He thinks that he has done her a great favor by marrying her. He therefore expects that she should kiss the dirt under his feet and treat him like a god. "You ain't got no particular place. It's what Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick" (TE 52). From this quotation, the reader can see that the old man never really cares for Janie as a person. He does whatever he thinks she needs, without asking her, and expects her to be grateful for everything he does. He never washes his feet even if Janie put a basin of water ready under his feet. It is obvious that he regards Janie as not much different from an animal, a mule to be exact. And she is not supposed to have any feelings, nor is her opinion worth listening to. When she tries to tell her opinion or argue with him, he instantly gets mad, and threatens to kill her.

Disillusioned with her first attempt of self-fulfillment, Janie elopes with Joe Starks, who becomes her second husband. Joe Starks is deeply influenced by the values of the white people, and he is eager for power and property. He promises to make Janie a lady, Mrs. Mayor Starks. Even before their elopement, Janie realizes Joe is not her bee to the blooming pear tree, yet he represents the far horizon for her, something different from her present situation with old Logan. She, therefore, puts away her dream and gets along with him. Once there, Janie soon finds the life far from what she has desired. Joe doesn't like to see her get involved with other black
women in the neighborhood, for he considers them of a lower position. Thus she is separated from her fellow black women. Joe doesn't like seeing Janie stand on the front porch of the shop and listen to the evening leisure talks, and always orders her to go into the shop and serve some customers when the talk is going on, while he himself enjoys the stories.

Joe assigns her the role of 'Mrs. Mayor Starks.' She must hold herself apart from the town's people and conduct herself according to the requirements of his position. Under no circumstances must she speak in public.... Being forbidden to speak is a severe penalty in an oral culture. It short-circuits Janie's attempt to claim identity of her own, robs her of the opportunity to negotiate respect from her peers (BLC, 1076).

Joe's failure lies in his indiscriminate absorption of the white world values. He is not much different from the white master he works for in Pennsylvania. He is obsessed with power and property, and he looks down on his fellow townspeople in Eatonville because they can't afford to buy their own house. And his forbidding of Janie's involvement in the front porch talk is a clear sign of his sense of class superiority over the others in Eatonville. And the idea from the white world that directly causes the failure of his marriage is the patriarchal discrimination which poisons both the black world and the white world. Everything he does for Janie is to convert her into a middle class white woman, a lady in his own word. If Nanny were alive to see Janie as Mrs. Mayor Starks, he thinks, she might feel satisfied. Many of the township women envy Janie's place very much. Yet these women are very much poisoned by the stereotype African American women, and they are blind to their own potentials. Janie confesses at the end of the novel that these women never see the dawn all their life. But Janie never values material security higher than spiritual fulfillment, and she keeps her dream alive all her life. Unfortunately, Joe's narcissism never lets him understand Janie's inner feelings.

The mule is the embedded image that haunts Janie through two marriages and becomes a metaphor for the roles she repudiates in her quest for self-fulfillment. It is the idea against which the book
vigorously argues. Love, for the old ex-slave Nanny, is 'de very prong all us black women gits hung on'; that is, as Nanny goes on to explain love makes black women see substance in a "dressed up dude" who can't keep himself in shoe leather, much less provide for someone else; his women tote that burden for him. Love doesn't kill black women; it makes them 'sweat' (BLC, 1087).

If one takes a closer look at the narration about Matt Bonner's yellow mule, one may get a better understanding of the similarity between Janie's situation and that of the mules. "They had him up for conversation every day the lord sent. Most especial if Matt was there himself to listen, Sam and Lige and Walter were the ringleaders of the mule talkers. The other threw in whatever they could chance upon... (Hurston, 1978, p83)". And the mule is the talk material for everybody on the front porch, but no one really cares for her; Janie as the pretty Mrs. Mayor is also the topic of the townspeople, but the talk never amounts to more than mere sexual interest or jealousy. The mule has no word in all the talks about her, and so is Janie denied the chance to communicate with her fellow town people. Whenever Janie tries to join in the mule talk, she is ordered to go in the shop and sell something. She finally develops hatred towards the inside of the shop just as the mule hates Matt Bonner and the plow. All these similarities make her sympathize with the yellow mule. When the others torture the mule and have fun out of this event, Janie couldn't bear with it anymore.

She has snatched her head away from the spectacle and begun muttering to herself. "They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin' dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish develin' 'im tuh death. Wisht Ah had mah way wid 'em all." (TE 89)". The last sentence is an open condemnation upon the cruel patriarchal world. Janie wishes that she could claim penalty on all the men who torture the poor mule. And it may not be very hard for the reader to sense the anger in Janie hitting out at the mercilessness and dumbness of the townsman. Sensing Janie's disgust with the mule-torture, Joe decides to buy the mule from Matt Bonner and set her to rest. This is probably the only time that Joe is sensitive to what Janie feels inside and does
something accordingly to make her happy. Janie takes this action as a manifestation of his love for her, and responds to it very emotionally:

... When it was all done she stood in front of Joe and said, "Jody, dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. 'Tain't everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought. Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something (TE 91-92).

Janie is very grateful to Joe for this liberation, yet this liberation doesn't change the mule's condition at the very basic level, because it remains a topic to the townspeople and it still cannot defend itself. Therefore, when one think again about Janie's speech, one sense something ironic. This irony lies in Janie's interpretation of power and freedom. Joe's purchase of the mule to set her to rest is a kind action from the ruler, but the action is a demonstration of his power. And the comparison between Joe and Abraham Lincoln seems to escalate Joe to the level of the great president who gave freedom to all black slaves. Yet from the reading one can see that Joe is just a little figure who hungers for power. Thus, the comparison only exposes the absurdity of Joe's self-complacency. And the last sentence betrays Janie's hatred of Joe's affectedness. Janie seems to tell us that Joe has set the mule to rest not because he thinks she deserves rest, but because he wants to show he has the power to set free the mule. His image of possessing a power like a king draws people's attention further away from the democratic Lincoln to almost a dictator. In fact, after this analysis, we have more reason to believe Janie is not just talking about the mule; she is talking about herself. Though Joe helps her escape the control of her first husband, she won't thank him, because she is not respected by him as an equal human being. She is something purchased, a piece of property, just like the mule. The role she is assigned presently is not out of her own choice; it is a product of dictatorship. And the final death of the mule also affirms Janie's judgment of this case. The freedom given from above is not always sweet, and sometimes the cost is even higher than if you fight for
it. When the corpse of the mule is left alone, the dead-eating birds' chant sarcastically discloses to us that the cause of her death is pure fate. In purchasing her and setting her to rest, Joe saves her from dying of exhaustion, and yet kills her by leisure.

Fortunately, sensing the danger of sharing the same tragic fate as the mule suffered, Janie determines to rebel against the role assigned to her by Joe. Otherwise she may end up just like the mule. Failing to find recognition of her individuality from the outside world, she withdraws from Joe and the male-dominated world that he represents. And she realizes that she has kept many things from Joe, and she tries to live a double life. Silence becomes her weapon to Joe's male chauvinism. There is two possible results of silence; one is to die in silence and the other is to explode. Janie's silence belongs to the second type. Deep inside, she never really surrenders to the pressure of the male world. Instead, her silence is the declaration of a cold war; it is a demonstration of protest on her part. This is a weapon she once used against her first husband, and now she resorts to it again in her fight against the abuse of her second husband. When she is slapped in the face for a burnt dinner, she doesn't say a word, nor does she try excuses or cry out of pain, for these behaviors would add to Joe's sense of triumph and betray her powerlessness against his abuse. She leads the hit inside, lets it shake her mind where she keeps Joe's picture frame, and lets the frame fall to the floor and break into pieces.

The silent protest gives her stupendous power to resist being hurt by Joe's physical and verbal abuse. The slap in her face and the criticism against her physical appearance and her intelligence only makes her hate Joe harder. At the same time, she accumulates strength for her counter-attack. That is what she does when Joe criticizes her again in front of the townspeople in the store. She takes up Joe's words against her and uses them directly against him. In other words, she laughs at Joe's loss of sexual power. This attack drives right at the weakest point in Joe, and he soon falls sick and dies. After the death of Joe, Janie regains her freedom just like when she was the little girl under the blossoming pear tree. And she soon recovers her nature as a romantic and adventurous woman. As manifestation of her protest against the bondage placed on her by the patriarchal system, she burns all the hair rags and lets her hair fall freely
down to her waist. She also refuses the wedding proposals of some men generally viewed as accomplished people and decides to be the blooming pear tree and waits for her bee man to show up.

Joe has special merits like eloquence and self confidence. He is attracted to Janie's beauty and she likes him. He flatters Janie and scorns her work in the potatoes' field behind the plow. She is impressed by his speech and compliment because she has not heard a word of praise from Logan since their marriage.

You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday ... 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. IV, 197.

Thus, Joe allures Janie with his speech about high life and prestige. He speaks for change and chance. Janie thinks that he may be the man who wraps her with love and romance. The couple begins meeting each other from that time. Joe tells Janie that he wants to be a famous person. He is planning to achieve his dreams in a new town in Florida called Everglades. Janie and Joe become close to each other and develop a love relationship.

The day you puts yo' hand in mine, Ah wouldn't let de sun go down on us single. Ah'm uh man wid principles. You ain't never knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show you. IV, 198.

Joe Starks, who is going to be Janie's second husband, is described as follows: "It was a citified, stylish dressed man ... He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going. He was a seal-brown color but he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that to Janie (TE 47)”. She regards his stylishness, carelessness and single-mindedness as typical of a white man and is surprised to see this in a black man. She is proud of his "portly" appearance because he looks "like rich white folks (TE 56)”. Janie's new life with Joe is the third segment which seems to be exciting and challenging. She assumes that Joe would probably lead her to the
new horizon. It is because her hopes and dreams are still new. Janie feels energetic and interesting with the new bubble of life with her second husband. However, not too long after Joe and Janie have settled in Eatonville, Janie starts to feel that she has not yet reached the horizon. She feels that her dream has not yet been fulfilled. Gradually, she realizes regretfully that she is again in the wrong track of life.

The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor … the bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. it was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired(232).

Washington suggests that Janie’s use of speech does not lead her to liberation or power, but to self-division and further submission to her status as an object. Janie begins self-observation as her marriage to Jody begins to dissolve. She imagines her shadow throwing itself on the ground in submission to Jody while she is sitting under a shady tree, enjoying the wind blowing through her hair and clothes. This image is a clear example of Janie’s psychic split between her free-self, portrayed by the image of the blowing wind through her hair and clothes, and her submissive-self as seen in the shadows that she imagines. Conger thinks that:

We are likely to perceive others as a unity while maintaining a psychic split within ourselves. The split is the shadow of our embodied self […] embodiment represents our capacity to bring diverse internal and external elements into an organization called the self (199).

Joe seeks for big voice and luxury but Janie seeks for true love from a simple life. Janie longs for warmth and harmony in the family but Joe dedicates most of his time to build his power and wealth. But soon this obsession makes him neglect his marital life. He decisively believes that being a ruler of things will bring him joy and fame. Janie clearly understands his obsession with power and wealth. It does not please her. She disagrees with him, believing that he is struggling too much for them. Their different attitudes can be seen from the following arguments:

“Well honey, how yuh lak been’ Mrs. Mayor?” Joe says “It’s all right Ah reckon, but don’t yuh think it keeps is in uh kind a strain?”
Janie replies, New, Jody, if jus’ looks lak it keeps is in some way we ain’t natural with one no other. (46).

It is evident from this conversation that Janie and Joe think differently. Janie believes that the husband and wife relationship is more important than holding the highest position to become bigger than other people in the community. Joe cannot provide the love and warmth that she has always sought after. He treats her like a puppet without emotions and feelings. Besides love, Janie yearns for equality and a chance to speak for her emotional and physical needs. While Joe’s high ambition leads him to material success, Janie is plunged into disappointment and depression.

Joe prevents her from exhibiting her abilities, for he is afraid that people will admire him less in case people come to know of them. For example, when Janie is asked to give a speech, Joe tells the people that Janie cannot do it, without asking him whether she can do it or not. “Thank Yuh fuh yo compliments, but math wife don’t know then ’bout no speech making (TE 43)”. He further shows his attitude about women’s role by saying that “Ah never married her for nothing ‘lak dat. She’s a woman and her place is in de home (TE 43). In addition, Jody asks Janie to tie her hair whenever she has to appear before other men in the public. Jody issues his command without explaining to Janie what prompts him to make this authoritative demand. He is afraid that he might unwittingly disclose his fear that other men may stare at Janie’s beautiful and glossy hair. Instead of loving Janie as who she is, “(Jody) immediately sets about the task of molding and shaping her (Janie) into his woman” (Ferguson 189). Jody just boasts of how big his voice is and how almighty he is thought to be as a black mayor running a store and a post office, “(Jody) nevertheless needs her (Janie’s) feeble female consent to be viewed in society as a man” (Ferguson 190). Instead of viewing Janie as a woman equal to him in every respect, Jody regards Janie as the “bell-cow” whereas “other women were the gang” (TE 41). Once again Janie is oppressed by Joe and still she is considered as a mule. Joe thinks that he has strong patriarchal thinking that women must not show their ability in public. Joe’s supercilious attitude, without giving Janie a chance to reveal her views and opinions, makes her feel annoyed. Janie enters Joe’s room to see him
and blame him for his severity. She regrets all those years she wasted with him waiting for love and happiness to come. Janie blames him for not listening to her or appreciating her as a wife and lover. She berates him for his oppression and egotism.

The marriage with Jody does guarantee Janie a dignified social status. However, her very title as “Mrs. Mayor” destroys Janie’s close relationship with others and with her African American community. Janie being Jody’s wife loses her self-identity, as she is dependent on Jody. Further, Jody, in Janie’s eyes, is no longer the Jody who once praised her as the “pretty-doll baby (TE 29)”, but is totally changed into a godlike figure who expresses his big voice by silencing Janie. By flaunting his big voice, Jody proves that what he desperately wants is not any response from his people but implicit obedience, not companions but followers. He is respected because he has once shown mercy for the poor mule, namely Janie and then set it free from its dumb master, Logan, so that he can make the mule work willingly for him. In doing so, Jody is worshipped as a king, a king who establishes his kingdom by weakening and silencing his people. As a God (here we can consider Satan as God, as Satan considers himself as God), he causes his followers great sufferings so as to show them who the lord is. They suffer so they worship him; they worship him so they suffer. “All gods who receive homage are cruel. All gods dispense sufferings without reason. Otherwise they would not be worshipped. Through indiscriminate suffering men know fear and fear is the most divine emotion” (TE 45). Joe says:

You’ se Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie I god, Ah can’t see what uh women uh yon’ stability would want tub be treasure’ all dad gum – grease from folks data don’t even own de house day sleep in. Taint’s no earthly use. Trey’s jus’ some puny humans playing’ round depose uh time (54).

One day Joe makes fun of her in front of many men by criticizing her appearance, saying that she is an old woman and that nobody wants a woman of her age to be his wife. Janie retorts to him instantaneously:

Ah ain’t no young gal no mo’ but en Ah ain’t no old Women neither.
Ah reckon Ah looks math age too. Ah’ mud women every inch of
The timely retort reveals that though Janie is silent and submissive to Joe, she does not want him to take for a weak woman. For the first time, Joe is extremely stunned, when her rebellious action bursts out to him. At this stage, her identity or her ‘self’ is quite ambiguous since she does not know what she really desires. This poetic language and ambiguous phrasing continues till she becomes acquainted with Joe Starks; his marriage proposal and their subsequent marriage together put Janie in another phase of her search for her “self.” In both marriages Janie’s ability to hurt her husband’s is equal to their ability to hurt her. As her marriage to Jody deteriorates she begins to observe herself: “one day she sat and watched the shadows of her going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes (TE 68)”. Immediately after Jody’s death she goes to the looking glass where she told herself to wait for her, and there she discovers that a handsome woman has taken her place. She tears off the kerchief Jody has forced her to wear and lets down her plentiful hair: “The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again (TE 75)”.

One can approach and examine it as Janie’s deliberate attempt to fashion and praise black female self and a sense of self love or narcissism on the part of an African American female.

Thus Janie refers to herself through words such as ‘handsome,’ and ‘glory.’ Janie’s forceful and powerful character is vividly shown in them. What is even more noteworthy is that Janie has learnt to look at herself, to see herself. Janie has acquired the power to see, to enjoy and to understand, in this case her own female black self or rather loosely herself as a human removed from femaleness or blackness. In her first moment of independence Janie is not seen as autonomous subject but again as visual object, “seeing herself,” draping before herself that “hidden mystery” that attracts men and makes her superior to women. Note that when she turns to the mirror, it is not to experience her own sensual pleasure in her hair. She does not tell us how her hair feels to her—does it tingle at the roots? Does she shiver with delight?—no, she takes stock of herself, makes an assessment of herself” (TE 79). What’s in the mirror...
that she cannot experience without it, that imaginary other that the mirror represents, looking on in judgment, recording, not her own sensations but the way others see her. In the long paragraph the novel tells us how she has changed in the six months after Jody’s death, one is told that Janie has talked and laughed in the store at times and is happy that she is released from the wretched hands of dominating Jody.

Janie’s internal speech and consciousness begins with marking the internal change in her. These passages gradually or suddenly turn to be the male character’s space where it becomes the subject of speech. At the end of these parts, which are supposedly devoted to revealing Janie’s inner life and changes men’s voices become dominant and absolute. Even in Janie’s most delicate life-turning periods, just before and after Jody’s death, Hurston does not seem to give enough attention to Janie. In the long paragraph where one learn about Janie’s changes in the months following Jody’s death, it is quite distracted when Janie speaks about Hezekiah and how he emulates Jody. This shift in the paragraph brings Jody back to the text and wipes out Janie’s account of growth and self-discovery: “At this point, the paragraph shifts its focus from Janie and her growing sense of independence to Hezekiah and his imitation of Jody, describing Hezekiah in a way that evokes Jody’s presence and obliterates Janie” (TE 114). The humorous end of the paragraph tells us how Hezekiah needs to drink liquor to keep up with the fact that a woman is running the store. This part not only eliminates Janie as the subject of the text and replaces her with a male subject, but also shows Janie’s absorption into the male-defined “troublesome” women.

Marriage with her god-like husband also fails to bring love to Janie. Instead, marriage “always changes folks, and sometimes it brings out dirt and meanness dat even de person didn’t know they had in’em themselves” (TE 113). Since the very moment “she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush” (TE 71), Janie has gradually found out that Jody could be a mayor, a store-owner or a god but could never be a good husband. It is clear, “the spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor” and “the bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired” (TE 71). The parlor outside is full of merriness and joy, whereas the bedroom inside
turns into a desert where Janie could not be “petal-open anymore” (TE 71). Barbara Johnson in her article convincingly argues that “the inner spirit of the marriage moves outward from the bedroom to the parlor, cutting itself off from its proper place, and replacing itself with an image of virginity, the antithesis of marriage” (211). Ironically, although Jody seems to be able and mighty outside the house in the store and porch, he forces his wife to be a virtual virgin because of his impotence inside the house in their bedroom.

While the spirit of marriage fades away from its proper place, Janie could not avoid acknowledging her growing awareness of the inevitable split between her inner and outer selves. Presently, after one heated argument that Janie has with Jody, Jody slaps Janie for the first time in their marital life, whereupon Janie strongly feels her split-self, Ferguson observes that:

Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody, tumbled 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 an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. Watching her outer self “going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody”, Janie also feels her inner self suffering out of lonesomeness (77).

Knowing how to separate her inner self from the outer one, Janie could spare a space for her inner self to grow, to feel, to think and to sing for the joy that nobody else could steal away from her. With one “self” dutifully obeying Jody’s commands, Janie resolutely keeps her psychic distance from Jody. “With this newly defined split between her inside and outside”, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. perceptively remarks, “Janie learns to cross deftly that narrow threshold between her two selves” (The Speakerly Text 17). Barbara Johnson, as if echoing Gates’ reading of this scene, posits that “Janie’s acquisition of the power of voice thus grows not out of her identity but out of her division into inside and outside” (212). In other words, both Gates and Johnson
agrees that once Janie begins to acknowledge the division of her identity, she acquires
the ability to speak and is then ready to tell her story. Mary Helen Washington,
however, comes to a different conclusion, and she argues: “Hurston continues to
subvert Janie’s voice. Even in crucial places, where we need to hear her speak, she is
curiously silent. Even when Hurston sets out to explore Janie’s internal
consciousness, her internal speech, what we actually hear are the Voices of men”
(102).

Janie always disagrees with Joe in many respects. Whenever she attempts to
disclose her displeasure, Joe will not listen to her reasons but will control her with
physical efforts. Osho, an Indian philosopher says that “it looks as though men have
completely destroyed women’s self because of marriage but women’s ego is not
actually killed. Instead, it goes silently inside or as it went underground and worked in
an underground way” (38). As a result, women become very evasive in their egotistic
needs. Therefore all kinds of feminine tricks are used for women to have indirectly
acted out their demands in order to get something because men will not allow their
ego in any direct expression. When Janie discovers Joe’s nature, she learns more
about determining herself to fight against all obstacles that might come her way. Joe
cannot completely rob her ego. She substantiates her autonomy. When she realizes a
hard rock of life that she has to jump across, Janie tries to find the way out. She
knows the difference between an inner and an outer feelings and she could separate
the two things without trying to merge them into one unity. Janie’s acquisition of the
voice does not come out of her identity but out of her divisions between inside and
outside. She empowers herself in order to overcome conflicts of life quietly from
within. Though she loses her time of harmonious love and though she wastes her time
on the man who does not really love her, she learns an important lesson which enables
her to get close to the destination she aims to reach, for Bushe says that: “Janie grows
steadily in self- knowledge and discernment” (1027).

Joe’s death is hard and hectic. But it has put a long-awaited power on Janie’s
wings in the form of freedom which she has been hankering for, and tastes the
sweetness of independence without men’s control. More prominently, she can sit and
think about her future, that is, to search for the horizon. Janie rejects stereotypical
tradition, realizes her own rights and makes a positive assertion about her new life. She has experimented life with Joe and finally she has to gather stability to solve the impact of her forthcoming marriage with Tea Cake. It is noticeable that Janie rejects the rules of her community by going out with Tea Cake in “colorful dress, without thinking of mourning for Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with spring time across the world” (TE 88). This crisis shows that Janie is finally free and ready to search for the newness of life. Janie has regained emotional and mental strength after a long time. Hurston mentions that “she had found a jewel down inside and had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around” (TE 90). Though Janie encounters many unpleasant things, she is always passionate to fulfill her empty dreams. She has to find how hard she has to struggle to realize her dreams; After Joe Starks’ death, Janie firmly believes that her thoughts and dreams would come true. Though she listens to what people say, she does not allow outsiders’ attitudes or beliefs to exert any influence on her.

Janie is not satisfied with men who come around and try to shower artificial love upon her. Although they flatter her as a queen, she does not turn towards them. Janie’s potency is developed after Joe’s death and she has gained more power to control herself outside the environment. People tell Janie that this man is too low for a woman like her. Phoeby warns Janie and advises her to leave Tea Cake because he is twelve years younger than her. He may take her money and run away. Rumors spread out saying that the mayor’s widow is dating a young and poor man.

Poor Joe Starks. Bet he turns over his grave every day. Tea Cake and Janie gone hunting … fishing … to the movies … to a dance … Tea Cake in a borrowed car teaching Janie to drive … playing checkers; playing coon-can; playing Florida flip on the store porch all afternoon as if nobody else was there (264).

Janie’s life gradually changes when Tea Cake steps into her life. He is a young employee and gambler. This is her fourth segment; this part of life brings Janie a complete identification in the society. She finds her horizon at last with her marriage
to Tea Cake. Tea Cake is the catalyst to generate her ‘self-identity’. Tea Cake is a young and optimistic man, the first man who amazes and impresses Janie by convincing and teaching her to play checkers. It surprises her a lot when Tea Cake thinks that it is natural for her to play. He is the only man who can make Janie feel happy and satisfied to the fullest in her life. Since the very moment Tea Cake walks into Janie’s store “with a sly grin and his funny story”, Janie’s feelings “saved up for some man she had never seen” (TE 94), have indeed come to be revived. Janie comes to realize that Tea Cake could be her bee man, the bee man that can make Janie stay “petal-open” (TE 110), again by enabling her to see and furthermore to fulfill her enormous potential. Taking a downward glance at Tea Cake who sleeps like a baby, Janie deeply and strongly feels “a self-crushing love” (TE 128), throbs painfully inside her. Tea Cake -“the glance from God does enable Janie’s soul to crawl out from its hiding side (TE 106)”. Tea Cake is the embodiment of passionate love, and has all the answers to Janie’s “To-where” and “To-what” (TE 76), questions that Janie has been persistently asking her thirty-five-year old self. Boarding the train which “shuffled on to Jacksonville, Janie no longer merely thought of a country road at sum-up” but instead heads straight for “a whole lot of things she wanted to see and yo know” (TE 76,116).

Tea Cake decides to marry Janie and take her to his hometown. Janie accepts his proposal and is sure that he will give her love and happiness. She decides to live in her own way. ”Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine. XII, 266-267. She has been the victim of Nanny, Logan and Joe's thoughts and concepts.

From her grandmother, Logan Kellicks, and Joe Starks, Janie receives a ready-made text, a definition of her role. She is expected to conform to it. From Tea Cake, on the other hand, she receives an invitation to live a text, to formulate a role (TE 224).

Tea Cake brings a new joy which Janie has never experienced before. Being with Tea Cake, she feels like a child breaking rules and is really satisfied with him. Tea Cake admires her charms and reminds her of her own beauty. While Joe Starks
forced Janie to tie up her hair, Tea Cake wants to see it fall down as he says “Ah been wish in so bad tub get man hands in your’ hair. It’s so pretty. It feels ‘Jus’lak underneath uh dove’s wing next to man face” (TE 103). Many things that Tea Cake does for Janie really impress her, as Hurston writes: “She could not make him look just like any other man to her. He looked like the love thoughts of women.... He was a glance from god’ (TE 106). As Janie feels intensely for Tea Cake, he takes care of her and respects her for her uniqueness and individuality within a short span of time. But the public think that Tea Cake probably loves her property.

Gender roles bring forth identity and autonomy throughout the novel. Stereotypical gender attitudes are seen in Tea Cake as he beats Janie brutally to show his power over her as her husband. African American women often have to face this and the phenomenon is meekly accepted by them. Her life with Tea Cake is not bitter as it was with Logan where she felt like a mule. It is not like the life with Jody where she had to act like a show piece. Yet, she is not completely free of certain things which African American women could never avoid like, for instance, getting beaten up. They resignedly take that as their fate and in the black town Janie is treated like any other black woman by her husband Tea Cake. Women often speak in a passive voice, whereas men are aggressive. Joe Starks talks about the horizon as his ultimate destiny, whereas Logan's dreams are enclosed within his sixty acres of land. Logan undermines Janie’s opinions and she could not take that lightly.

Joe's suspicious mind forces Janie to tie up her hair which shows Jody's domineering position in the marriage. The town people criticize Jody's stubbornness. They sympathize with Janie's situation of being the wife of such a man. Although Janie is always portrayed as a woman who is different from the rest of the women, being a mayor's wife, she becomes more isolated and the marriage acquires a different angle. Speaking in rhythm has a different connotation for Janie. For her it is a way to express love but unfortunately neither her first husband nor her second husband speaks to her in a rhythmic tone which eventually aggravates Janie’s dissatisfaction with both of them. Her first two marriages have many problems in common. Joe is always ambitious; he wants to grab power and impose himself on others. He mistreats
Janie along with the town people to prove his superior position. He dictates her actions; she works in the store all day long. He insults her publicly and said “Somebody got to think for women and children and chickens and cows” (TE 11). The horizon represents Janie’s need to explore all the dimensions of life and the dimensions of her own self. This ability to understand and express her inner life through powerful figurative language characterizes Janie throughout the novel. Janie's journey towards the horizon resumes after the death of Joe. She seeks to get an opportunity to meet her mother who has abandoned her and to tend her grandmother's grave. Her search begins to obtain something more; something different from what she has been doing all through her life. Neither her mother nor her grandmother is like her. She is encouraged by neither of them. Her thirst for freedom and quest for the horizon indisputably distinguishes her from her foremothers and her own mother.

Janie has not only found true love in this quest, but also discovered the power of her own voice and the ability of self-expression. Janie’s three marriages have represented her process of consistently maturing as the novel unfolds. Janie’s first marriage is arranged by Nanny, her grandmother, whose main concern is giving security for her granddaughter. In her view, this could only be provided by the protection of a wealthy man or by the institution of marriage. When Nanny forces Janie to marry an older, wealthy farmer, Logan Killicks who possesses “sixty acres of land”, Janie immediately rejects Nanny’s plan, understanding that this concept of marriage is not what she desires for herself. But ultimately she surrenders to Nanny’s pressure and marries Killicks. She soon realizes that she could never develop any feeling for her spouse. In order to gain control over his young wife, Killicks tries to destroy her spirit by threatening to assign the backbreaking labor of the farm. Janie has not only found true love in this quest, but also discovered the power of her own voice and the ability of self-expression. Janie’s three marriages have represented her process of consistently maturing as the novel unfolds. Janie’s first marriage is arranged by Nanny, her grandmother, whose main concern is giving security for her granddaughter. In her view, this could only be provided by the protection of a wealthy man or by the institution of marriage. When Nanny forces Janie to marry an older, wealthy farmer, Logan Killicks who possesses “sixty acres of land”, Janie
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In this novel, Hurston is trying to show through Janie that America is beginning to grant well-earned mobility and power to women. Janie reveals her unique characteristics, especially her mental strength and moral courage, distinguishing herself from the average women. She does so by venturing alone through various destinations with several men with hopes of achieving peace and happiness. Violence toward women is vividly depicted by Hurston. She also portrays how women are deprived of their freedom and autonomy. The novel does substantiate Janie's firm belief that God acknowledges women as well as men. Janie acquires her own voice and the ability to shape her own life to assert her identity and autonomy. Although she is an African-American, who has a small voice to be something in society, she is distinctive with her attractive looks and attitude. Janie has started considering what people say. So, she takes all the wealth she has gained, puts together and reconsiders. She plans to do an experiment with it. She starts dating with Tea Cake, going out with him often. Janie gradually learns about him and feels that he is different from other men. She confidently tells her friend, Phoebe about her new man: “Now, Phoebe, Tea Cake ain’t dragon” me off nowhere Ah don’t want to go. Ah always did want tub get round uh whole heap, but Jody wouldn’t low me tub” (TE 112). Janie discerns the startling contrast between Joe and Tea Cake and exhibits a positive attitude towards Tea Cake. While Joe presses Janie, Tea Cake releases her.
Hurston says that Tea Cake is a glimpse from God, the one who gives Janie a key to explore the kingdom. She completely stops thinking of Joe.

Janie soon realizes that she could never be happy with Killicks. She leaves him and takes her chances with the suave and ambitious Joe Starks who is on his way to Eatonville. The relationship with Joe too does not embody her dreams about love. Just like Killicks, Joe also has very definite notions about women’s place in society. For him, a young beautiful woman like Janie is a possession, just like his store and his white house in Eatonville. He expects her to fulfill the role of Mrs. Mayor Starks, representing his political power in town. He makes her work in his store, and forces her to wear a headscarf while working there: “He ordered Janie to tie up her hair in the store. That was all. She was there in the store for him to look at, not those others” (TE 87). In course of their marriage, their relationship becomes strained and increasingly unbearable for Janie. Joe dominates every aspect of her life and ridicules her in front of the customers.

Finally, she loses her temper and tries to fight back. She gets all the spirit and the courage to disclose the bitter truth among the public about Joe that he is impotent: “You big-bellies around here and put on a lot of brag, but taint nothi to it but ybig voice. Talking „bout me lookin old! When you pull down yo britches, you look lak de change uh life (TE 23)”. Even though Janie manages to emancipate herself from Joe to a certain extent, it is only after Joe’s death that she frees herself from his oppression. His death does not cause grief to Janie. Rather it gives her freedom. Not long after the funeral she admits to her friend Phoeby, “ah jus loves dis freedom (TE 142)”. She feels as if she is freed from the boundaries drawn by Joe Starks. All the men, in this sense, fail to be the bee men to Janie’s pear tree. Nonetheless, Janie’s life journey is far more than a disillusionment, “the discovery that there is no bee man (Brown 45)”. Rather than viewing this disillusionment as a defeat or as a disadvantage, Janie regards it as one part of her self-fulfillment journey. Traveling in the springtime of her life, “Janie saw her life like great tree in leaf with things suffered, things enjoyed, [and] things done and undone (TE 8)”. Janie does not consider her life as a tragedy. Instead, she sees her life like “a great tree in leaf (TE
8). Though it might not be petal-open right now, it is waiting for its next season optimistically. Coming back from the far horizon, Janie has no regrets about her life, and she would never let herself wallow in self-pity. Indeed, life is not always good and secure. Yet Janie would not let this disillusionment become a handicap in her life. Instead, she is confident that she has the power for her to go on her life-journey. This time, she does not need a man to tell her what her dream should be. She is to walk “on the muck(TE 8),” by herself with absolute identity and autonomous freedom.

Janie has plenty of time to be herself. It is the time for her to recover from the agony that her marriage with Joe has plunged her in. She takes very short time to get well. Janie feels very confident to choose her own route. She gets familiar with Tea Cake and knows him well enough. She decides to marry him. Janie again shows her robust self-confidence and indomitable spirit. She does not care what will happen in future. It is Janie’s nature that she always tries to experience things and decide, on her own, any course of action rather than let other people influence her, as she herself says to her friend: “Phoebe, dense educated women got up head of things to sit down and consider. Somebody d told’ emu what to set down for. Nobody ain’t told poor me, so sit’ still worries me. Ah wants tub utilize man self all over” (TE 112). Janie’s new path now seems to be more thrilling, and better than the past. However, she is confident and courageous to grapple with and tackle many unexpected events that come and go like violent storms. She follows her young husband to Jacksonville and ultimately, to the Everglades. Janie’s new journey is not completely successful. As if to test her strength, Hurston makes Janie encounter some uncertainty in her relationship with Tea Cake. Joseph asserts that “her relationship with Tea Cake becomes, in the sense, emblematic of her orientation toward the desired object in general” (472). Tea Cake on other side confirms his love for Janie but never makes her feel confident about the future. In Jacksonville, he steals her money and leaves her alone for a few days. Though he finally comes back, he confesses what he did and gambles back the money, she is not ready to accept him but still, Hurston reminds us about the peculiarity and freshness of the Everglades.
The second half of the novel shows Janie’s discovery rather than recovery. Hurston describes: “To Janie’s strange eyes, everything in Everglades was big and new” (TE 123). Janie proves that she can cope with things around her quite well. She can keep her life balanced. In Everglades, they join other workers, working side by side, picking beans from the rich black soil of the muck, coming home and making supper together. After a short period of time, their house becomes a meeting spot for the neighborhood. All the people are working-class friends who come in the evening to play cards, to sing and to tell stories. Life in the muck is momentous and much incarnates the fertility of life that Janie confronts. Though it is full of dirt, the soil is fertile, it is a place where plants and all living things grow. In the muck Janie has fruitful experiences like love, care, unity, friendship, loss and jealousy. She learns how to adjust herself to the environment.

The new marriage enables her to build up her inner power and strength. She assertively shows her beauty to the eyes of other people, especially to Tea Cake who loves and admires her. Janie’s life with Tea Cake is noticeably very noteworthy. Tea Cake treats Janie as his equal and allows her to be independent. Being with him, Janie is free to exhibit her self-identity. She is no longer a mayor’s wife or a store owner. Janie works as a bean picker. She is happy with the simplicity of life, the horizon. She has long sought for freedom and eventually derives it from her long term struggle. She also attains gradual empowerment within herself. Hurston further shows Janie’s self-reliance and strength in the final period of her life with Tea Cake. Janie’s train ride with Tea Cake, however, is short-lived. For, both of them escape a horrible hurricane that has suddenly started raging. But unfortunately, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog while he is trying to save Janie from drowning and consequently contracts the killer-disease. Soon the disease deteriorates into his dreadful madness.

Janie summons Dr. Simmons, a white physician who finds that Tea Cake's health cure is too late. The doctor adds that “… de worst thing is he’s liable tuh suffer somethin’ awful befo’ he goes." (TE 319) The doctor prescribes him a serum and tells Janie that he will come to see Tea Cake later. He warns her from staying near when the fit gets him because he becomes angry and choking. Tea Cake quarrels with Janie.
Rabies wraps his mind with delusional thoughts and he accuses Janie of betrayal. He thinks that Janie will marry another man and suspects Mrs. Turner's brother and even the doctor who treats him. Janie tries to calm him and assures her love and loyalty to him. She tells him that he is her only love and no one replaces his place in her heart.

Janie: Tea Cake, 'tain't no use in you bein' jealous uh me.
In de first place Ah couldn't love nobody but yuh. And in de second place, Ah jus' uh ole woman dat nobody don't want but you.

Tea Cake: Naw … but wid de eye you se young enough tuh suit most any man … plenty mo' men would take yuh and work hard fuh de privilege. Ah done heared 'em talk.

Janie: Maybe so … Ah jus’ know dat God snatched me out de fire through you. And Ah loves yuh and feel glad (322).

The rabies changes him into another mad dog. Feeling jealous about Janie, he desperately wants her to die. He tries to shoot her but she kills him unwittingly with his pistol. Racine asserts Janie as “Shooting Tea Cake is Janie’s assertion to the world that she has a life worth living (291)”.

All her life, Janie always gets ready and is willing to give and take love. Nevertheless, she also remains ready to defend her shining self against any danger and harm that would extinguish the bright light that may shine on her journey to self-realization. Rather than await somebody else’s rescue, Janie must fight for her own sake whenever she needs to. Tea Cake teaches her the use of a gun and ironically, Janie kills him with the skill imparted to her by him. In the court, Janie's lower voice indicates her powerlessness. Usually power is related with a high voice but Janie does not show her power by raising her voice because she knows it is not going to be helpful.

It was the meanest moment of eternity ... she had wanted him to live so much and he was dead. …

Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service. She had to hug him tight for soon he would be gone (326).
Tea Cake's murder is a mere accident and Janie is set free by the court for this reason. After losing her last husband, Janie feels that her life is complete as she has experienced almost everything related to love, jealousy, care, sharing. She feels sorry for having shot her husband, but at the same time she feels that she has touched the horizon which is no longer a strange thing to her. The horizon is familiar to her now, which incorporates all the joyful memories of her life. It is important for all to have a life of their own. As Janie says: “you got tuh go there tuh know there ... Two things everybody got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (TE 189). Tea Cake takes out his gun and attempts to shoot her, but she shoots him dead unintentionally in self-defense. She repents having lost the only person who loved her very intensely. At the same time, she feels happy, thinking that she could at least experience the feeling of real love for once. Janie faces a trial and she is not found guilty. Eventually she comes back to her town, “So Ah'm back home agin and Ah'rn satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house (TE 140)”, and live by comparisons. Moreover, Janie's journey from West Florida to Eatonville and later on to Everglades coincides with the movements of escaped slaves. They move from one place to another in search of freedom and in Janie's case, she changes places to achieve her ultimate self-realization, identity and autonomy which is the avowed objective of Hurston. Janie evolves as a diametrically transformed woman from her two loveless marriages with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks.

Sadoff considers Janie’s very act of killing her husband as, both metaphorically and physically, Hurston’s attempt to “act out her rage against male domination, and to free Janie, a figure herself, from all men” (T E 122). In this sense, only when Janie “eliminates the male oppressors” (du Cille 121), could she become completely free from male domination. For Janie, all the men she encounters in her self-discovery seem to be the oppressors who demand from her absolute obedience. In their relationship with Janie, Logan and Jody are always eager to be the dominating ones by curtailing Janie’s self-growth. Even Tea Cake, “the son of evening sun who has to die for loving Janie” (TE 178), slaps Janie around not only to show “he was boss” (TE 147), but also to soothe his bitter jealousy which “stems from beliefs that
he is too black for Caucasian-featured Janie” (Ferguson 194). Tea Cake, like Jody and Logan, diminishes Janie’s self in favor of his egoism.

Tea Cake tries to kill Janie out of jealousy but, as fate would have, she kills him unwittingly and unexpectedly in self-defense. The decision that Janie makes is very astonishing and shocking too, because normally it is very difficult for a woman to kill the man whom she has loved sincerely. More significantly, one can see that Janie is a kind of a firm, cognizant woman who can consider and decide the most important thing to do during a crisis. Tea Cake regenerates her true passions. Her love and his affection with nature are brought out when he takes her wherever she wishes. Ultimately Janie is convinced that he could be the bee in her blossom: “he seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from god” (TE106). In fact, Janie is impressed very much by his life style and her relationship with him allows her the freedom to live meaningfully in a community which is not disturbed by emulating the social mechanisms of a capitalistic society. Tea Cake seems to share Janie’s awareness of what is important and what is not. Cheryl. A. wall feels that “female autonomy cannot be granted by men: it must be demanded by women” (23). Accordingly, Janie demands and gains her autonomy in the end.

After killing Tea Cake, Janie finds herself in a formidable crisis to fight against the society. But she remains undaunted. Janie is arrested and has to be in jail for three hours before the court is set to try her case. It looks as though her journey has almost come to an end but there seem to be two destinations for her: freedom and punishment. Janie realizes that she is innocent of killing Tea Cake. But she does not feel so convinced about herself as to prove her innocence. However, when it is her turn to defend herself, she becomes cautious and thoughtful. She recalls in the court how intimate she and Tea Cake have been with each other so that they could see that she does not shoot Tea Cake out of hatred and malice. She makes them understand that the terrible Tea Cake couldn’t come back to her until he is bitten by a mad dog and that she does not want to kill him: “A man is up against hard game when he must die to hear it”(TE187). Janie gathers her inner strength and power to tackle the
situation by using her language. She tries her best to describe to the court the events and circumstances under which she have shot him dead. She is full of fear, but she manages to explain her critical position and is resourcefully able to take her own decisions to safe-guard her life. Her fear is an honorable thing as Hurston describes: “It was not death that she feared. It was misunderstanding (TE188)”. Janie is afraid of making a false impression that she does not like Tea Cake. Due to his madness, she kills him out of sympathy. It is considered a sin, shame and the worst action in her life. Though she is in a critical position, she does not know her fate. Death does not frighten her. But she is afraid of the sin that she has unintentionally committed. She is also afraid of the disgrace that her guilt may bring her in the society. Unlike Joe Stark’s death, the loss of Tea Cake torments her. Janie tries to soothe herself by thinking of sweet memories and feeling that Teacake is still around her. She imagines that Tea Cake is not dead.

Janie seems to be rebellious, self-reliant and intelligent; she is not an aggressive woman. She possesses a feminine quality. She is delicate, sweet and beautiful. She is also a good cook. She does not walk alone in the path of life, satisfying her desires. As she needs protection, she gets married but she gets entangled in problematic situations all along. It is her self-confidence which encourages her to directly confront the real situations in order to find the way out. Boyd has mentioned in his article that Janie “seeks her identity, her self-hood, in the eyes and arms of men” (303). Janie empowers herself in restrictions and limitations but attains her identity as an empowered woman through experiencing her own life. To conclude, Janie, the protagonist of the novel, takes all the challenges to become the “New Emergent Woman.” At first, she is in conflict with her goals as she has to face a lot of barriers in a male-dominated African American community and its traditional perceptions about a woman. She is not at all ready to accept the traditional concepts of a woman being compulsorily inferior and submissive to men and working hard like a mule in the fields.

Janie has been questioning her own identity since her childhood as a result of her virtuous orphanage and her accommodation in the backyard of a white family. As
a girl, she have played so well with the children of the white family where Nanny have worked that she identified herself with them, and that is why she couldn't recognize herself on the photo among the white kids. Besides, as she is dressed by her white patron much better than her peer blacks, they became jealous of her and isolated her from their circle. Worse than this, they continuously humiliated her by recalling to her about her father being hunted for the rape of her mother. Living between the white world and the black world, and not being accepted into either of them, young Janie has started her quest about her identity long before she have got any reasoning power for such a challenging question. And this quest has accompanied her all through her life.

Finally, Tea Cake comes into Janie's life. He is a troubadour, a travelling businessman, having no property worth bragging about, totally free from the influence of white male values. He is ready to challenge all the conventional male and female concepts, and he is willing to invite Janie to join him as a partner in his life adventure. He is the bee for Janie's blooming pear tree. Only with him is Janie able to fully explore her potential as a person, to freely display her physical beauty; to play chess; to shoot and to fish; and to enjoy the life among companions. Though she has to kill him after he has been infected with rabies, she will never change her feelings for him and will love him just the same way forever. This short-lived marriage with Tea Cake helps Janie complete her self-fulfillment. She finally escapes the fate of getting exhausted to death as the mule of the world, and the fate of getting bored to death as the mule of a king. She has been to the horizon and is back. She knows what she is capable of and knows what it feels like to be oneself.

Hurston offers a vivid picture of the African American community. This African American world may not be as prosperous materially as the white world; and compared with the elite white civilization, the African American culture still seems underdeveloped. However, one may also notice that the white civilization is at a very critical stage, and more and more people lose their faith in the society, drawing nutrition from this dying culture. Viewing from this aspect, the African American culture is full of vitality; it is closely related with the great Nature. And the African
American people are still full of hope and passion for the future. When one read this work, one see how people enjoy their life, and how they try to make meanings out of their life because they staunchly believe that there is a meaning. Maybe this is what is needed most when the world is full of despair. And in dealing with the modern theme of identity-searching, Hurston sets a model by combining black traditions with modern themes. Undeniably, Hurston's suggestion for women's salvation may seem too traditional, for she seems to place too much emphasis on marriage. Later feminist writers have explored more ways for women's self-fulfillment, such as through artistic creation, through profession, and through sisterly love among women. Hurston’s masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, deserves our full respect and attention in her creative use of the Afro-American culture, in her imitation of the spoken language of the black community, or in her exploration of black women's identity. And this is exactly the situation in which Janie finds herself in her first two marriages. Both of her two husbands cut a role for her according to their own expectations. The first husband, old Logan Killicks wants to shape her according to the old stereotype of black women, and make her work like a mule both inside and outside the house. Though Logan himself works just as hard, he considers Janie as a person incapable of attaining an equal position with him. It is a great pity that he never realizes that Janie is an intelligent, free and romantic woman. No wonder Janie leaves him at last.

Janie wants to make a difference in male-dominated African American community. By being “a new emergent woman” she decides to become a model for other African American women who are still in the clutches of male supremacy and mental torture. Janie has to assert her identity and individuality. She has her own choices in her relationship. She has a voice of her own, and she has financial independence. She narrates her life story to her friend Phoeby which inspires Phoeby. This is very evident from Phoeby’s speech itself, “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus listenin tuh, Janie” (TE 257). Phoeby has admitted that she has an unsatisfied life with her husband; In fact, Janie’s story might have truly inspired her to become an emergent woman. Rather than merely waiting for a man to change Janie’s life, she questions the traditional gender roles and emancipates herself in the course of the
novel. She develops from naive and passive observer to a self-determined woman who actively strives for love and happiness.

Janie’s very act of murdering the male oppressors so as to get rid of their control, might distort Hurston’s attempt to represent Janie as a heroine whose dream is not about escaping from the male-dominating world, as Washington has asserted, but about getting involved with it and learning from men so that she may become an independent woman dreaming her own dream and telling her own stories. Janie finds men as they find them and above all what she really wants is to negotiate with them, not to “eliminate” or “beat them off”. In contrast to the hero who is always “demanding and conquering” and who “inspires and requires followers”, Janie is the heroine who comes to “love and nurture, to comfort, to solace and to please” and to have company in her life-journey. Indeed, Janie does not need “a man wise enough to let her be whatever kind of woman she wants to be (Turner 109)”. On the contrary, only when Janie resolutely refuses to “let” men define who she is, could Janie be the woman she wants to be. Moreover, without directly confronting the men who are the so-called oppressors, Janie could never have known who she could be aside from male-definitions. As Mary Helen Washington puts it, “Janie’s life is about the experience of relationships (105)”. Though Janie’s relationships with her three husbands are failed and troubled relationships, they have become an integral part of her life journey.

Janie is bold enough to travel a long distance to discover her female identity and find out how far the horizon could be. She finds out what else she could do in addition to “languish(ing) tuh death up” sitting on “de high stool (TE 114)”; unsatisfied as she is with what she is told to accept, she ventures to experience life by herself. Unlike men who are rarely shown capable of change and growth, Janie allows experience to change her. Janie’s experience, furthermore, would bring about desirables change in her black community even if it might upset them and challenge their given assumptions about the world. Janie comes back to the black community not to accuse people of failing to live their life to its fullest but to share with them what she has seen in her self-discovery. Janie’s “travelling blues”, indeed, captures
the very essence of African-American music, especially its “antiphonal singing technique” (Jones 26). Le Roi Jones gives this special technique a precise definition: A leader sings a theme and the chorus answers him. These answers are usually comments on the leader’s themes or comments on the answers themselves in improvised verses” (27). While Kaplan explains that “Janie is silent throughout most of the trial, merely looking on as a series of white men tell her story for her. [She] is trapped” (128), it is argued here that the matured Janie is simply awaiting a more proper audience than the jury as the final and opening scenes of the novel reveal. “The amount of improvisation depends on how long the Chorus wishes to continue” (26-27).

Janie’s new-found self-confidence is the basic prerequisite for the equal and happy partnership with Tea Cake, her third husband. The manner of their first encounter is fundamentally different from the way Janie has met Joe. In contrast to her previous marriages, her relationship with Tea Cake is based solely on mutual attraction and affection. The happiness of their marriage is not based on traditional gender roles— the man as the dominant, protecting part and the women as the yielding, passive part. It is rather based on the individual feelings they reciprocally share. When the readers analyze the characters of Nanny and Janie, they could see that Nanny is a suspended woman who internalizes every kind of negative images prevailing in the society as she was a slave. She advises Janie that black women are considered as the mules of the world. But Janie is not ready to accept the concept of women as mules. She seems to be the new emergent woman who strives for her own identity and her own voice in a community which is antagonistic to woman’s emancipation. For this community, “uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing and dey needs aid and assistance. God never meant em tuh try stand by their selves (TE 86)” From childhood, Janie has suffered the oppressions that are relentlessly imposed by men. First, she is pushed by her grandmother to marry Logan Killicks, though she does not love him, and then by her three husbands. Janie extols and espouses feminism. All her experiences of life journey voice forth her self-awareness and feminism. Her self-awareness can overcome all oppressions and insolent treatments by men and realize that she can stand up for freedom and happiness through men’s superiority.
The novel in fact, succeeds in telling the gripping story of Janie’s struggle to articulate appropriately through her own voice. Telling her own story is symbolic of Janie’s attainment of voice, since story-telling is supposed to be the task of men, and women were restricted from telling stories in Hurston’s time. Janie has redefined this concept by telling her own story. Thus Janie by every means is a new emergent woman. Janie’s very act of coming back to her community suggests that she is now ready to assume the role of a “leader” (autonomous) in the collective “traveling blues” that African-American women need to improvise and sing in the course of re-writing their life stories. Marquis states that:

As Janie walks back into town, she is a complete, proud woman, unashamed of herself and her actions. […] Janie is heroic; she has endured, and the means by which she demonstrates this survival is through her physical being. Her body is strong, proud and demanding much deserved attention for her past accomplishments (83). Moreover, she shows in this “bold walk through town that she is certainly not one who wants to disappear, hide, or go unnoticed” (85). Making use of a “call-and response” strategy”, Janie tells her story to Phoeby who, after having heard the story, “breathed out heavily “ and exclaims with excitement that she has grown ten feet higher listening to Janie’s experiences in her life journey and her “travelling blues”(TE 192). Through Phoebe’s speech one can understand the force of Janie’s visual retelling of her experience. She is totally changed by her story.

Hurston tries to make this point that if black people are going to create a permanent identity for themselves they should intensely follow this traditional African form of oral sharing of their stories and experiences. If a major transformation is going to happen it is supposed to happen through the traditional and local cultural black heritage; no white is going to save black people and recognize them as independent individual. For Hurston, African American identity formation and self begins within black tradition. Janie’s story about discovering her self-identity “changes her and her friend, Phoeby” (Washington 107). Moreover, her story may become, in the words of Lee Edwards, “a compelling model of possibility for anyone who hears her tale” (Washington 107). Janie tells Pheobe to pass on her story to the
women of her community: “You can tell ‘em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just
de same as me ’cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (TE 16). Accordingly, an
expectation is created in the reader’s mind that Phoebe will retell Janie’s tale, perhaps
she “inspires and transforms” those women who will listen to her tale, just as Janie
has inspired her, and as Daphne Lamothe puts it: “Janie’s experience, her story,
functions as myth for the folk, teaching them the value of self- expression and the
necessity for self-determination” (171). Janie, having returned to the once rejected
surroundings, watches pictures of “love and light against the walls, alone in her
bedroom” (TE 143), almost as though she is watching a film. She “pulls in the
horizon and drapes it over her shoulder” (TE 143) and calls in her soul to come and
see. Lonely but at peace within herself, Janie “pulled in her horizon like a great fish-
net” and “called in her soul to come and see” (TE 193). For Janie, it is not the time for
weeping over her loss but the time to come and see what she has harvested and
achieved in her life time. Janie’s emergence for identity would be continued by
anyone—black male or female—who generously responds to Janie’s call.

The language of this section gives us the “illusion of growth and
development” (Lamothe 171). Being exposed to the fact of her own blackness for the
first time in a white household, Janie became conscious of the way blackness was
viewed. Because of the inner force of her character and also through her
grandmother’s life experience inflicted upon her by the whites, Janie develops a kind
of love and passion towards her blackness. By the time she grows up as an adult she
becomes conscious of other inner transformations in her character through her new
experiences in three successive marriages. In the first two marriages she is still
passive to a great extent, but as she moves on toward the end of her second marriage
her identity takes a new form; one can see a rather fixed kind of self-realization in her.
Her final bold argument on the porch with Joe, which brought about his severe illness
and final death, can be one indication that Janie has changed. In her last marriage to
Tea Cake, her search for identity which is accompanied by her self-protection and
self-vitality leads to her decision to kill Tea Cake rather than being killed by him.
Unlike her first two marriages, her decision to marry him constitutes a moment which
suggests agency and activity for Janie’s ever developing identity. Deciding to live
alone and returning to Eatonville rather than allowing Mrs. Proposal to motivate her to marry one of her sons is another indication that Janie will remain single the rest of her life; this as well tells the readers that now Janie is alone, firm and independent, having acquired and asserted her self-identity, autonomy, dignity and racial pride. Their Eyes Were Watching God is a love story. Nevertheless, this love story could not simply be regarded as either Hurston’s or Janie’s autobiography. Rather than limiting herself to her “unique” and “personal” experience, Hurston, like what Janie has done in the novel, would more like to share what she has discovered in her life-journey with her black community.