

## A WOMAN EMPOWERS HER SELF- ACTUALIZATION IN HURSTON'S "THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD"

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**Abstract:** This framework appears with four stages of the heroin and also it paralleled the author's own life. Hurston wrote this novel in 1937, a time when African-American female authors seem to be rare. Not only was it unusual in African-American female authors but also that period to contain an African-American female as a novel's heroin. The central story of the novel focuses the young women's spiritual, emotional, and physical journey towards self-actualization. Readers are invited to experience the series of adventures through which the protagonist obtains the self-knowledge increasingly. This paper argues major themes of sexism, racism and Afro-American religion and their culture. Zora depicts marriage with infidelity, jealousy, violence and hatredness instead of presenting the romantic marital relationship. Marriage can be successful if the couple is committed to love, trust and respect and is able to negotiate difference. Overtly Zora Neale Hurston and her contemporaries succeeded in bringing women into the main stream of life and literature.

**Keywords:** Self- Actualization, Delicacy, Submissiveness, infidelity

**Introduction:** This novel states about the protagonist's search of Love. The reader could follow the experiences as Janie lived in them. In addition, the author controls the story and uses the third person narrative. This framework appears with four stages of the heroin and also it paralleled the author's own life. Hurston wrote this novel in 1937, a time when African-American female authors seem to be rare. Not only was it unusual in African-American female authors but also that period to contain an African-American female as a novel's heroin. That is why Hurston's works were overlooked after her death. Alice Walker, a well-noted author searched and found Hurston's unmarked grave in August 1973 and reintroduced all the works of Hurston's in the 1970's. However, Hurston served as one of the first African-American female voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hurston presents the theme of gender roles and significance of African-American culture during 1930's.

The central story of the novel focuses the young women's spiritual, emotional, and physical journey towards self-actualization. Readers are invited to experience the series of adventures through which the protagonist obtains the self-knowledge increasingly. Also treats the subject of black female sexuality realistically making it an intrinsic aspect of the protagonist's process of self-actualization. The focus on the spoken word is particularly appropriate in a novel whose central project is giving voice to the heroin's journey towards self-knowledge. Janie's desire for self-knowledge gained through experience is expressed in the opening of the novel. Slavery's legacy of the sexual abuse and exploitation of black women was embodied in Nanny's story, which was the obstacle to Janie's self-independence and sexual development. In order to gain self-experience, Janie wants to maintain a distance from Nanny. Nanny had

been subject to coerced sexual relations with the slave master who owned her. Nanny's sexual exploitation under slavery and also Janie's mother Leaf's rape who impressionably disturbed because of haunted violent memories and unwilling sexual initiation couldn't lead her normal life. Nanny drove her desire to secure the possible protection for her beloved granddaughter "Janie" and taught of doing an arranged marriage to Logan Killicks, an old wealthy man.

"Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me  
.....Ah said I'd save de text for  
you."

Nanny's enslavement and troubles envisioned the human dignity and spirit. The concept of dignity always links the human growth and enhancement, which she always relates with Janie's upbringing life and trying to teach her to stand on "high ground and preach a great sermon about coloured women sitting on high." This is her ultimate goal for Janie but she didn't follow and consider the words of Nanny. Nanny's desire to raise Janie to be a "respectable" black woman also suggests an engagement with cult of true womanhood ideology, 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology of womanhood, which placed black women on the licentious end of spectrum against bourgeois white women who showcased the Qualities of domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness. Nanny wants to fulfill her own unfulfilled desire through Janie.

**Nanny's perception on Womanhood:** Nanny's perception of sexuality is nothing but pain, violation, and violence probably because she grew up in slavery. A single word from Nanny had such a severe impact upon Janie. This had marked the definite end of Janie's childhood and the most naïve level of innocence. The tone of inadequacy from Nanny's voice created a vibration in Janie's body. She felt from head till toe. There was a sense of pity she felt for

Nanny, more than feeling remorse about kissing a boy. She lost her childhood innocence and she disappointed her everything, the only person who loved her till death is her dear Nanny. So the first perception of womanhood or being a woman in Janie's eyes is that women have been violated also Janie are a woman so she may also be violated. She got this perception through Nanny. Therefore, because of Nanny, Janie understood that womanhood is seen as a bad thing.

Nanny continuously associates "men" to her past traumatic experiences. She repeatedly emphasizes on how she wants Janie to be a legitimate wife. It's highly understandable how she doesn't want Janie to go through equal torment as she did. During Nanny's period, she lived herself through slavery and had a child while she was unmarried. However, she undermines women to a whole different extent. Nanny is definitely on a path where she will force Janie to do something she wants just for the sake of her own comforts. Nanny does not see that the world has changed beyond what it was when she was Janie's age. This is one of the indecent flaws in her reasoning. She also has a traumatic past with her daughter Leafy whom after being raped, strayed completely and resorted to sleeping with different men, and drinking on a nightly basis with these painful experiences in the back of her mind. She falsely believes that either she will marry Janie off or she will have to lose her to the same fate Leafy lives.

Through Nanny's feelings, audience can understand that Nanny is helpless and she had been a slave who was raped and mistreated. As an African woman she suffered more than a man. She raised a girl by herself and then suffered by watching her be tainted. She is tired and wants Janie to be much more than a mule. Nanny's pure intention is truly she believes that the best things a black woman could hope to attain out of life are security and financial stability. This is more than she could have hoped for at Janie's age. Janie however being married off is a terrifying and ghastly prospect. Nanny does not understand that Janie longs for adventure, love, and fulfillment. She truly could not see what that by marrying Janie off to a man she didn't even like, she would be acting as an obstacle to her happiness. She believes that now that Janie has reached womanhood, the only things to do in order to protect her from the evils of a white, male dominated world is to marry her off. Hurston's work tells us much about social realities of American life, ways in which domination underpins this society on economic, racial, and sexual levels.

Nanny makes this major decision for Janie, because she has lived under the kind of domination the essay above is talking about for a long time and she has submitted to it. At the same time she should not be forcing Janie to submit to a wrong and cruel world

just because she is exhausted, emotionally wounded and had no other choice. She also feels that she is approaching the end of her life and to be at peace before she dies she feels the need to leave Janie in someone else's responsibility.

**Quest for knowledge and Experience:** Hurston's choice to represent an erotic young black female character flew in the face of prescriptive advice from the black literary establishment to avoid subject matter that reinforced the dominant image of the licentious black woman. The tendency had been to draw silence around black female sexuality as a response to an automatic stigmatization of black female sexuality. Janie has described as a woman "in search of Quest for knowledge" through experience has more to do with her desire to expand the meaning of black female respectability.

This novel based on the values of the community and the tension that arises when the community advises Black women on what they ought to do. This is the first novel of a Black woman who has her eyes on the horizons, searching for joy, love, happiness, and Identity. One of the Hurston's techniques is her use of dramatic irony in which the heroin repeats her journey without romantic illusions and struggle for full humanity. Hurston's characters whose self-esteem and identity are based on illusions and false values are alienated from the Black folk community. Like Janie in this novel who struggle against self-alienating values toward a deeper sense of community. In addition, Hurston prepared her heroin, Janie for newly found identity and freedom. Janie's re-counting of her experiences begins with her being weighed down with false images that said as a Black and as a woman she is not allowed to exist naturally and freely. Hurston contrasted these communities' values of one generation with the next. Janie's grandmother Nanny was a freed slave woman who understands marriage as a way to escape poverty and abuse and as a way to avoid traditional fate of Black women. Nanny wanted Janie to have all the material possessions and protective security she herself never had. Nanny's entire moral code has developed in relation to the ethical ambiguities in her experience. Hurston revealed the quality of quiet grace by contrasting Janie's outer actions with her inner thoughts. Hurston illustrates the relevance of one of her life experience while working in a black owned barbershop, which serves for white people. The story experiences the author's grandmother who was living in a white's house. While growing up, she expresses her life there as normal, until the day where she starts at a picture, trying to search for herself, She discovers otherwise Janie, the main character also different from all the kids at her school and also from the people who she grew up with. Finally she acknowledges her reality that she is black woman.

The experience of Janie fully epitomizes the personal experience of the author. The story is told in the structure of a "frame." "Their eyes were watching God" is a fictional account of very real situations that women endured then, and still endure now, regarding domestic violence. The heroine Janie's two previous marriages are overtly abusive in physical and psychological aspects. Janie considers her relationship to be her true love, but that does not mean their relationship is any less abusive. In fact, it is an accurate reflection of unreported domestic abuse: It shows moments of violence and control but with intervals of calm love and affection also appreciation. In moments of abuse Tea Cake intimidates Janie, silence her, beats her, and steals from her. All of these are brushed off in the name of true love. The fact that Hurston last shows Tea Cake biting Janie as she scrambles in self-defense is a display of his animalistic nature. Janie does little to admit the abuse to her or others. Surrounding character's reactions show how complacent victims' confidants can be. In addition, the law does little to acknowledge and protect victims. Hurston was raised by a white family at an early age. Hurston's father gave charge of his daughter to a white family for a while so she could continue with her education. Thus author and the main character grew up at the intersection of different cultures and were influenced by both. Hurston gives off tiny fragments of the issues of racial segregation. She grew up in a time where African American's were segregated and in her books she addresses the issue in subtle ways. This is a crucial point in the development in Janie's voice. Although it happens at an early stage in the novel and her life, it is nevertheless a huge revelation to her. After this incident she will come to learn "The damaging effects on Black people living in a white world. She will struggle with self-acceptance and external resentment from other black children. Throughout the book she will learn to take pride in both race and gender, and she will vehemently refuse the subservient role society seems to have predetermined for her. However, Janie was the result of what was back then a social taboo, interracial marriage or sex in this case, if that wouldn't be harmful enough to the formation of her identity. She was also constantly reminded of how her father had raped her mother. Despite the vile and heretical nature of her conception, she was still the subject of much envy. Other children envied her white features, which was the equivalent of beauty of many. Nevertheless, they attempted to crumple her feathers and destroy her self-confidence and happiness.

**Dual images of womanhood:** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a symbolic division between "good women" and "bad women" based on race and class. The "good women" were pure, clean, sexually repressed, and

fragile. These good women were wives, mothers, and spinsters who were all dependent on men. The "bad women" were dirty, physically strong, and knowledgeable about evil in the world. Bad women were whores, laborers, and single mothers who worked for a living and were socially and politically powerless. Because of the dual images of womanhood white women whose class allowed it formed their identities around "good women." They accepted their difference from Black women and this difference was one of superiority. This difference of superiority divided into White women and Black women. Both White and Black women affected their relationship with each other but it was in their past. Black women have a past, culture, religion, tradition and history in Africa. They refer slavery as a special historical event in the beginning of their subordination and oppression, whereas white women subordination did not come out of slavery. They came out of their marriage to white men. They successfully built feminist theory and obtained political results when they protested their subordination. In protesting their subordination, white women did not fully support Black women in their struggle against oppression. White women continue to support white male racist and sexist behaviors towards Black women. White women who dominate feminist theory do not question whether their perception on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of all women as a group. They do not aware of the extent to which their theories reflect race and class biases.

**Conclusion:** The majority of Hurston's Black female characters in the selected short stories exhibit the realm of male and female power relationships. Mostly the structure of marriage demonstrates power in the hands of men. Black women were excluded from dominant codes of Morality and Attributes such as Delicacy, Shame, Blessing, Purity, Submissiveness and Pity and even though absent from the definition of Women. Black womanhood was linked to Overt Sexuality and Taboo sexual practices. Black Women characters in Hurston's selected stories however do not embody the negative sexual values assigned to them. Female sexuality is almost always linked to beauty and the way through which agency is enacted. Hurston's women characters at times seem to adopt the dominant model of womanhood in which the women is in need of protection, so that their power works in the private sphere. This paper argues major themes of sexism, racism and Afro-American religion and their culture. Zora depicts marriage with infidelity, jealousy, violence and hatredness instead of presenting the romantic marital relationship. Marriage can be successful if the couple is committed to love, trust and respect and is able to negotiate difference. Overtly Zora Neale Hurston and her

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### Refernces

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