"A BEE FOR HER BLOOM": *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD,* A NARRATIVE OF SUBVERSION AND DOMINANCE

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Abstract

A compelling tale of exuberance and elemental life force, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has been subject to contradictory criticisms. Originally dismissed for not being serious fiction, being fundamentally apolitical and for its apparent disregard for the dynamics of black aesthetics, the novel has recently received more controversial readings. The novel is mainly viewed as a literature of protest that condemns interracial and intraracial oppression and discrimination and as an instance of black feminism in which women display pivotal interrelationships, achieve feminine bonding, and arrive at liberation through this sororal nexus. Some focus on the demand for an altered recognition of female voice, and others criticize Hurston's protagonist, Janie, for being a passive hero whose happiness is merely a function of her successive marriages. While benefitting from these critical readings, the present study aims at exploring a different aspect; Janie is viewed not necessarily as a colored woman oppressed by the limiting hierarchies of a patriarchal context, but, rather, as a strong-willed figure of authority who uses whoever she finds on her path to her own advantage in order to achieve her ultimate goal. Hers is a narrative of conscious and persistent defiance, resilience and dominance. Not only does Janie defy subjugation and objectification, she also gets to exercise power, autonomy and control through her avid eagerness for life. She transforms vulnerability and the demand for conformity into authority and dominance. And the vital drive that fuels her actions and decisions is her need for individual gratification.

Keywords: Hurston, Subversion, Dominance, Feminism, Voice

Introduction

Born out of an intense desire for recuperation after a torrid, passionate, yet unfulfilling and disastrous roller-coaster affair that Hurston experienced, what she called "a parachute jump" (*Dust Tracks* 205), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) has been subject to diverse and at times contradictory and controversial critical responses. Hurston herself wished she could rewrite the novel due to its undeniable structural and narrative inconsistencies and controversies. The novel was not well received by the intellectual community of the time, especially the great masters of Harlem Renaissance, such as Richard Wright, who refused to take the novel as serious fiction (qtd. in *Bloom's Guides*, 15) due to the absence of any political awareness and engagement ["fundamentally apolitical" (51) as McGowan believes], its apparent disregard for the dynamics of black literature and its depiction of black stereotypes living in an isolated and segregated community (*Bloom's Guides*, 15) and also for its exaggerated implementation of folk language of the blacks. Richard Wright, for instance, believes that "the sensory sweep of [Hurston's] novel carries no theme, no message, no thought" (qtd. in *Bloom's Guides*, 15).

Not necessarily foregrounding the dominant variables of slave narrative and instead focusing on a romanticized tragedy of love and adventure, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* retreated into the margins and spent a life of oblivion for a few decades after its publication till its author was rediscovered by Alice Walker as she was studying black

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folk traditions and narratives (Jordan 107). The novel was practically unearthed by Walker and brought back to the literary arena. The resurgence of Hurston and her works prepared the grounds for a new wave of critical works on this novel. This time, the novel was treated more kindly, and the critical responses shed more illuminating light upon this multi-layered text. The bulk of the critical works on Hurston focuses upon the feministic aspects of the novel, considering Janie as the victimized protagonist in a male-dominant society, calling it a "literature of protest that condemns interracial and intraracial oppression and discrimination" (Jordan 107).

Jennifer Jordan refers to works of critics such as Smith and Christian who focus on black feminism which, they believe, is dominant in Hurston's work; "a literature in which women 'have pivotal relationships with one another,' achieve a feminine bonding, and arrive at 'liberation through [their] sisters'" (107). She further continues that Hurston's narrative can be taken "as a vehicle of feminist protest through its condemnation of the restrictiveness of bourgeois marriage and through its exploration of interracial sexism and male violence" (108). She also emphasizes the communal consequences of Janie's struggles, that through realizing who she is, "she becomes a leader of women, and of her community" (108). Mary Hellen Washington , similarly, focuses on Janie's status as "a woman outside of the folk community" and "women's exclusion from power, particularly from the power of oral speech" ("Hurston's Failure", 33). In a rather different feminist perspective, Joseph Urgo criticizes Hurston's depiction of Janie since, he believes, she is unable to truly see through the mask of patriarchy even in the marriage to Tea Cake; this marriage "extends and strengthens the hold of domination over Janie because Janie no longer even recognizes the domination as domination" (51). And Diana Miles considers the story as "a compelling tale driven by Hurston's demand for altered conceptions of women's identities" (67). As it will be discussed, however, Janie's life is a single-star galaxy and she is the only one that matters. Even her recounting of her story to her fold friend, Phoebe, is more an assertion of her individual dominance and her subversive inclinations rather than a selfless act of dismantling the hierarchies of both the racist and patriarchal community for the benefit of her woman folk. Hers is not an act of solidarity with other black women but an attempt for actualization of her desires. She is driven by her own desire for power and dominance alone. This is the moving force, the object of her desire, that for which she shapes her entire life and uses anyone as along they prove efficient.

There are also criticisms of the novel which engage with the linguistic, ethnographic and anthropological facets of the text. Sally Ann Fergussen, for instance, believes that each of the husbands in Janie's life are characterized "in terms of a strikingly familiar, well-documented folkloric motif" (185). She discusses each of these folkloric, black archetypes in detail and analyses Janie's respective behavior in relation with these preset frameworks of behavior, at times moving away from the expected norms. She further strengthens the point that in this narrative the "black and white men alike devalue the black female" (185). Sigrid King also studies the function of naming and the subsequent stance of authority that it provides; he discusses how women have always been named and thus subjugated, and

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focuses on Gilbert and Gubar's "dichotomy between women's command of language as opposed to language's command of women" (qtd. 58). And there are also those critics who deal with the novel's question of voice [Robert Stepto believes that Janie "has not really won her voice and self after all" (166)] and quest narrative [Lovalarie King calls it an Odyssey (59)] . While benefitting from the previous critical readings of Hurston's novel, the present study aims at exploring a different, less-touched-upon aspect of *Their Eyes*; through a close and critical reading of the novel, it is hoped, one can catch a new glimpse of the well-rounded protagonist of the novel, Janie, not necessarily as a (black) woman oppressed by the limiting hierarchies of a patriarchal context who is eventually liberated through her last marriage, but, rather, as a strong-willed figure of authority who uses whoever she finds on her path to her own advantage and to achieve her ultimate goal. Hers is a narrative of conscious and persistent defiance, resilience and dominance, a novel of "zest for life" (Sundahl 31). If there are any victims, it surely is not Janie and if there is anyone who is victorious eventually, it is none of her husbands. Not only does Janie defy subjugation and objectification, she also gets to exercise power, autonomy and control through her avid eagerness for life. Her happiness in not "a function of her relationships with men" (Miller 188); rather, it is a simultaneously implicit and explicit consequence of her benefitting from each relationship. She transforms vulnerability and the demand for conformity into authority and dominance.

Discussion

She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons….

(*Their Eyes* 85)

The trajectory of Janie's life is beautifully summed up in this sentence. All that she does throughout her eventful life, whether prompted by other people's mindset and ideologies or initiated through her own decisions, are accomplished intentionally and purposefully, paving the way for her ultimate desire and goal. The most crucial and shaping influence in Janie's life is the interplay of the very two primary metaphors of the novel, that is the metaphors of mules and pear trees. It is the dynamics of this binary that shape Janie's personality and her journey toward authority and dominance. *Their Eyes* is a narrative of dominance and defiance; it is a game of power and victory. To make her original fantasy of pear tree and blossoming come true, Janie practically and rather mercilessly takes advantage of all her three husbands. All the relationships depicted in this novel are structured on a dynamics of give and take, subordination and dominance, and a narcissistic desire to satisfy one's own wishes and desires. The male characters of this novel represent universal stereotypes of masculinity and patriarchy and this is an undeniable fact. The narrative of Janie's life, in essence, revolves around the interpersonal relationships of these characters as she struggles to gain more, to win.

Most feminist readings of the novel highlight the "blossoming of Janie Crawford's consciousness" (Fergussen 185), putting Janie in the spotlight as they investigate the various

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aspects and stages of her oppression, suppression and eventual liberation processed through her tripartite life marked by her three marriages. These readings foreground the defining patriarchy as shaping Janie's life from the very beginning as these prevalent views are forced upon her by all the major characters in her life. Janie, in Harold Bloom's words, is "now necessarily a paradigm for women, of whatever race, heroically attempting to assert their own individuality in contexts that continue to resent any consciousness that is not male" ("Bloom's Guide", 8). Beginning with Nanny who is the prime voice of the internalized femininity implanted in her through her life as a black woman slave, Janie is told that she has no place of her own in the world: "'so de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger tuh pick it up. He pick it up … but he don't tote it. He hand it to his woman folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world'" (*Their Eyes* 29). Nanny tells Janie that she needs to be protected by a man (from other men) and that there is no room for her idealized concept of love and fulfillment. The pattern is continued through her first marriage to Logan Killicks and carried on in her second relationship, this time to the businessman and figure of public authority, Joe Starks. Though Janie's third marriage is considered to be her key to freedom and equality, Tea Cake is no less a domineering patriarch than Killicks and Starks.

All the men of her life advocate, enforce and expand this gender-biased dynamics of relationships each in their own distinct fashion. Logan demands Janie to act literally like a mule, working on the farm. His practical, competitive capitalistic idea of work ethics is demeaning to Janie and disillusions her. Jody represents another form of capitalist patriarchy, demanding to monopolize Janie as a commodity (McGowan 52). He calls himself a god, and "immediately sets about the task of molding and shaping her into *his* woman" (Fergussen 188). He puts Janie and other women in the same category as animals, "'somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god'" (*Their Eyes* 45). Tea Cake has a more compatible nature. Yet, he, too, demonstrates possessive behavior to prove his masculine superiority. However, Janie resists this forced internalization of patriarchal dominance and authority. She manages to establish a subversive strategy towards such hierarchies. To Janie, unlike what so many critics believe, it is not merely a question of integrating herself into the realm of social acceptance and involvement or being an equal counterpart to the male side of the binary of man/woman. It is also not a matter of securing a black female identity and a bond of sisterhood with the rest of women folk in the communities where she lives. It is not the question of proving herself to the others either. Moving beyond the polarities of obedience and resistance, she demands, and eventually accomplishes, perhaps good-heartedly or unpretentiously, a position of power and dominance. The vital drive that fuels her actions and decisions is her need for individual gratification. The undermining of the dominant patriarchy and its subsequent confinements and suppression is not the horizon towards which she is progressively moving; this, primarily, is a step that she takes towards a stance of victory against the economic, socio-cultural and individual (emotional as well as physical) oppression.

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Throughout the entire story, whether in those sections where the narrative voice can be identified as that of Janie or in those parts where the narrative perspective takes an indirect third person stance, Janie's life is portrayed as she struggles and eventually succeeds in establishing herself as the only figure of authority and dominance at the cost of breaking the formative norms and expectations of the community. She manages, despite all the obstacles and hindrances, to survive and that is truly a triumph to be celebrated. Her life might not be a narrative of dramatized radical feminism or an exploration of a female identity or a female aesthetic. It is, rather, a self-driven aesthetic of individual life experience, of a much desired exuberance. The self-discovery which takes place in this novel is only a stage and not the ultimate goal of the journey. This on-going and ever-evolving process of self-exploration is, for Janie, a question of voluntary, alternate immersion and withdrawal as deemed fit. In this long process, the bodily experience is as important in defining and delineating Janie's identity formation as the emotional experience. As she gradually yet steadily moves towards her horizon, she gains the empowering confidence and mastery of herself. She is, from the very beginning, the center of her own universe and the male characters are merely rotating in her defined orbits as long as she needs them to do so. The men in her life stay in her life as long as she finds something to obtain and as soon as there is nothing left for her, she leaves the relationship for a better and brighter horizon.

In her first romantic experience, which is very often disregarded by critics, she meets Johnny Taylor. After her revelations under the pear tree and her fantasies and built-up expectations, as she wishes "to be a pear tree – *any* tree in bloom" (*Their Eyes* 11), she returns home "waiting for the world [her world] to be made" (11). It is then that she sees Johnny Taylor, "through the pollinated air" (11), after her "former blindness" (11). The next thing the reader knows is that Janie has experienced her first kiss, her first experience. She is not interested in Johnny Taylor *per se*. He is only a means to an end. This very first experience of Janie is, in essence, her moment of epiphany; it is at this revelatory moment that her virgin eyes witness, for the first time, in a much metaphorical fashion, the enticing allure of love and fulfillment. Hurston's narrative beautifully presents, to the avid eyes of Janie, a willing and equal stance of love in which the pear tree and the dust-bearing bees passionately engage. It is a romance of mutual love and satisfaction. This is the kind of love and body experience that Janie desires, and this is what sets off Janie's momentous quest.

That seemingly innocent kiss is discovered by the worried Nanny. This is when Janie is given a long talk filled with simultaneous kindness and berate to be awakened of her dream and learn the lesson that she has no right to a dream; Nanny reminds Janie that "neither can you stand alone by yo'self" (*Their Eyes* 31). The second metaphor that Hurston uses is the metaphor of the mule for which Nanny is the mouthpiece. Shaped by an agonizing history of slavery, rape, racial abuse and economic and social exploitation, Nanny conveys to Janie what she sees as the only alternative in a male-dominant society; that is, marriage to a well-to-do man who can protect Janie from having to experience all the painful ordeals that her grandmother and her mother had to endure in their lives. Garnished

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with kisses and beatings, Nanny's words (she thinks) opens up Janie's till-then innocent eyes to the realities of the world, the realities that she knows.

Janie's second relationship is her unwanted marriage to Logan Killicks who, in her opinion, "look[s] like some ole skull head in de graveyard" (*Their Eyes* 13). Even though she is forced into this marriage, she is not the only one at loss. She behaves as though she has done a favor to Logan by marrying him. She does not show any appreciation for his caring behavior during the first months of their marriage and looks down on him. It is true that she is forcefully domesticated and suffers the loss of her dreams and becomes a woman in the process (24), yet she is relatively free to do as she wishes. She stands up against Logan's male dominance. Although Logan behaves as though he owns her because of the convention of marriage, and directly tells her that she belongs where he wants her to, she has the strength to refuse to bow down. What she gains from this marriage is protection from being left alone after Nanny's death, from staying hungry and having no roof over her head. She enjoys the status and grandeur of being among the rich, colored folks and she has independence.

Yet, driven by the disillusionment of her idea of mutual and rewarding love, she takes off as soon as she finds a better opportunity. She feels that "her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her" (*Their Eyes* 25), and then she meets Joe Starks who "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizons" (28). So, she uses her "powerful independence" (29) and leaves Logan. Joe is not someone that she chooses out of love; he, who buys "her the best things the butcher had, like apples and a glass lantern full of candies" (32), is also a means, a port, a bridge that gets her one step closer to her dreams. Although Joe promises her freedom, he turns her into a commodity, an object of possession, by confining her to their house and store. He does not allow her to participate in the social life, make speeches and enjoy life because he is possessive and jealous. But Janie's state is not a total loss. Even though she is objectified and treated as a trophy wife to be shown around and bragged about, and although she is silenced by Joe, she has the respect and, for what it is worth, the envy of other women and praise of other man. They think highly of her as they think she does not belong to their social class. She feels satisfied for a while, and for about fifteen years she does not change anything.

Joe saves her from becoming a mule working on Logan's farm and opens up to her the realm of possibilities and new horizons. However, he is very much the epitome of the dominant patriarchy and economic authority and in favor of control. "The protection he offered [is] in the form of almost total subjugation of her self-expression" (L. King 55). He considers Janie's speaking in public or her participation in social life and activities as threatening to his male ego. He has created an image of authority for himself in which Janie is only a background figure similar to his general store or his status as the mayor of the town. Janie's being silenced and maltreated once again frustrates her. However, as there is no promise of change for a while, she prefers a life of seeming obedience. Many critics accuse Hurston's protagonist as a passive protagonist to whom things happen (Washington, "I Love the Way",10). Janie, however, has the shrewd instinct not to lay bare her true colors.

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Hurston states that "a little war of defense for helpless things was going on inside her" (*Their Eyes* 54). For her, Joe is dead; she learns to pretend and keep things from him. A voluntary life of withdrawal is her defense strategy for a while. This is the beginning of her second betrayal, this time to Joe: "Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some men she had never known. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them" (68). If she does not leave Joe, it is not because she is being held back. Rather, it is because she has no better opportunity, nothing to move her beyond where she stands.

She stays and tolerates. This is the time when Janie matures as a woman, develops a sense of who she is and who she eventually wants to become. She finally comprehends what actually can satiate her desires. Even though there are critics who question Hurston's silencing of Janie in those situations where she has to be heard, one can distinguish the silent tolerance of Janie is a preparation stage; she is not only saving herself for the one who will eventually actualizes her dream of pear tree but also waiting for the right time to strike to make the best score. She makes her voice heard, loud and clear, when she gets tired of Joe's constant bitter remarks and comments about her age and looks. She defends herself against Joe in front of everybody they know. Her counterattack, however, is much more intense. She shatters the illusion of greatness, power, authority, superiority, masculinity and distinction that Joe has built all these years and humiliates him by talking about his impotence in public. The war inside her for *helpless things*, including her, is made external now. Not only does she expose the emptiness veiled by his mask of masculinity, she also robs him off of his till-then established stance of authority among those whose respect he values the most. This, indeed, is a revengeful act of emasculation. Joe is now the object of town ridicule.

In a way, this symbolic killing of the image of *the* Joe Starks, whom all the town praises out of fear or jealousy, leads to his actual demise. She tells Joe what she has kept inside and she does it at his deathbed, too. This is a final blow to the broken ego of Joe and he dies. Janie's words are the last things he is doomed to hear on his deathbed. After his death, she does not feel sorrow. She has gained, through Joe and his death, knowledge, voice and financial independence. She celebrates the freedom of being without him: "she tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. … then she starched and ironed her face, forming it into just what people wanted to see . . . ." (*Their Eyes* 81). That she feels liberated and that she enjoys this feeling are clearly pictured in Hurston's single-word description of her feelings after Joe's funeral: "Finish. End. Nevermore. Darkness. Deep hole. Dissolution. Eternity. Weeping and wailing outside. Inside the expensive black folds were resurrection and life. … she sent her face to Joe's funeral and herself went rollicking with the spring time across the world" (83-4). Through the verbal slaughtering of Joe, Janie releases all those negativities stored in her all this time, and "cleanses herself of any hostilities that could leave her too bitter to love again" (Fergussen 191). The first two marriages are founded on a logic of security, protection and status. In these two relationships, Janie gains what she desires through the

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experience of loss; "it is only through loss – of the dream, in this case – not fulfillment that Janie begins to develop as a subject" (McGowan 52).

And, there comes Tea Cake whose behavior is as sweet a melody to Janie's ears as is his name. It is true that he imposes his dominance upon her in a new, and colorful way, and makes it like that is what she wants, Janie still moves on along her narcissistic path to the satisfaction of her ego. The financial independence and security that she has gained through her marriage to Joe provides her with the luxury of choices and adventure. Tea Cake is generally believed by some to be the liberator; the knight who saves the lady in distress: "the tale of courtly love in which the young troubadour or knight engages in an all-consuming passion with a lady of high rank" (Jordan 110). Even Tea Cake's death is romantically pictured since their great love which is "an alliance of adventure and sexual union in a kind of Eden" cannot "survive in a temporal realm" (110). She further maintains that Tea Cake's death "eternalizes not only a love affair but also the novel by recuing it from the pulp-level mediocrity of a they-lived-happily-ever-after ending" (111). Yet, there are others who contend that Tea Cake merely represents another kind of male domination and suppressive behavior. He keeps her in doubt about their relationship from the very beginning, leaves her for days after their first night together and once more in their room in the new town, taking all her money with no good excuse. He is jealous, possessive and physically abusive. Yet, with Tea Cake, the world is full of beautiful colors and pleasing music, and the air is once more pollinated. He is young, adventurous, energetic, romantic, and surely different. He makes his way to her heart by reaching somewhere deep inside her that has been untouched till then. He invites her to play checkers and teaches her to do so, "He set it up and began to show her and she found herself glowing inside" (*Their Eyes* 91). This desire for playfulness is the undiscovered essence of her character. With Tea Cake, Janie is a mature woman who know what she wants and knows how to get it. She voluntarily follows him and even beats him out of jealousy and also allows for Tea Cake's territorial beating of her in public. Still, it is Janie who gets the most out of the relationship. She gets to experience joy, adventure, and life the way she always dreamed of. And, it is Janie who, when threatened, shoots Tea Cake (she knows she is better at shooting) and kills him. The ultimate hurricane incident and the rabid dog attack and her shooting of Tea Cake is, in Jordan's view, Janie's "confrontation with the necessary violence of nature" in her "quest for realization" (109).

All that happens may be viewed as rite of passage; to abandon, to outlive, to elope, and eventually to kill in order for her womanhood to be fully realized. Janie's story is significant since, as a narrative celebrating the struggles of a black woman in a male-dominant community written also by a black woman in living in a patriarchal context, it carries with itself an inspiring picture of individual success and dismantling of hierarchies. What magnifies Janie's stance of victory at the end is the place where she starts her long journey; she comes from an "ambiguous position of displacement" (Jirousek 21). But she manages to find her own place in the world. The function of authorial and narrative voice and the fashion with which the binary of voice and silence is implemented have received

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serious critical attention. Much is said regarding the journey of Janie being in essence a quest for her own voice; that she gets to narrate her life story, Scheherazade-like, empowers Janie as an independent and strong-willed woman who owns her own destiny. Possessing a voice of her own endows Janie with a position as that of a figure of respect, envy and admiration, a subject rather than an object. McCredie believes that as a "many-voiced text," Hurston's novel "establishes a female voice of authority not only on the simple level of authorship, but also on the more complicated level of self-authorization" (25). Although Janie is silenced by Logan, Joe and even Tea Cake, it is ultimately her story which is heard in which she juxtaposes her past and present in an active, porous and dynamic nexus as constantly shaping who she is and what she longs for.

Yet, there are critics who question the textual inconsistencies concerning the narrative perspective as well as Janie's being silenced in those parts where she should be heard. Deborah Clarke maintains that the voice is "both celebrated and undermined" (198) and Carla Kaplan states that "Hurston privileges dialogue and storytelling at the same time that she represents and applauds Janie's *refusal* to speak" (121). Nevertheless, the authority of Janie's narrative is not necessarily based on the strength and autonomy of her self-constructed voice. It is not merely a quest for an individual voice. Acquiring a voice of her own and her ability to narrate her story are, in essence, a side product of her struggle for authority, individual satisfaction and romantic love. Through a cognitive process of self-exploration, she comes to terms with the fact that the usefulness of the men in her life has an expiration date. She develops her ability to think for herself, to speak whenever needed and achieve what she desires. She delves more deeply into the realm of personal experience, the physical and the emotional, the tangible and the felt. Her strength lies in her embracing of those elements that have been designed to enslave and objectify her; as Audre Lorde puts it, "that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength" (42).

Conclusion

Janie has an adventurous soul; the driving consciousness in Janie is a desire for authority, dominance, exuberance and individual gratification. Yet, this is sugarcoated by her romanticized longing for a genuine love, pear trees and bees. Either she initiates the process of dream-realization or it is prompted by others' demands, expectations and exploitations. She takes advantage of whoever that happens to be of service. She leaves her first husband without getting a divorce and marries another. Her first act of rebellion is her own physical departure. Her second one is the symbolic murder of her second husband, and the ultimate act is a literal killing of her third husband. Her physical sense of being threatened by Tea Cake who has contracted rabies is a metaphor for the fact that Tea Cake is getting more abusive and possessive, curbing Janie's existence. The dog bite is not merely the cause for the rough and physically abusive and life-threatening behavior of Tea Cake; it just brings out the symptoms of his domineering character (Cassidy 264). That was the real threat. So, Janie, unconsciously perhaps, chooses the easiest manner of defense. All the men

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in her life are exploited, each in his own particular fashion, to make her dream come true. "Out of the ash" of each relationship she rises and "eat[s] men like air" (Plath 2727). Her story is a constructive process of self-narration. Janie's narrative is a form of art which "exalts an exuberance that is beauty, a difficult beauty because it participates in reality-testing" (*Bloom's Modern Critical Views*, 6).

She has an insatiable desire for life and the experiences of life and possesses an unshakable belief in the possibilities and promises; this larger-than-life compulsion is what distinguishes Janie not merely as the one who dismantles hierarchies of power and dominance and not necessarily as an advocate of a black aesthetics. Hers is a gradual evolution, a developmental process of progressive liberation. She reaches the horizon she wanted; her tree of life is in full bloom. She is at times dominated, it is true. Yet, she is the dominant figure by the end, the sole survivor. Life, in its full bloom, is what she is after and what she eventually achieves even if it means that she takes advantage of the very figures who are accused of dominating her. The story lays bare the shades of domination and narcissistic tendencies of the characters that underlie any human relationship. Each relationship is an extension of this dominance. Hurston displays a sagacious knowledge of the implications of being black, what Alice Walker calls "racial health; a sense of black people as complete, complex undiminished human beings" (85). That is why her conscious refusal to foreground a gloomy portrayal of the miseries of the black folk highlights, most effectively, the essential exuberance of Janie as a power-driven individual in search of personal gratification. In this long journey, Janie is the only one who experiences independence, individuality, elemental life force, resilience and authority. Like a pear tree, any tree, she grows roots and branches and blossoms; she survives: "Janie saw her life as a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches" (*Their Eyes* 8).

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